

August 20, 2014

Scott Chadwick, Chief Operating Officer
City of San Diego
202 C Street, MS 9A
San Diego, CA 92101



Dear Scott,

In the midst of the ongoing elevator outage and subsequent scramble by MEA-represented employees to provide service to the public and their fellow City workers, we would like to express our concern, as well as the frustration of the employees we represent. This elevator breakdown is no surprise to the employees who work at the City Operations Building (COB). They have observed and been subject to periodic elevator outages for years, watching them be fixed with "band-aids" rather than be renovated or replaced altogether.

This is simply the latest in a long list of building system problems in COB after years of neglect and deferred maintenance. Frankly, employees are tired of hearing 1) "there's no money" in the budget to fix these problems or 2) the City intends to move employees elsewhere eventually so no money should be spent on this building. With an aging building, when things break down, we have seen that the parts take longer and longer to acquire, cost more money to fix, and the "fixes" are less effective.

This past February, a motor in the HVAC system went out, causing a burning smell to fill the air surrounding it. Fire personnel inspected, but could find nothing. The following day, the HVAC system had to be shut down for more than two weeks while a replacement part was located and installed. If this had happened in any of the summer months, working conditions would have been unbearable.

MEA has fielded many complaints from employees over the years, and has been patient and understanding with the City regarding the need for time and money to fix the problems or allow for a move to another location. But our patience, and the patience of your employees at COB, is running out. General working conditions have deteriorated to the point of being unacceptable and the City needs to act to address the problems.

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In addition to the structural building system issues, the general cleanliness of the building continues to be well below standard. For years this has been blamed on budget and staffing cuts, and even acknowledged by Facilities staff who claimed they simply did not have the staff to do everything needed for the building. Given the budget situation of today, however, there is no excuse for employees having to come to work every day in these conditions.

Complaints range from concerns about air quality and air circulation, to how often their trash is emptied, to concerns with the building's plumbing (there is currently one urinal broken in the men's restroom on the third floor). Other complaints include broken furniture, stained carpet, settled dust on desks, counter tops and window sills, and deteriorating seals on windows that allow dust and soot to enter the building and settle on window sills and desktops. Many employees have attributed respiratory and other physical ailments to the health and safety of the building. Worker's Compensation claims have been made against the City as a result of conditions in the building.

The City should stop being penny-wise and pound-foolish, and 1) move expeditiously to address dust/cleanliness issues and other immediate needs, 2) proactively fund and fix the backlog of structural issues in the building, and 3) initiate an analysis of COB to determine the extent of renovations needed to provide a consistently healthy and safe workplace and/or a plan to move employees into a more appropriate City facility. MEA looks forward to partnering with the City to make this a priority.

It is time for the City to invest in itself and its employees. If caring about the work environment of its employees is not the City's top priority, perhaps the City cares about the experience of the members of the public that it serves. Development Services, the main occupant of COB, is a major point of contact with San Diego's citizens, business owners, and developers alike. Often, this is the only City building members of the public ever enter. It should be a better representation of what the City of San Diego is and does.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Marin Mejia".

Marin Mejia

Labor Relations Representative

San Diego Municipal Employees Association

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