



**City of Madison**  
**Minutes - Approved**  
**Task Force on Structure of City Government**  
**Common Council Subcommittee**

City of Madison  
Madison, WI 53703  
www.cityofmadison.com

Friday, December 14, 2018

2:00 p.m.

City-County Building, Room GR-27  
210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

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**NOTE: POSSIBLE QUORUM OF THE TASK FORCE ON STRUCTURE OF CITY GOVERNMENT OR THE COMMON COUNCIL EXISTS AT THIS MEETING.**

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Yog hais tias koj xav tau ib tug neeg txhais lus, ib tug neeg txhais ntawv, cov ntawv ua lwm hom ntawv los sis lwm cov kev pab kom siv tau cov kev pab, cov kev ua ub no (activity) los sis qhov kev pab cuam, thov hu rau tus xov tooj hauv qab yam tsawg peb hnub ua hauj lwm ua ntej yuav tuaj sib tham.

Office of the City Attorney (608) 266-4511

[Legislative File No. 50732](#) - DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE TASK FORCE

**1. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL**

Meeting Called to Order at 2:03 p.m.

Present: John Rothschild, Alder David Ahrens, Ron Trachtenberg, Maggie Northrop and Justice Castañeda

Absent: Eric Upchurch (arrived at 2:05 p.m.)

Also Present: Alder Keith Furman; Alder Paul Skidmore; Alder Rebecca Kemble; Lisa Veldran; Nick Zavos; City Attorney Michael May; Assistant City Attorney John Strange

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Motion by Northrop to approve the minutes of December 7, 2018, seconded by Castañeda.  
Motion passed on voice vote.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment at this meeting.

NOTE: Motion by Castañeda, second by Rothschild to suspend Robert's Rules to allow free flow of discussion. Motion passed on voice vote.

**4. DISCLOSURES AND RECUSALS**

There were no disclosures or recusals from the members present.

NOTE: The subcommittee later voted to suspended Robert's Rules to stand informally and allow for public discussion and engagement, at which point a member of the public, Brenda Konkel, provided feedback to the subcommittee on a number of issues.

**5. DISCUSSION OF STRUCTURAL AND PROCEDURAL ISSUES RELATING TO EQUITY AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF RESIDENTS IN COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING**

- A. The subcommittee identified and discussed the following positives and negatives of the current structure of the Common Council meetings.
1. POSITIVES
    - (a) Members of the public attending the meeting get a chance to state their view or opinion on any item listed on the Common Council meeting agenda (5 minutes for public hearing items and 3 minutes for other agenda items).
    - (b) Robert's Rules is a universal language that assist the mayor and common council members run an orderly meeting.
    - (c) Holding meetings at night may allow greater accessibility for members of the public who work during the day.
    - (d) The current meeting procedure, including that council meeting are held every other Tuesday at 6:30 p.m., has become a familiar and known process to the public.
    - (e) Use of the consent agenda allows the council to move non-controversial items quickly.
  2. NEGATIVES
    - (a) There is no time limit for debate and with 20 alders that can lead to very long debates on individual agenda items. This often results in meetings that last late into the night. The subcommittee noted that this could be a major barrier for people who want to attend meetings and provide testimony: they may initially attend the meeting but, upon realizing their item will not be taken up until late at night, decide to leave without testifying. The subcommittee further noted that the late meetings are particularly tough on older members of the public and older members of the council who tend to function better during the day and early evening instead of late at night when, under the current structure, many important city decisions are made.
    - (b) The subcommittee noted that while public comment and input at common council meetings is important it should consider whether the current structure for public comment is having the impact it should.
    - (c) Single location and time for meeting may be barrier to attendance for people who work at night or can't travel downtown. The subcommittee noted problems presented by, among other things, lack of parking downtown and lack of childcare for council members and members of the public.
    - (d) Lack of clarity of council rules and uneven enforcement of them leads to confusion and may contribute to long debates and meetings.
    - (e) The physical set up of the Council chambers is not conducive to public involvement. The public is pushed off to the side.
    - (f) Public engagement tends to be anecdotal rather than empirical and objective, and thus policy decisions can be manifestations of input received by those few who are able to attend and express their personal opinions.
  3. ALTERNATIVES
    - (a) Provide Day Care.
    - (b) Parking Validation.
    - (c) Allow videos to be submitted for testimony.
    - (d) Separate Public testimony from legislative debate and action.
    - (e) More written comments made public.
    - (f) Austin 2016 Engagement Study – Summary below:

1. Help residents feel they are being heard and that it is worth it to be heard.
2. Enable on line or virtual participation during live meetings.
3. Ensure that everyone who cares about an issue or is impacted has the opportunity to engage.
4. Develop an online Agenda commenting system that allows residents to give input to Common Council on city issues by allowing “for”, “against” or “neutral”. Organized information on comments provided to Council members in advance of a meeting.
5. Provide feedback to those that who gave input. Always provide feedback in a timely manner to participants on what was heard from participants and how the input is being used and inform them of future decisions. Provide feedback to those that who gave input.
6. Make sure that the Council (and BCCs) follow a consistent, structured, transparent process from proposal to decision and the process rules are enforced.
7. Develop an online engagement platform that includes recent developments on topics. Permit a subscription information system to provide updated information on issues and options under consideration and that can also include specific questions to elicit feedback.
8. Provide training to City staff that engage with the public so they can provide useful feedback and capture public input.

A motion by Trachtenberg, second by Castañeda to leave the discussion of alternatives and take it up again at the January 11 meeting.

**6. DISCUSSION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE AND WHETHER THAT STRUCTURE FACILITATES OR IMPEDED COMMON COUNCIL DECISION-MAKING**

The subcommittee discussed whether the structure of the mayor's office facilitates or impedes common council decision-making.

1. Why are positions like the neighborhood officer and food policy coordinator in the Mayor's office?
2. What role should Deputy Mayors play? Do they have any administrative function, such as supervising departments? The subcommittee noted that the manner in which Mayors use the position of Deputy Mayor (formerly Mayoral Assistants) varies from administration to administration.
3. The City budget seems to primarily be an executive function, although some alders argues that the Council has failed to organize itself use its power on the budget.

**7. DISCUSSION ABOUT WHETHER A TRAINING PROGRAM SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED FOR COMMON COUNCIL MEMBERS.**

The subcommittee deferred any discussion of whether a training program should be established for common council members.

**8. FUTURE MEETING DATES AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION**

The subcommittee noted that the only future meeting was Jan. 11, when they would pick up the topics they had.

**9. DISCUSS PLANS FOR CONCLUDING THE WORK OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE; REPORT TO THE FULL TFOGS**

There was no discussion of the plans for concluding the work of the subcommittee.

**10. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn by Castañeda, second by Upchurch, passed on voice vote. The subcommittee adjourned at 4:05 pm.