



Office of the Common Council

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To: Members of the Common Council Executive Committee
From: Sara Eskrich, District 13 Alder
CC: All Alders and Mayor Soglin
RE: Governance Reform Proposal
Date: July 11, 2017

Thank you in advance for considering the proposal for a Governance Task Force I crafted with Council President Rummel. I ask you to join us in support of this structure.

I hope this memo will provide you with some background on the proposal. As you may know, I am very interested in and committed to governance structure and policymaking for accountability to our entire community. I have been communicating with Mayor Soglin and many of you on and off about this priority since being elected to Council.

I appreciate and thank the Mayor for proposing a resolution to create a special committee on government organization. This provided the needed impetus for us to act as a Council. Before submitting the alternative proposal, I met with the Mayor about our differences in approach but shared objectives. For the most part, you will see that the substitute resolution mirrors the charge and objectives of the Mayor's proposal. The key differences are twofold:

1. **Structure** – We are proposing a smaller task force, made up of Alders and citizen experts in governance and community engagement. This serves a practical and meaningful purpose.
 - a. Practically, large committees are often challenged in obtaining quorum to meet. The Common Council and Mayor will ultimately act on recommendations from this task force, so they will be more bought-in and ultimately successful in implementation if engaged in the recommendation development process.
 - b. Meaningfully, Alders are democratically elected *by residents* to be representatives *of residents*. This is representative democracy, and is fundamentally accountable. Recommendations on the future structure of city governance should be made by democratically elected representatives, informed by members of the public.

The Council has found success with nimble President's Task Forces' ability to respond quickly and engage meaningfully with residents in recent years.

2. **Public Engagement Process** – The Mayor is proposing the committee itself to be representative of the community and bring those diverse perspectives. It is true that this is how the city has historically considered changes to governance structures. However, we know more and more now how difficult, tokenizing, and ultimately unaccountable it can be to have members serve as representatives of a larger group without adequate supports and

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engagement in place. Therefore, the President's Task Force is explicitly charged with developing and implementing an innovative public input process to engage residents in the development of recommendations for future governance structures.

I have begun discussions with community leaders with expertise and experience in community engagement on how to design this process. The task force will learn by hearing from them about their experience, taking our own city past and present (e.g., Imagine Madison) experiences, and ultimately craft an innovative engagement plan we can implement proudly.

I do not think this needs to be a highly controversial or polarizing decision. The work of this task force will be wide-ranging and challenging, and will require support and engagement from residents, community experts, the Council, Mayor, and city staff. Ultimately, I believe it is possible to use many structures to create recommendations for future structures. However, with a topic so critically important to our future, I hope we will together leverage our democratic structure to engage meaningfully with our community.

Thank you again for your thorough review and consideration of this resolution. I hope you will support Legistar File 47707, "SUBSTITUTE - Creating a President's Task Force to Review Local Governance Models and make recommendations to the Council and Mayor." Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any questions. I will also be at the CCEC meeting this evening.