

DATE: March 15, 2024

TO: Mayor Wheeler
Commissioner Gonzalez
Commissioner Mapps
Commissioner Rubio
Commission Ryan

CC: Chief Administrative Officer Michael Jordan
Maty Sauter, Manager, Division of Asset Management

FROM: Government Transition Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: District Offices Recommendations

Our Charge

The Government Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) is a group of Portlanders appointed by the mayor and city council in March 2023. GTAC acts as the primary community engagement and advisory body for Portland's government transition.

In an 8/23/23 memo, the 2023 council defined GTAC's scope of work to include:

“Advise on the role of future Council districts and offices, inclusive of exploring expectations around district/office outreach to the community and constituent relations work.”

Regarding district offices, GTAC recommends:

1. The final decision on permanent in-district offices should be left to the future city council;
2. There should be a robust community engagement process about programming in these offices prior to the permanent decision;
3. The City should continue ongoing facilities research and scoping of in-district office work to ensure responsiveness to direction of the future council; and
4. Temporary low-cost offices should be available in each district beginning January 1, 2025.

Background

GTAC's Districts + Council Operations Subcommittee is charged with making recommendations to GTAC on future council districts and offices. Members of the Districts + Council Operations Subcommittee have done important research into

comparable examples of other cities with district representation to assess if and how they deploy and utilize the concept of in-district offices to support residents' access to local government. This research has concluded that few cities have such examples, due to the cost and security concerns of running an in-district office year-round.

This research matches the due diligence findings of the Office of Management and Finance's Division of Asset Management, which has pegged the one-time capital cost of creating in-district offices as required in Resolution 37368 at \$600,000-\$1.8 million, depending on the cost to get Rose Network access at each district location (as accessing the City's network is the underlying requirement for in-district offices to match the security levels of downtown Council offices), and approximately \$1.7 million (total) to maintain these assets each year that they are in operation.

Several Subcommittee members would like to do more research into the issues of representation and barriers to access prior to expending substantial funds on in-district offices, since such research has not yet been conducted.

Several Subcommittee members feel that although in-district offices are expensive, issues of representation and access to local government likely do exist for certain communities including District 1, due to traditionally low levels of civic investment in certain areas of the City, which should be rectified.

Several Subcommittee members speculated that issues of representation and access vary from district to district, and potentially between different demographic groups.

Several Subcommittee members highlighted the need for security and allocating necessary funds to ensure councilors' safety. Facilities noted that city councilors regularly ask for security, and some GTAC members have heard this concern from candidates and community members.

Several Subcommittee members also want to ensure that the public has access to in-district offices by January 1, 2025.

Based on these discussions, the Subcommittee wants to promote the following three goals, which are not mutually exclusive:

- Ensure that ample research is conducted on representation and access issues prior to the dedication of substantial funding to council offices in each district;
- Ensure any funding that is expended on addressing issues of representation and access is appropriate for the district(s) in which it is targeted, and meets the needs identified; and
- Provide at least minimal in-district office provisions for the new councilors.

Recommendations

On March 13, 2024, GTAC voted to recommend the following:

1. The final decision on permanent in-district offices should be left to the future city council.
2. There should be a robust community engagement process about programming in these offices prior to the permanent decision.
3. The City should continue ongoing facilities research and scoping of in-district office work to ensure responsiveness to direction of the future council.
4. Temporary low-cost offices should be available in each district beginning January 1, 2025. Temporary low-cost offices are defined as follows: room for up to eight staff total per district, in a reasonably welcoming environment, in close proximity to public transit, with the existence of or ability to install appropriate signage and wayfinding. It is explicitly noted that there should be no expectation of security or technological systems (e.g., security cameras, audio-visual systems), or daily security or technological support for staff working at these sites, above that which these sites are provisioned with when they are first leased/obtained. GTAC expects and understands that the properties will be taken as-is, with only de minimis upgrades, such as signage and used commercial office furniture. Based on the information received from facilities, GTAC recommends that council cap the total one-time, capital investment across all four district offices at \$150,000 total, and at \$150,000 annually, total.

GTAC Considerations

We recognize that conversations about district offices – and the corresponding issues of representation and access – are important and challenging conversations.

While GTAC generally agreed to recommendations #1-3, significant time was spent discussing recommendation #4. Prior to approving the above recommendations, alternatives to recommendation #4 were considered but they failed to receive majority support (in the following chronological order):

- No district offices – temporary low-cost or otherwise – available January 1, 2025. This option was considered by the Districts + Council Operations Subcommittee, but it failed to receive majority support.
- Temporary low-cost offices in Districts 1, 2, and 3 available January 1, 2025, in recognition that District 4 has incomparable assets and District 1 has historically been disenfranchised and lacking investment from the City. This option was considered by GTAC, but it failed to receive majority support.

- Temporary low-cost offices should be available in each district beginning January 1, 2025, OR one central eastside office located in District 1 with the conditions included in Resolution 37638 which include “secured entry and egress” should be available beginning January 1, 2025. This option was considered by GTAC, but it failed to receive majority support.