



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

FIRE DEPARTMENT

ISO Class 1 Fire Department

HEADQUARTERS

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www.cambridgefire.org



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TO: City Manager Louis A. DePasquale
FROM: Act. Fire Chief Gerard E. Mahoney
RE: Response to City Council Policy Order O-16; June 3, 2019
DATE: July 29, 2019

The Edward J. Sullivan Courthouse at 40 Thorndike Street has been vacant since June 2014. In December 2017, a large water pipe froze and burst resulting in water flooding the basement. This resulted in significant damage to electrical equipment which then affected critical Cambridge and regional public safety radio infrastructure located in the building.

In early January 2018, power was restored enabling the radio equipment to function. In mid-January 2018, another water pipe failure resulted in a fire in an electrical vault. This resulted in the building running on generator power for an extended period of time. Power was eventually restored later in the month.

In January 2019, another water pipe failure resulted once again in a power failure, requiring an emergency generator to provide power to the building. As of February 14, 2019, all critical radio infrastructure equipment had either been relocated and/or disconnected from the building. Also, on the same date the emergency generator failed, and it was determined it was beyond repair.

The State Department of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM) has been providing two security guards at the site 24/7 since the power failure in February.

Our point of contact with DCAMM, Jeffrey Dill, has informed us there is still a large amount of water in the basement, there is mold throughout the building and there is no power. DCAMM is working with their environmental group to expedite the removal of the water. On May 24, 2019, Mr. Dill was able to confirm the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had been notified of the outage of the red beacons on the roof of the building.

On June 1, 2019 at 7:17pm the fire department responded to a report of smoke coming from windows on an upper floor of the building. Upon arrival and investigation, it was discovered a steam pipe had ruptured and what witnesses' thought was smoke was actually steam. Representatives from Veolia responded to the scene and the steam feeding the building was disconnected.

The building is a Type I fire resistive building, built in 1971. Construction practices at that time included the use of asbestos for enhanced fire protection of steel structural members. The building is secured/locked and vacant, and there is no electricity, heat, water or steam. As mentioned previously DCAMM is paying for two security guards to be on site 24/7. They are instructed to call 911 and/or pull the fire box located on the exterior of the building in the event of an emergency. Furthermore, my understanding is the conditions have deteriorated to a point where it is not safe for persons to be in the building without Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

With respect to the request to perform a safety check of the building and report on the safety status of both the interior and exterior, I do not recommend doing so at this time because the building is unoccupied and secure but does not presently present a hazard that requires intervention.