



## City Council Staff Report

**From: City Manager**

**Report Type: INFORMATION REPORTS**

**Lead Department: City Manager**

**Meeting Date: August 19, 2024**

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### **TITLE**

Informational Report on City Hall Operations

The City has received several comments and concerns from residents regarding access to City Hall staff offices. This informational report provides background on the current business operation at City Hall, our ongoing commitment to serving the community, and potential changes moving forward.

### **BACKGROUND**

In July 2019, prior to the pandemic, the City's Executive Leadership Team established an interdepartmental "Workplace Safety Working Group" to review and recommend workplace safety and security enhancements at primary City facilities, including City Hall. This reflected contemporary concerns regarding the potential for workplace violence, and complemented facility evaluations and proactive training to address a range of emergency scenarios. City staff were also addressing occasional reports of theft and interactions with challenging individuals within several City facilities. As an employer, the City takes seriously our responsibility to provide a safe workplace and the importance of taking reasonable steps to address security on an ongoing basis.

The working group discussed several potential recommendations, including signage and physical restrictions to distinguish public access areas from staff working areas and equipment. This is an important distinction in government facilities, in order to enforce rules against unauthorized access. Over the past few years, the Municipal Services Center and Regional Water Quality Control Plant have implemented controlled access with security guards and visitors by-appointment only.

Restricting elevator access at City Hall was one such recommendation, which along with cardkey swipe recording for contact tracing, was implemented during the pandemic. This has

continued since, in the interest of workplace safety and security. Notably, there have been no reports of thefts within the building since implementation.

It should also be noted that City Hall presents a number of unique characteristics that compromise simple efforts to enhance safety and security:

- Unlike contemporary building designs, garage level elevators can directly access upper floors without stopping at the ground level. A ground level reception/security check-in station can therefore only be effective if upper floor access is limited.
- Public parking below City Hall is open at all times and used frequently by downtown customers. Access to garage elevator lobbies is locked after hours; however, elevator access from the ground floor to the garage is open to the public after business hours for public meetings.
- On upper floors, the central elevator lobbies cannot be locked due to the need for emergency access to stairways on the north and south ends of each floor.
- Most upper floors are not configured and staffed with receptionists that can monitor floor access from both ends of elevator lobbies.
- The current ground floor physical configuration cannot be easily modified for a staffed receptionist station without impacting lobby community meeting space. This space is used frequently for events that cannot be accommodated in the Community Meeting Room alone.

## **CURRENT CITY HALL OPERATIONS**

City Hall is open during regular business hours: Monday - Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and every other Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. City Hall ground floor access is also open after hours for public meetings.

The City Hall lobby is accessible from King Plaza, or during business hours through elevators from parking garage Levels A, B or C. Members of the public seeking assistance during business hours can access City staff through a variety of ways including in-person walk-in ground floor services, by phone, by appointment, or through the ground floor Check-in Desk to call staff. Whenever needed, staff is available to escort visitors to upper City Hall floors.

- Service by Phone: The public can call [\(650\) 329-2100](tel:6503292100) to be directed to a City department.
- Walk-In Lobby Services: Palo Alto residents and businesses can visit the City Hall lobby for in-person payment, utilities support, and police transactions. Staff are available to assist with service needs such as paying a utility bill, paying a parking ticket, reporting a crime, and vehicle releases. As a result, walk-in lobby services window hours vary and are [posted here](#).

- Walk-In Check-in Desk: A Check-in Desk in the lobby provides an access point for all customer service needs during business hours. This provides the public with direct access to departments in City Hall as well as services outside City Hall such as the Development Center. The Check-in Desk was recently updated with a new user-friendly interface and addition of the most frequently requested services to connect directly with staff.

The Development Center is located across the street from City Hall at 285 Hamilton Ave. Virtual and in person support is available Monday - Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and virtual appointments on Fridays. (Closed for lunch from 12:30 - 1:30 p.m.) Service support is available in-person, by virtual appointment, or by calling the Development Center at [\(650\) 329-2496](tel:6503292496) or email [building@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:building@cityofpaloalto.org).

As a practical matter, however, the vast majority of routine contacts and transactions are handled online and by phone rather than in-person. This avoids the need for community members to travel to City Hall, and staff is constantly working to ensure that sufficient resources are dedicated to efficient online services.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Our staff team is proud of the high level of service we provide to the Palo Alto community and committed to ensuring our services are effectively meeting our constituents' needs. In the near term, we are planning the following:

- Space planning is underway to determine how best to reallocate the office areas that will become available after public safety staff relocate to the new Public Safety Building. While the primary plan is to relocate the Development Center to this space, other functions and efficiencies will be examined. The current Police Department space is also in need of significant rehabilitation for reuse, so this effort is expected to take several months of construction following the completion of plans.
- Staffing is being reviewed to add personal assistance to the lobby Check-in Desk.
- Staff is also evaluating a potential security contract for public meetings and business hours at City Hall, for implementation after the Police Department has relocated to the Public Safety Building.
- Following the successful example of our Municipal Services Center Open House, our first "City Hall Open House" is planned for Wednesday, September 18, 2024 during the hours of 3 p.m. – 5 p.m. Depending on public interest, we anticipate making this a recurring event.

As with workplaces throughout the nation, workforce safety and secure operations at City Hall continue to evolve to reflect our dynamic social environment. We welcome feedback on how we're doing at meeting the community's service needs, as this helps determine our best next steps forward.

Please feel free to contact me at [ed.shikada@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:ed.shikada@cityofpaloalto.org) or (650) 329-2392.

**APPROVED BY:**

Ed Shikada, City Manager