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From: Gary Nevil <gn8623i@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2020 8:17 PM
To: City Clerk
Subject: 5/19 Regular City Council Meeting - Comments on Agenda Item 5-G

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Please see my comments on Agenda Item 5-G "Recommendation to Approve a Report on City Activities and Expenditures Related to the COVID-19 Emergency" of the 5/19 Regular City Council Meeting.

5/13/2020

Dear Councilmembers,

I am writing you to express my concern with the current efforts to “reopen” City offices. First, I do want to take a moment to express my sincere thanks for the City’s generous policies to date, and the accommodations that have been made for City employees during the Covid-19 crisis. I am grateful for the continued opportunity to earn my paycheck in a time when so much of the community has been impacted. However, I remain concerned about the City’s ongoing approach of bringing more and more people back into the office.

I work at Alameda Municipal Power (AMP), and while I am generally aware of city-wide efforts to bring employees back into the office, I will be focusing on AMP’s policies in these comments. Over the past month or so, employees from various groups in the office have been tapped as “essential workers” and compelled to return to the office, regardless of their ability to work from home. In fact, City leadership—which includes AMP, HR, Legal, and the City manager—have taken the position that all AMP employees can be considered to be performing an “Essential Government Function” at all times, and thus be compelled to return to the office.

It can be argued that these actions by the City meet the standards of the county Health Order, given that “Essential Government Functions” possess the least-defined requirements of any category. That said, they are far from meeting the “spirit” of the order. For “Essential Business” and “Essential Infrastructure”—which would include PG&E—it is a *requirement* that only workers immediately performing “essential” work can leave their homes to work, if—and only if—they are not able to perform that work from home. According to the language in the order, anyone not immediately performing “essential” work can’t return to the office except under limited circumstances for “minimum basic operations.” Similarly, in Gavin Newsom’s most recent statewide order, offices outside of the Bay Area are able to reopen, only if employees are *unable* to telecommute.

By next week, AMP is targeting a return to 50% occupancy in the office at any given time with 100% of staff rotating into the office. 50% is the maximum occupancy that can be achieved in the building while still following the 6ft social-distancing recommended guideline for government facilities and requirement for private businesses. This blanket percentage does not accurately reflect the number of employees able to work remotely,

nor does it reflect the number of employees immediately carrying out “essential functions” or “minimum basic operations.” It also does not reflect the greatly increased risks of transmission with more bodies in the office. There are of course employees at AMP that are “essential” to daily operations who do not have the ability to work from home. They probably account for closer to 33% of AMP’s workforce. These concerns have been brought before AMP and City leadership and received the response that I’ll paraphrase as “City buildings will safely follow the county’s health order and we are just not equipped to support continued telecommuting.”

I won’t personally go into the dangers of relaxing the shelter-in-place order too soon. Instead, you can read Mayor Ashcraft’s address on the topic (link provided). The City has been making great efforts to increase the safety of its offices, but if it were this easy to contain Covid-19, we wouldn’t have had to resort to shelter-in-place to begin with. We cannot predict or anticipate the path this virus might take. This said, I have a few questions for the Council:

- * Should we should hold the City offices to lower safety standards than private businesses in California and the Bay Area?
- * What are the City’s goals in bringing more people into the office?
- * Does the City distrust telecommuters?
- * Is the City hoping to return to normal?

I can’t answer these questions for the City, but I will posit my thoughts on the final question: these are not normal times, and quite unfortunately, experts agree that this will be a drawn-out battle, with the spread of coronavirus continuing for many months, if not years. I think that given the transmissibility of Covid-19, the sound approach remains ramping up efforts to keep as many City employees as possible working outside of the office. Additionally, I have linked an article on our neighbor’s, Santa Clara County, realization that telecommuting is a critical tool in this pandemic fight.

Mayor Ashcraft - <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2020/05/12/alameda-mayors-address-sheltering-in-place-on-island-working/>

Santa Clara County - <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/05/04/coronavirus-made-telework-necessary-santa-clara-county-to-explore-ways-to-keep-it/>

Sincerely,

Concerned City Employee