



**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mayor William Samaras and Members of the City Council

**FROM:** Kevin J. Murphy, City Manager

**DATE:** January 23, 2018

**SUBJECT:** MOTION by C. Elliott - Request City Manager look into developing a 311 app to allow residents to report issues

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Dear Mayor and members of the City Council,

I am providing information on the feasibility of the City of Lowell instituting a 311 system. While Lowell does not have a traditional 311 system, we have several communication tools that mirror such a system.

311 is a non-emergency phone number that people can call in many cities and towns to find information about services, register complaints, or report concerns such as graffiti or road damage. Even in cities where a different phone number is used, 311 is the generally recognized term for non-emergency phone systems.

In part to increase community engagement, the City of Lowell redesigned its website in early 2017. I am proud to say that this effort was recently rewarded when the city won the MMA's annual Municipal Website Award for a community with 50,000 or more residents. Through the website, we are able to communicate important information to the community via news flashes and email lists. Citizens are also able to engage by submitting requests through our "request tracker" feature. This allows people to submit information on a variety of matters such as potholes, graffiti, and other quality of life issues. The requests are followed up on and tracked within the website; allowing departments to gauge performance and trouble shoot recurring problems. The website also includes a mobile-friendly app available for both Apple and Android devices. The app is easy to use and highlights key interactive features such as "request tracker" and contacting city officials.

The City also appointed a City Hall Ambassador recently that is housed at our new greeter station at the entrance of city hall. The ambassador serves as the front-line of contact with residents, business owners, and various other community members seeking services from the City of Lowell. In addition, the ambassador handles answers the main phone number which is promoted as a way for constituents to reach out for many of the non-emergency issues associated with a traditional 311 system.

While other major cities have chosen to institute a more formal 311 system, it has come at a cost to the taxpayer. In Somerville, for example, the FY18 budget for their 311 operation is roughly \$750,000. Most of this amount is tied to salaries for call center employees. The City will continue to explore options to increase communication with residents while ensuring any solution is affordable.

Please let me know if you have further questions.