

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 23, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 41: CLOSED CAPTIONING OF GOVERNMENTAL MEETINGS (COUNCILWOMAN WOODSON'S REQUEST)

This memorandum is in response to a request by Councilwoman Woodson for information on the City's policy regarding closed captioning of the City's televised meetings. Councilwoman Woodson noted that it was her understanding that Fairfax County, Montgomery County, and Charles County currently provide this service for at least some of their meetings.

Prior to the adoption of the City's current cable franchise agreement in 1994, City staff studied the cost and technical requirements for providing closed captioning and determined that for cost reasons it would not be recommended to provide the service on a regular basis. However, Council and staff believed that it was important to address the potential need for the service should it be requested. To that end, the City's 1994 cable franchise agreement includes the requirement that the local franchisee (Comcast) must provide close captioning during any live coverage of a City Council meeting or public hearing (including work sessions) conducted in City Hall for up to four such meetings or hearings per year at the City's request. For services beyond the four meetings per year the City would need to contract with and pay for a third-party provider. To date the City has not received citizen requests for closed captioning service, and staff has not requested Comcast to close caption any meeting.

In response to the specific request, Fairfax County (VA) Montgomery County (MD), and Charles County (MD) officials were contacted to determine their practices.

- Fairfax County provides closed captioning for the Board of Supervisors' meetings (including public hearings) via a contract with a local vendor at a cost of approximately \$50,000 per year.
- Montgomery County does not provide closed captioning for the County Council meetings. The County Public Information staff indicated that the cost of providing closed captioning services for live productions was the reason. However, the County does

provide the service for one or two special governmental programs each year that are pre-recorded prior to their broadcast.

- Charles County does not televise County Council meetings at the present time.

If the City Council wishes to close caption meetings, its cost would probably be near the \$50,000 that Fairfax County spends annually.

Staff: Rose Boyd, Director, Office of Citizens Assistance
Sheryl Hesano, Management/Budget Analyst, OMB
Gene Swearingen, Director, OMB