

Proposal for Council Meetings and Committees

To make City Council meetings work better for the citizens of Austin, the new Council proposes changes to City Council meeting procedures and the Council Committee operations, to create:

- Greater opportunity to tackle major problems
- Greater opportunity for meaningful public and City Commission engagement, earlier in the legislative process and before decisions are final
- Better use of staff time and resources
- Culture of public engagement and improved customer service

Immediate Steps to Improve Council Procedures, Evaluate After 6 Months

1. Manage Council agenda to avoid late night meetings and foster greater public participation:

- Rotate Council meeting agenda items on a regular schedule by subject to save staff, public and Council time. Example: week 1 and 3 zoning, week 2 and 4 other items.
- Hold Council meetings more frequently to reduce the number of agenda items per meeting and to end meetings at a reasonable time.
- Move Executive sessions to a day other than Council meetings as appropriate.

2. Enhance opportunity for meaningful public engagement earlier, before decisions are final

- Move public hearings earlier in the process to Council Committees. At request of 4 Councilmembers, schedule additional public hearing before Council for a limited time period with the goal of establishing a time certain for testimony that is accessible for the public.
- Assign all proposed ordinances/resolutions to Council Committees before being considered by the Council. (Does not apply to time sensitive items or items already further along in the process. This does not change the City Manager's ability to bring items directly to the Council.)

3. Dramatically enhance access to and completeness of minutes, back-up, tracking follow-up action on resolutions, and other records of Council Committee and Commission proceedings to support transparency. Create accessible documents that clearly explain Council processes to public.

4. Take immediate steps to initiate longer term improvements for public engagement beginning with discussing the following issues during a "deep dive" session with the entire Council for the purpose of soliciting ideas to enhance staff's current engagement efforts:

- Evaluate creating a mediator position (on staff or contract) to reduce conflict for planning, zoning, contracting, and purchasing issues.
- Initiate a public process to research, obtain public input, and make recommendations to Council on best practices for public engagement in city government. Create Public Engagement Task Force supported by experts in public engagement best practices.
- Align City Commissions with Council Committee structure over time to enhance public engagement and better address Commission recommendations.