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The Honorable Cambridge City Council
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
By electronic and HAND DELIVERY

Re: Awaiting Report No. 14-02 ... "replying all" to Emails ...

Dear Mayor Maher and City Councillors:

I write to offer some commentary on Awaiting Report No. 14-02 and the City Council's Policy Order O-11 of Jan. 27, 2014.

In the order, Councillor Cheung suggested the practice of blind carbon copying the Council on emails sent to it, to ensure that Councillors do not inadvertently reply-to-all.

Had the order passed unamended, directing the Manager to confer with the Mass. Attorney General, I believe the Council would have learned that the blind copy practice is recommended by the Attorney General's Office of Open Government.

But I think that there are better technical solutions available. I hope Ms. Mary Hart, Chief Technology Officer, and Ms. Nancy Glowa, City Solicitor, will be able to confer and advise you as to practical options at such time as the Government Operations and Rules Committee meets to discuss the issue.

In particular, the blind carbon copy option has two serious flaws. First, it depends on the sender to enforce it. Since many members of the public send mail to the Council, in addition to City Staff, even if this practice were adopted by the City Staff, it would not be a comprehensive solution to the problem, merely to a common case.

Secondly, not having `council@cambridgema.gov` in the To: or Cc: line of the message makes it more difficult for recipients of the email to determine where it went, and harder to search for such messages in archives. It would make it harder for Councillors to use their email and manage its volume.

Some technical solutions are available. While I am quite knowledgeable about Internet email systems in general, I am not an expert on Microsoft Exchange, the City's email system of choice. So these suggestions may require modification or alteration:

1. Configure the `council@cambridgema.gov` distribution list to alter the headers of the message, so that, e.g., instead of emails appearing to come to `council@cambridgema.gov` they are altered to come to `council-noreply@cambridgema.gov`. If a Councillor inadvertently replies, their reply will go to the `council-noreply` address which will generate an error.
2. Configure the `council@cambridgema.gov` distribution list so that the City Councillors are barred from sending to it; their attempts to do so would be rejected. When a Councillor truly needs to send an email to their colleagues, he or she could request City Staff send the message, or, in the alternative, send the message to the individual Councillor's email addresses.

Very truly yours,

s/JOHN A. HAWKINSON/
John A. Hawkinson

Cc: Mary Hart, Chief Technology Officer,
Nancy Glowa, City Solicitor