



Conor M. Baldwin  
Chief Financial Officer

Allison Chamber  
Deputy CFO

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager *EMD*

**FROM:** Conor Baldwin, Chief Financial Officer *CB*

**CC:** Miran Fernandez, CIO

**DATE:** February 3, 2021

**SUBJECT:** **Informational Update** – City Council Chamber Upgrades

One of the many challenges presented to the City of Lowell by the COVID-19 pandemic has been continuing to hold public meetings in a way that both adheres to recommended public health protocols on social distancing, while also allowing the residents of Lowell to participate in government through the City Council, School Committee, or the various boards and commissions. This challenge has been exacerbated by the antiquated technology in the City Council chambers and other public meeting rooms in City Hall. The city has historically provided broadcast capabilities through the city's partnership with LTC, but save for a relatively minor upgrade in audio equipment completed several years ago, much of the equipment in the Chambers has far exceeded its useful life. The city has long desired to increase the accessibility of these public meetings and modernize some of the technology necessary to do so, but has needed to balance those desires with the financial realities of the budget. Until now, however, residents who wanted to address the Council or participate in meetings with other boards could always attend in person.

The funding allocated to the City of Lowell through the CARES Act has afforded an opportunity to the city to utilize this available, one-time, source of outside grant funding to not only achieve the intent of the CARES Act, but to also address an existing challenge in the city, namely to use technology to not only maintain and facilitate the existing level of public participation throughout the remainder of the pandemic, but also to enhance the level of civic engagement by making it easier for Lowell residents to access their local officials. To achieve these goals, the MIS department has engaged a third-party vendor to conduct an overhaul of the Council Chambers. A memorandum from the Chief Information Officer is enclosed, which more fully describes the work.

In order to accommodate the installation of the new technology, the MIS department has recommended that the City Council and any other boards or commissions pivot to a fully remote schedule beginning on February 10<sup>th</sup>, through the beginning of March so that the vendor can complete the installation and so that the equipment can be tested. The costs for this project is fully funded by the CARES Act allocation for Lowell and will not bear any burden on the Lowell taxpayers. However, the benefits of these improvements should have a lasting impact on the potential for public participation.