

Hugh Adams Russell

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15 November 1973
Councillor Frank Duehay
26 Lowell Street
Cambridge 02138

Frank:

It is impossible for an architect to sit for several evenings in a row in the Council Chamber without thinking what a shame it is that such a nice room is so dismal and depressing. So, for a few minutes yesterday I tried to figure out just what the problems were, and what simple expedients might make the room nicer. Now, I'm not suggesting that you spend our hard earned tax dollars to fix up the Council Chamber, but if the idea does come up, or when someone decides it's time to repaint, then you should know what is possible, and what sorts of simple things would help.

Problems: - dingy red, brown, green, and dark wood color scheme
- poor ventilation
- not enough spectator space
- hard to tell what is going on in big unfocused council area
- hard to hear, particularly when speaker is unused to microphone
- people at the door and entering room are distracting

Solutions - repaint all areas above wallpaper (walls and ceiling) a light cream color leaving gold leaf highlights

- patch wallpaper where peeling

- move the wood rail to enlarge spectator area either by moving it closer to the mayor's desk or by rotating the ends inward so that a couple of rows of seating can fit behind the councillor's desks (who knows, bring you closer together might have other benefits)

- provide an aisle around the back of the seating area which would also provide a place for standees

- install an exhaust fan under the roof to draw out stagnant smoke filled air through ceiling grilles

- have sound system checked out by qualified sound engineer and see if new developments in this field could be utilized

- replace light bulbs in sidewall fixtures (presently a glare problem) with decorative low-wattage bulbs and install a few small accent spotlights on present central chandelier to illuminate portraits, flags, mayor, and councillors

- replace Mayor's and Clerk's lights with inexpensive "Tensor" lights so we can see what's going on up there
- replace panels in entry door with clear glass so that doors can be kept closed but people can still see what's happening inside
- provide speaker for second floor lobby area so people outside can keep track of what's going on inside without having their conversations disturb the proceedings
- replace disreputable looking window shades on upper windows or reglaze windows with translucent plastic
- extend carpet to spectator area to quiet sound of people moving about

Let me say, in closing, what these suggestions are not. They are not a request or suggestion that this work be performed at this time, or until priorities demand. They do not solve the basic difficulties with the room, such as the impossible sight lines from the balcony, the basic shape that makes good acoustics impossible, or the inappropriateness of a throne for a mayor in this age.

Nearly every time I come into city hall I think of how lucky we are to have such a warm and friendly building. I hope you will not misunderstand my desire to have it even warmer, friendlier, and nicer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'H' followed by a flourish.

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Communication from Hugh Adams Russell
regarding the bad conditions of
Council Chamber

November 19 , 1973