



Interdepartment
Correspondence Sheet

City of Cincinnati

Date: September 8, 2008

To: Mayor and Members of City Council
From: Milton R. Dohoney Jr., City Manager
Subject: Initial 3-1-1 Feasibility Report

Reference Document # 200800958

The City Council, at its session on August 8, 2008, referred the following item for review and report:

MOTION, dated 07/28/08, by Council members Berding and Qualls, that the administration report to Council on the feasibility of a non-emergency shared services 311 phone number as the primary point of contact for the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County...

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City administration has conducted initial research into the feasibility of implementing 311 as a primary point of contact for non-emergency services from the City and County. Initial findings follow:

According to a 2007 study by ICMA (the International City/County Management Association), 15% of U.S. local governments have implemented 311 and another 27% were considering doing so. With proper planning and funding, the concept can be successfully implemented in Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Potential benefits of 311 include:

- Easier access to local government services.
- Better ability to assess citizens' service needs and wants.
- Improved ability to monitor performance in responding to citizens' requests.
- Long term operational savings through consolidation of call taker positions and establishment of more efficient methods of accepting, routing, and tracking requests.
- Decrease in non-emergency calls to the 911 center. However, the total number of calls received (emergency and non-emergency) will likely significantly increase due to the ease of using 311 (further details below).

KEY ASPECTS OF CITY/COUNTY 311 IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the City's initial research into other City and County's experiences with 311, successful implementation of 311 requires the following:

- **A regional 311 plan.** City, County, and other jurisdictions within the County must agree on a 311 center plan that addresses funding, organization, and operation. Implementation of 311 involves many of the same challenges as implementation of 911. Whatever the scale of an initial 311 implementation (City-only, county-wide, or throughout the region), citizens throughout the region will call 311 for a wide variety of purposes. Planning must address how to these handle calls, regardless of the geography or device (landline or mobile phone) from which they originate, and regardless of the jurisdiction responsible for providing the service or information the caller seeks.
- **Substantial startup funding.** Following are readily available figures for 311 startup costs in other mid-sized cities.
 - Baltimore, MD \$2.5 Million
 - Denver, CO \$3.5 Million
 - Albuquerque, NM \$5.4 Million
 - Minneapolis, MN \$6.2 Million

Major start up cost items include:

- Public telephone network engineering costs to establish and route 311.
 - Contact center technology enabling acceptance of requests via phone, email, text message, and web chat.
 - A customer service request system deployed at the 311 center and all government agencies charged with completing requests received via the 311 center.
 - Space/facility expenses.
 - A communications campaign to publicize the availability and purpose of 311, as well as limit any confusion regarding 911.
- **Increased staffing for the customer service center.** The total number of calls received at a 311 center will likely significantly exceed the total number of calls currently received at local government customer service desks. In Austin, TX, total calls for service increased 70% during the first year of 311 center operation. In Minneapolis, MN, customer service calls increased 87% during the first year and a half of 311 operation.
 - **Re-engineering of business processes.** Significant process changes are required to provide the 311 center with the expertise and authority required to address information and service requests for a wide variety of agencies. Technology, training, and business processes improvements within the 311 call center are only part of a 311 implementation. Agencies charged with fulfilling service requests must also be part of these improvements.
 - **A communications campaign** aimed at alerting the public of the availability and purpose of 311, as well as reiterating the purpose of 911.

CITY ONLY 311 OPTION

Implementing 311 initially on a City only basis would substantially simplify developing a 311 center plan and re-engineering business processes. The City already has a single-number call center (591-6000) and has already completed much of the re-engineering associated with transferring expertise and authority to the customer service call center. However, a City only implementation would still involve significant start up and operational costs. Additional challenges of a City only implementation include:

- Even in a City only implementation, the 311 center should be prepared for a substantially higher number of calls than the current seven-digit number call center. Minneapolis' 87% increase in call volume is an example of what to expect. An easier to remember number will attract more calls, many of them not related to City operations.
- A seven-digit phone number would still be required for accessing the 311 call center when outside of the City's geographic area. While a seven-digit phone number is required for any 311 implementation, the seven-digit number will be heavily used if 311 is implemented in the City and not the County. Minneapolis and Pittsburgh are among the locations with a City only 311 implementation that includes a widely published seven-digit number.

ACTIONS THUS FAR AND NEXT STEPS

The City administration has taken the following actions:

- Reserved website www.cincy311.com.
- Conducted initial research on other cities' experiences.
- Contacted Hamilton County administration regarding the 311 concept.
- Engaged Cincinnati Bell regarding public telephone network requirements/costs for implementing 311.

Next steps:

- Exploratory conversations with Hamilton County and other jurisdictions within Hamilton County regarding their interest in participating in and funding a 311 center.
- Detailed research on costs and funding options.
- By October 31, 2008, the administration will report back to Council with at least two 311 implementation options and associated costs.

cc: Andrew Glenn, Director of Public Services
Margo Springs, Interim Director, RCC