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Alderman says timing bad for costly office renovation

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A \$264,000 office renovation for the city's top bureaucrat should have been put on hold due to the global recession, says Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

"It absolutely sends the wrong message entirely," she said Tuesday. "It's the little things that would signal that we're serious and we get it.

"This is frivolous spending in an economic recession. Period."

The renovation of the city manager's offices includes \$155,000 for new carpeting; \$41,500 for repainting; \$22,500 for boardroom technology upgrades; \$20,000 for refinishing a boardroom table; and \$25,000 in moving costs during the work.

It marks the first facelift in 25 years to the offices of city manager Owen Tobert, which house 27 employees and take up 13,000 square feet.

"It's just life-cycle maintenance," said Donald Hrynyk, director of the city manager's office. "Its time came up."

He disagreed with Colley-Urquhart's suggestion the remodelling should have been put off.

Hrynyk said the city committed to spending much of the money early last year, before the global economic meltdown.

He said postponing or cancelling the renovation would have cost almost as much as just doing the work.

"There would have been a big loss to the city if we walked away," he said. "We were buying the carpet one way or another. It didn't make sense to have it sit in a warehouse."

Hrynyk noted the upgrades have been on the books since 2005, when the city approved its first three-year budget, and weren't part of November's contentious budget.

Ald. Gord Lowe said he was fine with the renovations.

"It's been about 25 years, so it was due."

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