

# Memorandum

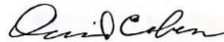
**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Councilmember David Cohen  
Councilmember Dev Davis

**SUBJECT:** SEE BELOW

**DATE:** March 25, 2021

Approved



Date: 03/25/2021

**SUBJECT: EFFECTIVE COUNCIL DISCUSSION AND DEBATE.**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Council discussions that will build consensus, inform decision-making and improve public engagement by implementing the following:

1. Agenda items should have an orderly speaker rotation among Councilmembers that starts with an initial round of comments and questions from each Councilmember who wishes to speak followed by successive rounds of discussions in timed increments
2. Require the meeting chair to apply orderly speaker rotation guidelines during Council discussion and deliberation, with discretion. For example, if somebody hits their time limit and is still on a point or wrapping up, they should be allowed to finish. Use natural stopping points.

## **BACKGROUND**

It is important to look at issues from multiple perspectives so that we can see a bigger context, which better enables us to discover solutions that takes the needs and concerns of everyone involved into consideration. Our City Council is a diverse consortium of lived experiences and beliefs that has the capacity to create a quality of life for our residents that is second to none. Council meetings are where the business of the Council is conducted, in public, with the opportunity for the public to comment. Listening to public comment is very important, but it is also important to keep in mind that a City Council meeting is not the public's meeting rather it is the Council's meeting conducted in public.

We have an opportunity to engage in more substantive discussion and debate. At the February 17, 2021 Rules Committee meeting, where this topic was first discussed, we offered some examples of how to accomplish this. While the discussion focused on creating an orderly speaker rotation among Councilmembers, there was never any intention to limit the time anyone could speak. Rather we sought to find ways to facilitate additional perspectives into the conversation, from other councilmembers and the public. In addition, we find that a back and forth between councilmembers results in more interesting deliberation and interaction. That is the spirit of the motivation behind the conversation we are trying to foster here.

It's hard to deny that Council meetings that extend until midnight and cut off time for public comments are counterproductive to our objectives. By keeping focused in our discussions and allowing more participation, we build majority support for a certain point of view, refine the motion to create better policy, and make sure everyone understands all points of view and implications of the vote. The result would be more efficient governance and better public engagement. The Rules Committee is working to be more mindful of the public's time by setting more agenda items as time certain. We should strive to make it as convenient as possible for the public to weigh in on agenda items that are most important to them.

*The signers of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City Council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff.*