

City of Cambridge

The Government Operations Committee held a public meeting on Friday, October 18, 1996, beginning at 10:00 a.m. in the Ackermann Room for the purpose of continuing discussion of staffing, space and technology requirements of the City Council office.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Francis H. Duehay and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury and Sandra Albano, Assistant to the City Council. Also present were James Maloney, Assistant City Manager for Finance and Valerie Roman, MIS Director.

Councillor Sullivan convened the hearing and explained the purpose.

Councillor Sullivan stated that the committee would start with technology issues related to the City Council. He stated that he had received the laptop computer he had requested and had started to use it. He said that he could see some disadvantages. He asked Ms. Roman for a report on the status of technology in the City Council office.

Ms. Roman said that eight new pentium personal computers have been installed. Councillor Sullivan stated that there is another personal computer in the office which needs updated software. Ms. Roman said that as soon as its placement is determined, the software can be updated.

Councillor Sullivan said that there is an issue about City Councillors having city-owned personal computers at home. Councillor Sullivan said although some City employees may be upset because the City Councillors want personal computers at home, they need to understand that the members of the City Council do not presently have adequate workspace at City Hall.

Councillor Davis said that she would like additional information regarding connectivity. Ms. Roman discussed the connectivity issue. She said that there is not an ability for someone who is not on the City fiber itself to get on the City network, because of security issues.

Councillor Davis said that she has a Mac computer at home, and she really needs equipment compatible with the city equipment at home so that she can connect to the city from her home, which is where her real workspace is.

Councillor Duehay stated that he wants information when he uses the computer. He does not want to learn how to mail merge. Clerical work is not his job. Councillor Duehay said that he is really looking for staff help, and he already has two interns. He also feels slightly uncomfortable with having and using a city computer at home, because the distinctions between his City Council work and other work, for example, as a board member of a non-profit organization in the community, are not always clearcut.

Councillor Davis suggested thinking about what each Councillor needs. She noted that at a minimum, each Councillor needs connectivity, and the way to achieve that may differ for each individual.

Ms. Roman stated that right now there are eight new personal computers and three new laptops, which were ordered after consultation with City Councillors at a Government Operations meeting on this topic. Given the lack of staffing to support offsite installation and the security issues, she suggests first trying to make this work.

Councillor Sullivan suggested having each City Councillor meet with Ms. Roman and Mr. Maloney, to evaluate their technology needs. Their legitimate needs may include delivery of a computer at home with guidelines from the Law Department as to permissible use at home. Ms. Roman stated that there are also issues of liability that should be addressed with regard to having City computers at the homes of City Councillors.

Councillor Duehay stated that the role of the City Council has changed and become far more complex. Councillor Duehay said that he will use his own computer at home, and he will use the city computer in his cubicle workspace at City Hall. He emphasized his needs for staff and office space.

Councillor Davis stated that she needs a laptop.

Councillor Sullivan noted the high cost of laptops and cautioned against ordering nine laptops without being very sure that this is really what is needed and will actually be used.

James Maloney stated that the City has made a great deal of progress. He thinks that individual meetings with City Councillors are a good idea.

Ms. Roman explained the access available through the computers. She stated that the personal computers have been hooked up for the City Councillors in City Hall. Everyone (vax and pc) has access to all of the city databases. The City Councillors also have access to the internet; and to some organizational data bases, such as Login from the National League of Cities and Local News.

Councillor Sullivan said he would like list of all of those city data bases. Vice Mayor Born agreed and said it would be helpful to have this as soon as possible.

It was agreed that the Law Department will be requested to develop guidelines for use of city personal computers at the homes of City Councillors. With regard to the issue of whether to purchase additional laptops now, Councillor Sullivan suggested that a laptop be seen as circulating, so that City Councillors can determine how interested they are in having individual laptops.

Vice Mayor Born requested that one laptop be available on a circulating basis.

Councillor Sullivan then moved the meeting to staffing needs for the City Council.

Councillor Davis suggested stipends sufficient to hire work study students.

Councillor Duehay said that he has had a lot of experience using graduate and college students. Overall, graduate students are more helpful. If you have them for just a tiny portion of the time, it is almost more work than is worthwhile. You really need an assistant half-time to be truly useful. Six or eight hours a week is not useful, so the annual cost would be \$7,000-\$8,000

Councillor Sullivan said that a problem with the committee process is that the City Council has no ability to generate information. He said that he believes there should be a position or perhaps one and a half full time positions to do research.

Councillor Duehay said that David Passafero is Mayor Menino's aid, and he came to his job as an aid to the Boston City Council. He is very capable. Councillor Duehay suggests talking to him about Boston's organization.

At 11:10 Councillor Sullivan stated that he had to leave the meeting because of a prior commitment. Councillor Duehay assumed the chair.

Vice Mayor Born asked for examples of useful projects for interns.

Councillor Duehay said that an intern came up with idea of the Affordable Housing Trust, and the Environmental Program.

Councillor Davis added that the gender equity report was developed by an intern.

Councillor Duehay stated that it is necessary to spend a great deal of time with interns.

Councillor Duehay said that he would suggest that the committee recommend that the City Council encourage the City Manager to work long range on office space as the building is being renovated. He also suggested that the Committee have a discussion with David Passafero, and requested that the City Clerk confer with the Chair of the Committee in this regard. He also suggested trying to get a clearer idea of what City Councillors want for staffing.

Councillor Davis said that it might be more useful for the City Council to develop its own little research bureau, than for each Councillor to have individual research support.

Councillor Duehay said that you can get a lot of volunteer assistance but the problem is supervising these interns. With a half-time person working for you, might be able to have that person supervising other student interns.

Councillor Davis stated that she would like to know how much a ten-hour grad student on work study would cost.

Councillor Duehay said that work study students are not eligible to work for politicians in a political context.

Councillor Davis said the rules may be different for work on policy issues.

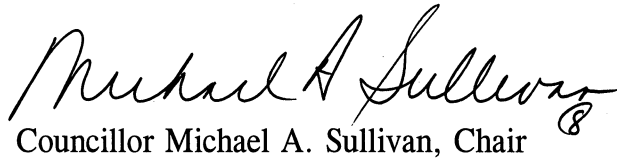
Councillor Duehay stated that the issue needs careful thought. If the City Council take a step, it is important to make sure that it is significant and actually increases City Council productivity and effectiveness.

Vice Mayor Born stated that City Councillors need to spend some time talking about the renovations of City Hall because it is not productive to talk about City Council offices in an isolated way.

Councillor Duehay thanked all for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15.

For the Committee,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michael A. Sullivan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Chair

A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Sullivan, Chair of the Government Operations Committee, for a meeting held on Friday, October 18, 1996 for the purpose of continuing discussion of Staffing, space and technology requirements of the City Council Office.

In City Council November 18, 1996

Report Accepted.
Placed on file.