Common Council Subcommittee Update to the Task Force on Government Structure

January 16, 2019

The Purpose of this document is to update the full Task Force on Government Structure ("TFOGS") on the work of the Subcommittee on the Common Council and the Subcommittee on Boards, Commissions, and Committees.

Each Subcommittee should answer the following questions with a brief narrative or series of bullet points that will update the TFOGS on the work of the subcommittee and generate discussion at the next full TFOGS meeting.

1. **How many times has the Subcommittee met since the last TFOGS meeting?**

   Five (5): 11/2/18; 11/16/2018; 11/30/18; 12/7/18; 12/14/18

2. **Briefly describe the process used by the Subcommittee to identify and examine issues relevant to the Subcommittee's topic area.**

   The Subcommittee created a work plan covering four topic/issue areas (see below) and generally discussed one topic area per meeting.

3. **List the key issues identified by the subcommittee as being most important Subcommittee's examination of its topic area.**

   The subcommittee used the issues identified in the Resolution creating the Task Force to inform the topics and issues it would discuss:

   Topic Area 1

   1. Full vs. Part time alders or hybrid
   2. Alder Terms (2 v 4 years)
   3. Number of Alders/Districts
   4. Staggered Terms

   Topic Area 2

   5. At-large vs. Geographic Districts or hybrid or numbered districts.
   6. Term limits.
   7. Redistricting considerations including diversity representation.

   Topic Area 3

8. Compensation levels.
9. Compensation and term of Council President and Vice President.
10. Support staffing levels and training for Council members.
11. Alders serving on BCCs.

Topic Area 4

12. Appointment of Council Members to BCCs.
13. Appointment of residents to BCCs.
14. Council Members as Chairs of BCCs.
15. Structural and procedural issues relating to equity and meaningful engagement of residents in council decision-making, including time, place and length of Council meetings, budget development, barriers to resident participation and accountability.

4. **When discussing the key issues listed above, did any themes or patterns of thought emerge among subcommittee members? If so, what were they?**

- Many of the issues listed above (and therefore in the Resolution creating the Task Force) are so interrelated that recommending a change in one area/issue will require recommending changes in others. For example, the subcommittee noted that switching to a Common Council comprised of full-time alders (Topic Area 1) would require a reduction in the number of districts/alders (Topic Area 1) and, very likely, the provision of additional staff for alders (Topic 3).
- Despite the interrelatedness of the issues, the subcommittee believes that any overall recommendations the full Task Force makes should take into account the pros and cons of making changes to each specific issue or topic area so that the Task Force can be aware of and balance the overall pros and cons. For example, one subcommittee member mentioned that if the Task Force recommends, say, moving to at-large districts as a way of addressing the negative impacts of parochialism (viewed as a con of having geographic districts), then it should take into account the degree to which such a change will impact alders being able to individually connect with members of a geographical district (viewed as a pro of having geographic districts). Thus, for each issue, the subcommittee compiled a list of pros and cons to making changes in each topic area so that the subcommittee and Task Force could return to these if and when they develop ultimate recommendations on a particular topic or issue. These pros and cons are listed specifically in the meeting minutes.
- In considering specific alternatives, the subcommittee and Task Force should also address underlying philosophical issues that relate to the purpose and function of city government. For example, in consider whether to have full-time alders or increase alder pay, the subcommittee and Task Force should consider more basic

questions, such as whether we view membership on the Common Council a "government job" or a "volunteer public service."

- Though the subcommittee has yet to formulate a range of possible alternative structures that may address the issues raised by the resolution, it did generally agree on some possible things that could help create more equitable and meaningful engagement of residents in council-decision making, including:
  - o Provide day care.
  - o Validate parking.
  - o Allow videos to be submitted for testimony.
  - o Allow live public participation at Council meetings by electronic means such as the internet or from remote centers of the city.
  - o Allow public comments on agenda items to be considered in advance of a meeting by allowing individuals to register in favor or opposed through a system that notifies residents of decisions to be made and asks for input.
  - o Separate Public testimony from legislative debate and action by allowing individuals to provide input at the beginning of Council meetings regardless of when the item on which they wish to speak is taken up by the Council. This may prevent people from leaving the meeting when their item is not taken up until late at night.
  - o Vary meeting locations.
  - o Reconsider rule requiring 24 hour notice for BCC members to appear by telephone if state open meetings rules are ever changed.
  - o Make written comments available to the public and Council members at the time of the meeting.
  - o Review and incorporate some of the suggestions from the Austin (TX) 2016 Engagement Study.
  - o Avoid late-night meetings. Reduce overall length of meetings.
  - o Adhere to and/or change current rules regarding the length of alder statements at Common Council meetings.
  - o Improve accessibility of Legistar.
  - o Create way for people to provide input in Legistar.
  - o Provide classes for the public to learn how to use Legistar.
  - o On city website, allow option for having a chat with a city employee who can direct a resident in the right direction should they have an issue or question about government services.
  - o Continue working towards having 311 number for city services.
  - o Maintain subscription lists for Common Council and BCC items so that residents can be made aware of issues coming before a body through an email blast or text message.
  - o Review customer relation software options that may create better processes for residents to navigate city services, such as through ticketing system

where issues are ticketed, followed up on my staff, and then the results reported back to the person requesting the service.

- o Consider ways to have video testimony/participation at Common Council meetings.
- o Review agenda setting procedures.
- o Consider the option of bifurcating public testimony and legislative sessions.
- o Add more than just the name of meetings to the city calendar so that more information can be obtained with 1 click, instead of requiring multiple clicks to get relevant and substantive information about a meeting.
- o Consider the possibility of creating an office of community representation/engagement.

5. **As the discussion of these key issues evolved, did the Subcommittee identify potential improvements to the city's current government structure that might address the issues identified? If so, please describe any alternatives discussed by the Subcommittee and any pros and cons to implementing such an alternative.**

   See 4. above.

6. **Are there any issues that the subcommittee has found particularly difficult? If so, what are they?**

   Whether the number of alders on the Council should be changed and whether alders should be full or part-time.

   Whether districting should be geographic or at-large.

   Whether this Subcommittee or the Subcommittee on BCCs or the entire TFOGS should be the body to primarily discuss and address the appointment of members to BCCs.

   Whether this Subcommittee or the Subcommittee on BCCs or the entire TFOGS should be the body to primarily discuss issues related to the Mayor's office.

7. **The full TFOGS would like a formal report from the Subcommittee in March. Does the Subcommittee have any questions in particular it would like the full TFOGS to address or discuss before March?**

   See 6. above.