



Conor Baldwin
Chief Financial Officer

Allison Chambers
Deputy CFO

MEMORANDUM

TO: Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager *EMD*
FROM: Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer *[Signature]*
CC: Michael Q. Geary, City Clerk
Miran Fernandez, Chief Information Officer
Eric Slagle, Director of Development Services
DATE: May 13, 2020

SUBJECT: **MOTION of 4/28/2020 by C. Conway** - Req. City Mgr. Conference With The Appropriate Department Heads To Explore The Feasibility Of Offering Certificates And Other Documents On-Line; Example Birth, Marriage And Death Certificates

MOTION of 1/21/2020 by C. Nuon - Req. City Mgr. Provide Report On City Clerk's Office Efforts To Digitize Public Records And Make Them Available Online

The COVID-19 pandemic has already fundamentally changed the way government must conduct business. These changes will likely become permanent, even after we return to a more normal way of life. In order to continue providing critical city services, like the issuance of vital records or certain permits and licenses, City Hall must move away from a primarily in-person model to one that allows for more services to be offered remotely or online.

In response to the above referenced motion by the City Council and at your direction, the finance department and the Office of the City Clerk, as well as many other departments which present the opportunity for online services—like Development Services—are actively collaborating on ways and means to offer certain services online. Many of the efforts were previously underway, like issuing building permits online, but the current public health situation has underscored the need to expedite these efforts and we have likewise accelerated the timeline to these projects.

While some types of certificates offered by the City Clerk's Office carry certain restrictions, the majority of requests are public record and the city can offer—through the website—a secure and convenient way to request the record—and make payment—online. Additionally, by paying online residents will have the opportunity to pay using other payment methods like debit cards or credit cards, which are not currently offered at the Clerk's Office in City Hall. Once the online transaction is complete the requestor would be mailed the certified document in a reasonable time frame without having to leave their home or interact with a normally busy public building, like City Hall.

In some specific instances, however, a request may still require additional verification and consultation with staff from the Clerk's Office. For example, birth certificates are public records and are available to any member of the public, unless the parents were not married at the time of



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birth. Access to records of births to unwed parents is restricted to the following individuals, by law: child, parents, father not listed on the record with documentation supporting paternity, legal guardians with supporting documentation, and legal representatives with supporting documentation. If the parents were unmarried at the time the child was born and have not since married and amended the birth record, or if the father's name does not appear on the record. If any of these circumstances are true for a particular record, then the record is restricted and requires a photocopy of a valid photo ID (such as a driver's license) from the individual, a parent listed on the record, or a legal guardian with supporting documentation (such as a copy of a court order) in order to be released. Using the online system, all of these documents can be communicated, if necessary, between the City Clerk's Office and the requestor, online.

The cities of Haverhill, Worcester, and Cambridge, and many other, all currently offer this service online to their residents and include certain disclaimers or guidance documents on their website for exceptions such as the aforementioned restrictions on birth certificates. The MIS department has already drafted comparable documentation to include on our website and is working on the necessary forms from our vendor, Invoice Cloud, to be created as soon as possible. Because our residents' privacy is of the utmost concern, we will include certain questions on the website to substantiate the identity of the requestor which will also mirror the best practices currently in use by these other municipalities and must be completed before a record is released. Pending approval, these request forms and the accompanying payment options can be up and running on our website within 60 days.

Regarding the ongoing efforts to modernize the building permit process in Lowell and allow for online application and payment, much progress has been accomplished but there are a few details which still need to be fine-tuned to ensure the best product for the customers. The primary elements within MUNIS are set, but the business process needs additional assessment and finalization, to allow for some of the nuances of the process in Lowell. Additionally the essentials of the so-called "customer experience" need to be put together, so that the system can be used by ordinary homeowners and industry professional, alike. The Development Services staff is meeting regularly every week to iron-out all remaining details to bring this option forward.