
FW: Suggestion for automated email response communication

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
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To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

From: brian darby [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, April 1, 2026 11:12 AM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Suggestion for automated email response communication

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Dear City Council,

I'm writing to you today not just as a constituent in the 17th District, but as someone who spends a lot of time thinking about how we can use technology to make our local government more responsive without burning out our city staff.

We've all seen how the "digital inbox" has changed city hall. Between the hundreds of constituent emails on hot-button issues and the increasingly complex Public Records Act (PRA) requests, our staff is often buried under a mountain of manual sorting. I'd like to suggest a way we can use AI to act as a "digital assistant" to help our team get their heads above water.

The Idea: An "AI Clerk" for Triage and Reporting

The goal isn't to replace the human touch, but to handle the "grunt work" of sorting and summarizing. Imagine a system that could:

1. **Summarize the "Essence":** Instead of a staffer reading 500 emails about a new park proposal, the AI provides a one-page report: *"70% of emails today are about the park; the main concern is parking on 4th Street."*
2. **Draft, Don't Send:** It can draft a professional response based on our current city codes, which a staff member then reviews and hits "send" on.
3. **Redact Sensitive Data:** For public records, it can automatically flag and blur out things like Social Security numbers or home addresses, saving hours of tedious highlighting and protecting the city from privacy leaks.

Two Ways We Could Do This

There are two main paths, and each has its own "vibe":

- **The "Turnkey" Path (Proprietary):** We hire a company like CivicPlus or Granicus. They handle the tech, and we pay a subscription (usually **\$15k–\$40k/year** for a city our size). It's fast to set up and very reliable, but we have to pay that bill every year.
- **The "Sovereign" Path (Open Source):** Since we're in the heart of Silicon Valley, we could actually host our own "private" AI on a city server. We'd buy a high-end AI server (a one-time cost of about **\$25k**), and the data never leaves our building. It's more secure and costs almost nothing to run once it's set up, though it requires a bit more "grease under the fingernails" from our IT team to maintain.

Why this matters for us

As a resident who works in San Jose and lives here in Santa Clara, I want our representatives to spend their time making policy, not hunting for emails. If we can automate the 80% of the work that is just "sorting and summarizing," we give that time back to the people who actually run our city.

I'd love to chat more about how we could pilot this—maybe just for one department like Public Works—to see if it helps. We have the tech right here in our backyard; I think it's time we put it to work for City Hall.

Sincerely Brian Darby 

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