



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Proposed Perimeter and Building Security Improvements at City Hall.

ISSUE: City Hall Perimeter and Building Security.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council approve the improvements to the perimeter security of City Hall including (1) limiting building access to the Cameron Street entrance and the Market Square center door, (2) the addition of uniformed daytime security guards to City Hall, and (3) the approval of the arming of City Hall security guards.

BACKGROUND: On June 6, 2019, in light of active violence incidents that have occurred with increasing frequency across the country including at the Virginia Beach Government Center, the City Manager tasked the Department of General Services with creating the Old Town Campus Safety Committee ("Committee"). The Committee was tasked with reviewing all security measures currently in place in the Old Town Campus, which includes City Hall, Tavern Square and Banker's Square and developing recommendations to improve employee and public safety at these City facilities through either future improvements, enhancements of measures currently in place or development and implementation of new required measures not currently in place. The City Manager required that the Committee develop these recommendations within 30 days.

The Committee was comprised of staff from most departments located in the Old Town Campus as well as Police Department personnel trained in building security matters. The Committee toured all sites in the Old Town Campus. By touring the facilities, the Committee was able to get a better understanding of the security measures that are currently in place and what either needs to be improved or put in place. The Committee met with City employees in each Campus facility and each security item or concern that was brought to the Committee's attention from the facility tours was documented and further discussed at the weekly Committee Meeting. The input from City employees was incorporated into the Committee's recommendations.

DISCUSSION: The Old Town Campus Safety Committee recommendations focused on five themes: access, training, notification, security, and governance. The Committee determined that there are several existing programs that could be quickly and easily be expanded or modified to provide substantial security improvements in the Old Town Campus. In addition, the Committee developed several new programs that would benefit overall security but may require more planning before implementation.

Because of the extensive nature of the recommendations, the Committee utilized a three-tier approach when developing the security enhancement recommendations for the Old Town Campus including:

- Tier 1 - Immediate needs for planned implementation within 90 days;
- Tier 2 - Mid-Term needs for implementation on or before the end of FY 2020; and
- Tier 3 - Renovation needs to be included in the City Hall renovation planning, design and construction process.

Based on tours of the facility and input from City employees, the Committee made the following Tier 1 recommendations to enhance security at City Hall immediately:

- (1) **Modify existing City Hall first floor public access** by limiting all visitor access to the main center doors off Market Square and the Cameron Street entrances or to the main center doors off Market Square only;
- (2) **Enhance current security guard presence** by increasing the number of security guards in City Hall, allowing for armed security guards and increasing their hours to coincide with all City Hall hours of operation. The number of security guards required would depend on the number of entrances accessible by the public;
- (3) **Fully transition from physical key locks to electronic controlled access for all doors;** and
- (4) **Enhance public security in the Market Square Garage** by introducing new emergency call boxes and wireless repeaters.

City Hall Public Access: One of the major concerns of City employees and the Committee regarding City Hall are the number of entrances that visitors can utilize to access the facility during normal business hours. The Committee had lengthy discussions regarding what could be implemented to maintain public access to City Hall and improve security of the building without hindering the daily operations of City agencies or restricting transparency for the public. The City Manager authorized General Services to restrict access to City Hall through the East and West stairwell doors to City employee access cardholders only. Egress from the building by the public will still be permitted through these stairwell areas.

The Committee recommended one of two options for public entry into City Hall in order to better identify who is entering the building. Option One (1) would provide entry through the main center doors off Market Square Plaza only. Option Two (2) would provide entry both through the center doors off Market Square Plaza and through the Cameron Street entrances. Option Two is the option that I recommend.

The Committee has recommended that visitor management also be incorporated into the daily operational functions at City Hall. Staff will review this recommendation in more detail to determine the best way to implement based on the appropriate level of visitor access needs.

For example, the way a visitor accesses services to pay a parking ticket may be different than for a visitor accessing City Hall for other meetings.

Enhance Existing Security Guard Presence: City employees who work in City Hall expressed concerns that they believed that the building was not safe due to the lack of security guards during daylight business hours. As a result, the City Manager approved the addition of three (3) unarmed security guards at City Hall during the hours of 7:00am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. The existing security guard schedule would resume at 5:00pm. The daytime unarmed guards began on September 9.

The Committee discussed the increase in active violence incidents across the country over the past decade and determined that the current level of security no longer appropriately mitigates the risk associated with a building as publicly accessible as City Hall. Therefore, in addition to the expanded number of security guards and the increase in guard hours to coincide with the public operating hours of City Hall (weekdays 7:00 am to the end of the last public meeting), the Committee also recommended that the security guards be armed and be trained in de-escalation and customer service so they also augment the City's priority to provide a friendly, helpful demeanor when interacting with members of the public.

Other Priority Security Enhancements: Other priority recommendations from the Committee include the installation of electronic controlled access for more doors in City Hall. By substantially increasing the number of access card-controlled locks security within City Hall will be enhanced. Given that City Hall is the peoples' house and is a symbol of a democratic, participative government where residents are welcome, I feel that each department should have at least one door that is open to the public without the need for the public to request access.

In addition, the number of panic buttons (which alert law enforcement) were recommended by the Committee to be substantially expanded so that each office suite will have a panic button(s) so that staff has more capability to alert law enforcement.

Finally, a high priority of the Committee was to improve the security of Market Square Garage. Staff will work on those improvements in the near term which may include enhancing wireless communication signal strength within the Market Square Garage.

FISCAL IMPACT: Implementation of all Tier 1 security measures recommended by the Old Town Safety Committee is estimated to cost approximately \$550,000 in one-time capital costs and \$200,000 in ongoing annual costs associated with security guards and monitoring and testing for some of the security technology. The costs in FY 2020 are contemplated to be funded by year end surplus funds remaining from FY 2019 which ended on June 30.

ATTACHMENT: None.

STAFF:

Laura B. Triggs, Deputy City Manager
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