



TO: Chair and Members of the Finance & Facilities Committee

FROM: Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2017 November 02

ACTIVITY-BASED WORKSPACE EQUIPMENT

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Finance & Facilities Committee:

- a) Receive Report 035-17FFC for information; and*
- b) Approve the allocation of \$150,000 for Activity-Based Workspace Equipment.*

Key Points

- Activity-Based Workspaces have been piloted with participating teams using minimal resources. Limitations have been reached using MLHU's existing furniture.
- To enhance staff productivity and health, workspace enhancements are required.
- Chairs have been replaced each year depending on available variance funding, but an infrastructure/equipment deficit has developed. The requested funding would allow us to minimize this deficit.

Background

The Middlesex-London Health Unit identified Activity-Based Workspaces (ABW) as a strategic initiative that could help to enhance collaboration, improve productivity and optimize office space. An ABW pilot project has been ongoing since August 2017. We have taken an iterative approach to this project, and changes are made to the workspace as needs are identified by the participating staff. None of these adjustments, however, is currently considered a full ergonomic solution. Through ongoing staff consultation and data collection, additional needs have been identified.

Further, MLHU aims to replace aging chairs and workspaces as the annual budget allows. Most of the Health Unit's chairs were purchased in 2008, but some currently in use are nearly twenty years old. Workspaces, while longer-lasting, are considerably older, with some dating from the 1990s. Many chairs and workspaces do not align with current ergonomic standards.

Activity-Based Workspaces Enhancements

For MLHU staff, time spent in the office ranges from less than 25% of the workweek to almost 100%. Traditionally, each staff member has been provided an individually assigned workspace intended for their exclusive use while in the office.

ABW is a workplace strategy that has developed across the office design sector for decades. It involves shifting from individually assigned workspaces to spaces shared amongst several staff members. Literature and anecdotal information show increases in program efficiency, collaboration, employee engagement and work satisfaction. Additionally, the organizations benefit from a smaller footprint for accommodating staff.

ABW proves most successful when the work that gets done in a health unit is considered holistically. Factors like alternative work arrangement policies and maintaining a variety of ergonomically correct shared workspaces are important for a successful transition from assigned to shared workspaces.

To date, the pilot project has made use of limited organizational resources and existing furniture. This piecemeal workspace allocation, however, has not been sufficient to meet the needs of the participating teams. The variance allocation would allow for: a complete transformation of the workspaces, ensuring that they are brought in line with ABW and ergonomic best practices; a reduction in MLHU's overall staff footprint; and proactive procurement of furniture in advance of a future location decision. This will be achieved by replacing existing cubicle spaces with bench-style seating more conducive to the ABW concept.

A more detailed evaluation report will be provided to the Finance & Facilities Committee in early 2018.

Furniture Replacement

Industry best practices recommend replacing an office chair every ten years. On average, the chairs in use at MLHU are almost ten years old; with the current pace of replacement, they will not be fully phased out until 2027. A ten-year replacement cycle aligns more readily with the ten-year warranty available from suppliers who participate in the Ontario Ministry of Government and Consumer Services Vendor of Record program. These chairs have been pilot-tested by staff members and meet all ergonomic requirements.

Thirty-six chairs are required to meet the ABW project participants' immediate ergonomic needs. However, it is recommended that the Health Unit replace as many chairs as possible for non-ABW staff, as well. This would allow MLHU to standardize its office chairs and ease staff chair use; recapitalize a furniture deficit; and reduce potential expenditures that may be required pending a decision on the location project.

Additionally, there are workspaces more than twenty years old throughout the MLHU's premises at 50 King and 201 Queens. Teams able to adopt ABW in the near future and workstations that are the oldest would be prioritized for replacement under the funding allocation in alignment with ABW and ergonomic standards.

Next Steps

MLHU staff will work within existing procurement policies to complete the procurement, installation and implementation of ABW enhancement, as well as chair and workstation replacements.

This report was prepared by the Strategic Projects and Procurement & Operations Teams, Corporate Services Division.



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