



EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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May 6, 1996

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 21, regarding reasons for the Library changing the consortium agreement, received from Director of Libraries Susan Flannery.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
attachment



MEMORANDUM

TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

FROM: Susan M. Flannery, Director of Libraries *SMF*

DATE: April 29, 1996

RE: Council Order #035, dated 3/25/96

The Metro Boston Library Network (MBLN) is a cooperative automated resource-sharing group formed in 1987 by the public libraries of Boston, Cambridge, Brookline, Newton, Malden, Chelsea, and Lexington. The primary functions of the system are circulation control, cataloging, and the online public access catalog. The system is used to support both internal operations within each of the seven member libraries and to provide direct public service. The mission statement of the network reads: "The Metro Boston Library Network facilitates the sharing of technology, resources, and expertise so that member libraries can provide innovative, efficient, and cost effective services to library patrons".

After almost a decade of operations, the Metro Boston Library Network continues to struggle with issues related to relatively small membership and an organizational structure that is fraught with inherent challenges. The range of services offered by the seven members from the august Boston Public Library to the struggling and impoverished Chelsea Public library gives rise to differences in expectations, service levels, and member satisfaction. The small number of members does not allow the network to take best advantage of economies of scale and the obvious benefits of "many hands make light work".

The Boston Public Library has served as the fiscal agent and central site for the network. The Boston Public Library has contributed both personnel and financial resources to the establishment of the network and we are very grateful for their support. In the last ten years the capacity of the network and the aspects of service that it dictates has grown dramatically. This has created opportunities and challenges and it has necessitated an evaluation of costs, services, and benefits.

Main Library	Boudreau Branch	Central Square Branch	Collins Branch	O'Connell Branch	North Branch	Valente Branch
449 Broadway	245 Concord Avenue	45 Pearl Street	64 Aberdeen Avenue	48 Sixth Street	70 Rindge Avenue	826 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138	02138	02139	02138	02141	02140	02141
617-349-4040	349-4017	349-4010	349-4021	349-4019	349-4023	349-4015

The Brookline, Newton, Lexington, and Cambridge public libraries have all determined that a move to the Minuteman Library network would provide more cost effective, member driven services to their patrons. Provided that the Minuteman Library Network is able to secure grant funds for an upgrade of their equipment, the four libraries would like to join that network. In the best case scenario, this would not happen until FY98. The Minuteman Library Network would offer:

1. Member driven 501(c)(3) organization; each member would have a vote on financial, personnel, and technical decisions of the network.
2. More services for comparable annual costs: full cataloging services, staff training, extensive statistical reports, and online databases
3. Advance planning for services and costs; capital costs would be anticipated and could be included in the city's capital plan
4. Network staff that plans scheduled downtime for equipment or software maintenance during off hours
5. Newer and more powerful equipment that speeds response time for routine check ins and outs and bibliographic inquiries
6. Centralized cataloging and quality control ensure that the database is accurate, user friendly, and consistent
7. Staff whose sole employer is the membership of the network
8. Cost savings through centralized supply purchasing

MBLN provides computer services to the Cambridge Public Library and its other members. Access to the collection of the Boston Public Library, which is governed by state regulation, will remain available to Cambridge residents both through walk-in service and inter-library loan. The towns surrounding Cambridge (Watertown, Belmont, Somerville, Arlington) are all members of the Minuteman Network.

Our interest in moving to the Minuteman Library Network is to improve public services, streamline administrative procedures, and contain costs.

Consent Agenda #7

Cal. /

5-277

Relative to Awaiting Report Item
Number 21 regarding reasons for
the Library changing the consortium
agreement.

In City Council May 6, 1996

*Charter right was exercised
by Councilor Suebay.*

5/13/96

*Report Accepted
Placed on file*