



Conor Baldwin
Chief Financial Officer

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kevin J. Murphy, City Manager 
FROM: Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer 
CC: Rodney Conley, Deputy CFO
DATE: August 16, 2017

SUBJECT: 7.11. 3/28/17 M. Kennedy - Req. City Mgr. consider establishing a translation bureau in the lobby of City Hall on Tuesdays, in order to provide interpreters in Spanish, Khmer, Portuguese and any other relevant languages.

In response to the Mayor's motion, the City Manager's Office has investigated the feasibility of creating a customer service station in the lobby of City Hall; one which would include a translation bureau to help service the needs of residents who require city services in languages other than English. A state-wide contract exists for translation services which could be utilized to offer these services at an introductory rate of \$35 per year and a utilization rate of \$3.50 - \$4.00 per minute for Spanish translation and \$4.00 - \$4.50 per minute for all other languages.

After researching the approximate demand for these services in City Hall departments which interact most with the public, like the City Clerk or the Treasurer's Department, the estimated usage would average to eight hours over a week or approximately \$2,000 per week based on a \$4 per minute rate, or just over \$100,000 per year. However, the demand for translation is consistent with certain payment dates, like motor vehicle excise taxes or property taxes, and the actual cost of the services may be less. Another, more affordable, option would be to partner with an outside organization in a manner similar to the approach taken by the City of Worcester. In January of 2016, Worcester partnered with Ascentria Care Alliance to provide translation services in City Hall. The Worcester-based organization entered into a contract with the city which provides for interpreters to be available either on-site or by telephone for City employees interacting with the public - including at City Hall and on site during situations like code inspections and public safety situations. Lowell General Hospital may be a suitable partner to approach in establishing a similar arrangement for the City of Lowell.

Aside from translation services, the City Manager's Office has also been investigating the City Hall lobby as a suitable "customer service" station which could be the central point of contact for residents, businesses, and community stakeholders to have a single number to call for city services and could be directed appropriately to the proper department. This service would also be able to assist walk-in traffic to City Hall and answer questions from the public. The finance department is currently identifying funds in the budget to staff and equip such a service station in FY18.