

CITY COUNCIL MEETING EFFICIENCY TIP SHEET

As part of the retreat planning, a Councilman had suggested that the Council discuss strategies to make our Council meetings more efficient. As a starting point to that discussion, I have taken the liberty of suggesting a few “tips” to meet that objective from my experience with other communities and a quick study of best practices nationwide.

First, staff has done an analysis on the agenda items for the 22 Regular Council meetings (excludes Special Call meetings) held in 2013. The analysis creates baseline data, including:

1. Number of meetings	22
2. Number of agenda items proposed	229
3. Items removed by Council from agenda	6
4. Items placed on the consent agenda by staff	91
5. Items adopted on the consent agenda by Council	73
6. Length of average Council meeting	2 hrs. 54 min.
7. Number of reports/presentations per meeting	1.6
8. Number of public comment speakers per meeting	6.6
9. Average time per meeting for public comment (assuming the full 3 minutes allotted were used)	20 minutes

Tips for Efficient Meeting Management:

1. Utilize the consent agenda for items that have the clear consensus of the Council; without needing to drag items onto the regular agenda simply to voice an objection that won’t sway the group to your point of view.
  - a. Ask questions and request supplementary information after the packet is released and well before the meeting occurs.
  - b. Utilize the 6PM work session to address lingering concerns or get last minute questions answered.
  - c. Recognize that if after you have expressed your concerns or disapproval for an itme in the days leading up to the Council meeting, and 5 or 6 Council members support an item, that item will likely pass.
  - d. You can vote for the consent agenda and ask the Clerk to specifically note in the minutes that you are voting against a particular item. Utilizing this suggestion will make it clear to your constituents that you don’t support an item on the consent agenda without having to use Council meeting time to fight a “losing battle”.
  
2. Have the Mayor ask the crowd to appoint “spokespersons” if possible from organized groups to avoid having multiple speakers say the same thing for

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Public Comment. Emphasize that all the speakers can come up at the same time to the podium to show that the issue has multiple supporters, but at the same time utilize just 3 minutes to get the groups point across. This also has the positive impact of allowing other speakers time for other issues of interest.

3. Avoid “grandstanding” on issues.
4. Avoid repeating what others on Council have already said.
5. Resist the temptation to “beat a dead horse”.
6. Resist the temptation to ask questions of staff that you already know the answer to – it takes up time during the meeting unnecessarily.
7. Avoid placing items on the agenda unless they are a legitimate policy discussion that may lead to the drafting of an ordinance/resolution.
  - a. Often times, you can address these issues with staff prior to the meetings and find out that it is an item that can be handled without the Council’s formal approval.
  - b. Socialize your ideas with the rest of the Council. Nothing is more frustrating to Council members than items on the agenda that are “dead on arrival” or put other members on the spot that need time to be digested and discussed informally.
8. Be pleasant and cordial to one another. A good deal of time can be wasted trying to prove others wrong or to challenge others on the Council. Please remember to praise in public and confront in private. It tends to make the citizens uncomfortable when the Council isn’t acting like gentlemen and ladies. It is akin to parents arguing in front of their children. No one wins in these situations.
9. Be respectful to the citizen’s time and effort to attend the meetings or participate in the online showing of the meeting. They don’t want to waste their time – they want the Council to move efficiently and effectively through the meeting. They expect you to show due care for the items on the agenda and for the best interests of the City. However, they expect that the members of Council and the staff be prepared in advance of the meeting to move things along quickly but prudently.
10. Defer items that are not ready for “prime time” if it becomes obvious that the homework needed to gain consensus on an item has been done properly.