

DRAFT MEMORANDUM

TO: Samba Baldeh, Vice President of the Common Council
Mike May, City Attorney
FROM: Heather Allen, Legislative Analyst
DATE: October 27, 2017
RE: Community Councils

The City of Madison has sought to increase the depth of participation and the numbers of individuals participating in all levels of civic engagement, with a focus on public participation at Common Council meetings. The first goal of this paper is to provide a review of various approaches to promote attendance and participation in public meetings. Research indicates that efforts to increase public participation generally fall into three categories: educating and empowering citizens, re-educating administrators, and enabling administrative systems and processes.¹

The second goal of this memo is to explore strategies to increase attendance at Common Council meetings. The City of Madison Common Council regularly meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month in the City County Building (CCB) in central Madison. If necessary, the date of the Common Council meeting will be changed to an alternate Tuesday evening or, on rare occasions, the location may be changed to Monona Terrace. This memo examines the potential consequences of moving the Common Council meetings to other locations in the City of Madison. The City Clerk's Office and Madison's IT Media Team, who produces Madison City Channel, provided input for this analysis.

The City of Madison has established racial equity and social justice as key principles to guide decision-making. The challenge of public participation is connected to these issues because historically marginalized communities are significantly less likely to participate in civic engagement. "We can't be neutral about giving people an equal opportunity to participate in and shape the social, political, and economic systems that affect their lives. Advocates for active and deliberative engagement need to be attentive to power dynamics, structural inequality, and unconscious privilege. If we don't, we risk becoming those well-meaning people who unconsciously perpetuate the status quo."²

Professor Cramer of the University of Wisconsin-Madison recently analyzed the City of Madison process of gathering community perspectives on the use of police body cameras. In her paper "Equity through Learning to Listen: The Case of the Public Discussion on Body-Worn Cameras in Madison, Wisconsin," Cramer finds that one of the necessary changes

¹ King, Cheryl Simrell, Felty, Kathryn M., Susel, Bridget O'Neill. "The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration." *Public Administration Review* July 1998, Vol. 58. No. 4, pp. 317-326.

² Thomas, Nancy L. "Democracy by Design." *Journal of Public Deliberation*. Volume 10 Issue 1 Special Issue: State of the Field. Article 17. July, 1 2014, pp. 4.

for more equitable public discussion is creating space and opportunity for marginalized voices to be amplified at the same time as limiting the impact of those voices who regularly dominate public debate. By creating spaces for historically marginalized people and potentially limiting dominant voices, we can create an opportunity for community members to be heard. She finds that “in the practice of democratic deliberation, listening is as important as talk.”³

Section I. Barriers to Participation

Public Participation in Local Government is Down

Robust civic engagement is the bedrock for local democratic government. Nevertheless, limited numbers of residents vote in local elections⁴ and an even smaller fraction of the population attends Common Council meetings. Members of the public that engage with the Common Council are often the “usual suspects.” Individuals with higher incomes or education are significantly more likely to participate in civic activities.⁵ “The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government. Public officials, in turn, are much more responsive to the privileged than to average citizens and the least affluent.”⁶

Public meeting attendance is also strongly correlated with education. College graduates are more likely than the general public to attend public meetings. Part of this disparity may be attributable to civic education and exposure to civic processes through school-based experiences. Members of the public with more free time are also more likely to participate in civic activities. The “time wealthy” have additional time resources and are have more opportunity to spend that time on public participation. Nevertheless, meeting attendance is down for all groups. Since the mid-1970s the likelihood of attending a public meeting in the previous year dropped for all people at various education levels.⁷

Barriers to Participation Vary from Individual Concerns to Institutional Processes

The barriers to attending Common Council meetings are varied and unique for each person. Some of those barriers may include motivation, concerns about logistics such as the timing and location of the meeting, or confusion about how to participate in a meeting. In order to increase participation, government officials must improve their understanding

³ Cramer, Kathy J. “Equity through Learning to Listen: The Case of Public Discussion on Body-Worn Cameras in Madison, Wisconsin.” *Journal of Public Deliberation*. Volume 12 Issue 2. Special Issue: Equality, Equity, and Deliberation. Article 10. October 13, 2016, pp. 9.

⁴ In the 2015 Mayoral election, total votes cast for mayor totaled less than 53,000 or compared with the approximately 190,000 Madison residents who met the 18-year-old voting age requirement. Source Ballotpedia and Census QuickFacts.

⁵ Hyman, James B. And Levine, Peter. *Civic Engagement and the Disadvantaged: Challenges Opportunities and Recommendations*. The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. CIRCLE Working Paper #63. December 2008, pp. 1-18.

⁶ American Political Science Association, Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, *American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality* (2004) pp. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

of a community member's reasons for participation or lack thereof. "Efforts to increase participation [in programs] must be grounded in an understanding of both what motivates people to get involved as well as any barriers that might inhibit that involvement."⁸ Barriers to get involved may reflect disparities in motivation depending on personal availability of time and resources. In each case, perceptions play a significant role in the decision to participate. For example, if a civic engagement activity is perceived to be interesting, an individual may determine that they do have the time to participate. However, that calculation may be the opposite if the activity is deemed less interesting.

Attendance at public meetings is sometimes utilized as a proxy for more authentic participation and civic engagement. Researchers focusing on Common Council meetings in Ohio found that barriers to authentic engagement result from long-standing institutional practices such as the structure of a public meetings and public hearings. The structures of those processes put the public at a disadvantage compared to the elected and appointed officials who oversee meetings.⁹ Therefore, it is important to consider remedies for this imbalance by addressing the meeting format and participation techniques.

This author conducted a quick informal survey of staff engaged in the City's Racial Equity and Social Justice Initiative to get feedback on barriers to attending a City of Madison Common Council meeting. Those answers were combined with some barriers frequently cited in the research literature. The barriers can be grouped into three main categories:

The Realities of Daily Life

- Concerns about transportation to and from the meeting, parking
- Childcare availability
- Language or physical barriers
- Conflicting work schedule or other obligations
- Reduced participation in social and civic organizations

Administrative Processes

- Misinformation or lack of information regarding the role of the public at Common Council meetings
- An adversarial relationship between City officials and members of the public
- Lack of knowledge of how to interpret the agenda, participate, or understand the protocol
- Perception that the meeting takes too long
- Inability to determine length of meeting/when an agenda item will be addressed

Participation Techniques

- A disbelief that participation in a Common Council meeting will impact the decision

⁸ Hyman, James B. And Levine, Peter. Civic Engagement and the Disadvantaged: Challenges Opportunities and Recommendations. The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. CIRCLE Working Paper #63. December 2008, pp. 11.

⁹ Farkas, Kerrie RH. Power and Access in the Public Hearings of City Council Meetings. Discourse and Society, Vol. 24, No. 4 July 2013, pp. 399-420.

- Intimidation or other discomfort with the Common Council location or process

Best Practices to Improve Participation

Survey City Residents Regarding Participation

In order to increase participation, City officials must first build their knowledge of the public's perspective on participation. Therefore, one of the first recommendations to increase public participation may be a survey of City of Madison residents and elected officials to determine the level of knowledge, interest and potential barriers to participating in City of Madison decision-making processes. This recommendation could help build understanding and shape any future efforts to increase public participation and should be prioritized accordingly.

The City of Madison recently conducted analysis on effective government as part of the 2017 strategic planning effort. The Effective Government Work Group highlighted survey techniques as a proven strategy to track progress related to effective city processes. In their final document *Roadmap to Outcomes: Effective Government*, the authors stated that, "The City should continuously try to improve the levels of internal and external satisfaction". The paper recommends establishing "public and internal satisfaction surveys regarding public input" as a data source to track progress.

This strategy is a key tool for the City of Seattle. Seattle sought to address concerns that departments were not sharing information. Moreover resident comments were regularly requested and collected however they were not regularly addressed. In response the City of Seattle collected nearly 1,000 surveys from residents and is using the information obtained to train city staff in all agencies on improved engagement and outreach.¹⁰

¹⁰ Accelerate This: Utilizing a People-Centered Approach to Engagement. City Accelerator Staff. Governing.com February 23, 2017. <http://www.governing.com/cityaccelerator/blog/-accelerate-this-utilizing-a-people-centered-approach-to-engagement.html>

Solutions to Address Barriers

Logistical Barriers	Administrative Barriers	Participation Techniques
Offer childcare	Simplify the agenda	Explore options for resident feedback
Offer meals or refreshments	Conduct outreach and education about the purpose and value of Common Council meetings	Increase advertisements for the Common Council meetings
Increase translation and interpretation accessibility	Provide more resources and information about participation at the Common Council	Identify and clarify participation benefits to residents
Change place or time of meeting		Explore other technology and media to obtain input from the public

Reduce Logistical Barriers

There are many barriers to participation in Common Council meetings that stem from the practical realities of daily life. Individuals have families and jobs, which impose limits on the time they have available for civic participation. Additionally, they may face economic barriers or issues with transportation. While relocating the meetings or moving them to different times of day may help address some of these barriers, there are other solutions that may also be effective in reducing the barriers that result from daily life.

Offer Childcare

One solution to consider is providing free or low cost childcare at the Common Council meetings. For low-income individuals with children, the cost of childcare may be a barrier to attending meetings, particularly when they are uncertain how long the meetings will last. In Wisconsin, single parents pay almost half their income for infant center care for a single child.¹¹ Having free or low cost childcare available during the meetings will make it easier for low-income individuals with children to attend the meetings.

¹¹ "In Wisconsin, single parents pay half of their income for infant center care, and 90% of their income for center care for 2 children." Childcare Aware.org Parents and the High Cost of Childcare. <http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/costofcare/> Retrieved October 9, 2017.

Offer Meals or Refreshments

Another potential solution would be to provide free or low cost meals at the Common Council meetings. Generally speaking, the promise of free food tends to incite interest. A survey of employees in U.S. and U.K. companies conducted in 2013 found that 1/3 of participants would attend an optional meeting if free food was provided.¹² Providing free or low cost meals can also help reduce barriers faced by low income individuals and may be a way to connect low income individuals with healthy meal options; something that can be lacking in low income neighborhoods. City expenditures for food-related costs are permissible if used to facilitate citizen participation; however, costs in excess of \$100 must be pre-approved by the Mayor.¹³ Should approval not be received, the Common Council could still consider facilitating the availability of meals by having food trucks present or getting a sponsoring organization to provide meals.

Provide translation and interpretation services in a proactive manner

Language differences may be an additional barrier to attending Common Council meetings. The City of Madison is developing a new Language Access Plan which will likely provide guidance on how best to increase access to translation and interpretation services. In addition, the City of Madison already provides language services upon request. Requesting interpretation at meetings or translation of documents often requires at least 48 hours of notice in advance which is a barrier for those who may attend a meeting without notifying the City of their need for translation or interpretation.

Having a translator present at meetings and translating meeting materials into multiple languages may be one way to address this barrier. Additionally, the Common Council could consider publishing meeting minutes posted online after the meeting in multiple languages. This issue should be revisited as part of the ongoing process to develop a robust City of Madison Language Access Plan.¹⁴

Change the location or time of meetings

The second section of this paper will focus on the strategies of changing the location of the Common Council meetings. In general, the tradeoffs here relate to increased accessibility for some people versus reduced predictability for the general public. There are also specific costs and logistics that will influence the feasibility of shifting the location or time of meetings. Please see Section II.

¹²Boldoni, John. Motivation By Mouth: Does Free Food Make For A Happier Workplace? Forbes February 21, 2013. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnboldoni/2013/02/21/motivation-by-mouth-does-free-food-make-for-a-happier-workplace/> - 1a28003d20c8.

¹³ Madison APM No. 1-6. <http://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/apm/1-6.pdf>.

¹⁴ See Legistar File # 48568:

<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3152193&GUID=C11FE8B4-4F31-4663-B025-0FB9B58508A1&Options=ID%7cText%7c&Search=language+access>.

Validate parking

City ramps provide parking for Madison residents that wish to drive to a Common Council meeting. The City could explore validating parking passes to encourage members of the public to utilize public ramps and participate in the Common Council meeting.

Reduce Administrative Barriers

Many individuals perceive the administrative process itself as a barrier to participation. Administrative processes limit the capacity of citizens to participate, as decisions are often reached before citizens have a chance to provide any input. Administrators may be seen as adversaries; managing and manipulating a one way flow of information from government to citizen.¹⁵ Unfortunately, merely changing the time or location of meetings is unlikely to address this type of public participation barrier. Fortunately, there are opportunities to enhance communication and reduce administrative barriers.

Identify opportunities to simplify agendas

Addressing this type of barrier requires reexamining the format of the Common Council meetings. First, the Common Council could consider simplifying its meeting format and agendas. There may be an opportunity to clarify the legalese in agenda items and replace it with more accessible language. Developing and providing a variety of guidance documents and instructions for meeting attendees may also help to build a sense of accessibility and encourage participation. Additionally, the Council could explore strategies to clarify the time that an item will be discussed so that participants can better plan their participation.

Additionally, the Common Council could consider offering other ways citizens can provide input on issues prior to making decisions. Online comment forms and other electronic tools offer new opportunities for citizen input (see next section on Participation Techniques).

Provide outreach and education about Common Council participation

Finally, the Common Council could consider implementing education efforts. This could involve reaching out to local schools and community organizations to speak about the local government process and civic engagement. Additionally, the Common Council could provide background and descriptions about agenda items before jumping into discussion of the items. The Common Council could also consider publishing a handout on the structure of Common Council meetings and how citizens can be involved in the meetings.

¹⁵ King, Cheryl Simrell, Felty, Kathryn M., Susel, Bridget O'Neill. "The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration." *Public Administration Review* July 1998, Vol. 58. No. 4, pp. 317-326.

Reconsider Participation Techniques

Finally, traditional participation techniques are often ineffective. The structure of public hearings is not seen as allowing for a meaningful, two-way conversation. Public hearings are also typically held late in the process, when decisions have already been made.¹⁶ Because of the historic nature of these techniques it may be challenging to address this type of barrier, however an effort to change these techniques may yield unexpected benefits.

Explore options for resident feedback

There are several things the Common Council can do to address participation techniques. First, the Common Council could consider offering alternative ways to participate. The Common Council could break into smaller meetings based on specific topics. The Common Council already offers live online viewings of its meetings. In addition, the Common Council makes recordings of its meetings available online after the meeting, so that those who are interested but could not attend can still see what occurred. The Common Council may consider adding opportunities for citizens to message in comments and questions through a video or internet interface. Studies show that electronic participation technologies improve participation processes and governance outcomes.¹⁷

Conduct more outreach and advertising

The Common Council could additionally change how it advertises the time and location of meetings. Social networking sites such as Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter could be employed.

Another way to address participation techniques is by partnering with community organizations. Partnering with neighborhood and community organizations is a great way to reach more individuals and a way to show the public that the Common Council cares about community concerns. Building long-term relationships with these organizations has the potential to improve public participation opportunities and help increase engagement across communities.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Feeny, Mary and Welch, Eric. Electronic Participation Technologies and Perceived Outcomes for Local Government Managers Public Management Review. Volume 14, 2012-Issue 6, pp. 815-833.

¹⁸ Recommendations: Building Capacity for Stronger Public Engagement in California May 20, 2013. <https://www.publicagenda.org/pages/recommendations-building-capacity-for-stronger-public-engagement-in-california>.

Explore other technology and media to obtain input from the public

The Swedish Government's Democracy Commission reports that:

Our results show that several public fora for political discourse must be opened. In pace with globalization, the tendency to prepare policy through negotiation, for example, results in inadequate opportunities for citizens to obtain access to information and demand accountability. It is necessary to allow more citizen groups – rather than particularly resourceful lobbyists – to participate in the design of the system of rules on an increasing number of levels. In this respect IT can also improve contact at other political levels between citizens and decision makers. We consider that it is important, for example, to look for methods for using IT in order to publicise views presented by consultative parties and increase the opportunities for citizens to have insight in and opportunities to influence bases for decisions, for example in conjunction with environmental impacts analyses.¹⁹

Identify and clarify participation benefits to residents

Finally, the Common Council should make clear to citizens what they can contribute by attending Common Council meetings and why it is important that they participate. The Common Council should let citizens know their input is valued and provide information on when they can expect to hear follow-up. It is important that the Common Council report how citizen participation impacted the ultimate outcomes.²⁰

¹⁹ Coleman, Stephen and Gøtze, John. "Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation." BT, Hansard Society, pp. 4-48. Retrieved from <https://www.acteurspublics.com/files/epublic/pdf/scoleman-jgotze-bowling-together.pdf>.

²⁰ The U.S. Public Participation Playbook. OpenGov Foundation. <https://participation.usa.gov/#play3>.

Section II. Moving the Common Council Meeting

As discussed earlier, the second purpose of this memo is to evaluate the potential of moving Common Council meetings to alternative locations in the community with the goal of increasing participation. Representatives of the City Clerk's Office and IT's Media Team which manages City Channel, were both asked for comment on the practicalities of moving a Common Council meeting to a different location. The following is a summary of that feedback.

Accessibility

The first major issue noted by both the Clerk's Office and the Media Team is the concern that moving the location of the meeting may reduce accessibility for some individuals. In particular, other locations are likely to have less access to public transportation given that almost all buses come to the square.

One of the benefits of moving the location of the Common Council meeting may be that there would be more free parking at certain locations. Alders have noted that residents often raise the concern that parking is very limited or unavailable near the CCB. The tradeoff here may be that driving and parking is easier for other locations while access to bus routes is relatively easier if the Common Council meeting is held in the CCB or another location close to the Capitol Square.

Logistics

There are several logistical issues that must be addressed in order to hold the Common Council meeting in an alternative location. Some of the key issues to consider include whether the space can accommodate a large group, has sufficient audio and visual accommodations, can connect to the City network to livestream the meeting, and can stay open a full hour after the Common Council meeting ends.

On occasion, if circumstances require that the Common Council meet in an alternative location those meetings have been held at the Monona Terrace. The benefits of holding the meeting at the Monona Terrace include: 1) Monona Terrace is a large space with an operations team to set up tables, chairs, etc. and has ample space for the public, 2) Monona Terrace has appropriate AV equipment to allow for all of the necessary microphones, 3) Monona Terrace is a City facility and therefore allows streaming of the meeting via the web to viewers, and 4) Monona Terrace is centrally located with access to public transportation and parking.

Predictability

Timing of the meetings can influence the accessibility of a location as well. The Common Council meetings generally begin at 6:30 PM on Tuesday evenings. Bus routes are running frequently during peak service on weekday evenings. Bus routes could be a good option for people coming from other locations to the Capitol Square. Common Council meetings do not have an established time for adjournment. Common Council meetings can last as little as 1 hour or on rare occasions they can extend into the early morning hours of the

next day. Bus service is less frequent later in the night and service on some routes may stop before the meeting has finished. Attendees who utilized the bus to come to the meeting may be left without transportation home after the meeting. This is also an issue for meeting staff. A predictable meeting end time may help to alleviate this concern.²¹

In addition, predictability has a large influence on the general awareness of when and where Common Council meetings take place. Similar to the City of Madison, many City Councils meet on Tuesday evenings at the same time and place. It is rare that these cities will hold a meeting away from the designated location/date/time. Consistency is an intentional strategy to ensure that the public can anticipate the location/date/time of the meetings. If the City decides to move the location/date/time of certain Common Council meetings, it will have to provide extra communication to publicize both the new meeting and any future meetings planned for the regular location/date/time.

Considerations for Remote Common Council Meetings		
Accessibility	Challenge:	Many city bus routes come through the Capitol Square/downtown. Folks who travel via bus may not find an alternative location as accessible as the CCB.
	Response:	Alternative locations should be selected to still allow robust access via bus routes. NOTE: Common Council meetings frequently last later in the evening than Madison Metro continues running most bus routes. This unpredictable end time of Common Council meetings may limit accessibility.
	Challenge:	Parking at the CCB may be inconvenient/inaccessible for people.
	Response:	Alternative locations should also be selected to facilitate ample vehicle parking.
	Challenge:	Residents of Madison coming from city outskirts may have to travel longer distances to reach the CCB.
	Response:	As an alternative, a Common Council meeting could take place in a different part of the city. However, whichever part of the city is selected, residents coming from other parts of the city may find the meeting to be less accessible.
	Challenge:	The new temporary venue would need to be open for the entirety of the meeting. It is likely that facility staff would need to stay much longer than normal business hours, depending on the length of each meeting. City Channel requires two hours before the meeting for setup and one hour after the meeting for equipment strike.
	Response:	There may need to be additional staff time required of employees at the temporary location to accommodate the likely longer hours that the building would need to be open.

²¹ NOTE: The Common Council did once establish a 10:30 PM conclusion time for meetings. However, the Council regularly voted to extend the time of the meeting, thereby defeating the purpose of the measure. As a result of regularly extending the meeting the Council repealed the time limit.

Considerations for Remote Common Council Meetings cont.

Logistics	Challenge:	Providing audio and visual support in venues outside of the CCB Room 201 limits ease of amplification and video display onsite.
	Response:	The alternative venue would need video displays for PowerPoint and laptop display appropriate for entire Common Council and public to see. Microphones would be limited to a total of 14 to 15. This would require sharing microphones as 57 microphones are normally utilized at meetings in CCB Room 201.
	Challenge:	Meetings held in City facilities offer the opportunity for viewers at home to livestream the meeting, because City Channel can connect to the City Network. Some Common Council meetings have over 100 people who watching the meetings at home.
	Response:	City Channel would not be able to offer livestreaming for the people who are watching the meetings at home.
	Challenge:	The microphone system at the CCB Room 201 allows the Chair to place microphones in queue.
	Response:	At any other facility there will not be a built-in audio system with a queue. As a result the microphones would always be live/hot.
	Challenge:	The Common Council meetings require a large space, ideally with a built-in PA system for audio amplification.
	Response:	Alternative venues would need to accommodate all Alders, City staff, public and equipment comfortably. Possible alternative locations may include larger City facilities such as Monona Terrace, The Villager, or the Warner Park Community Recreation Center.
	Challenge:	Moving meetings from the CCB to another building will require additional staffing for audiovisual services.
	Response:	Three to six people may be required for additional staffing for audio visual services.
Predictability	Challenge:	The public knows that the Common Council meeting is regularly held at the CCB. People are likely to be less aware of the new temporary location. As a result there may actually be less attendance at Common Council.
	Response:	The City will have to increase outreach regarding the date and times for Common Council meetings for meetings that move to new temporary locations and for meetings that remain at the CCB to offset confusion and the loss of predictability.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, there are several potential policy and procedural changes highlighted in the first section of this memo that could be explored as strategies to promote attendance at the Common Council meetings and community engagement. As the Common Council seeks to connect more authentically with residents there is a robust list of possible remedies that may be explored. Those remedies generally fall into three categories: 1) reducing the logistical challenges for individual residents who may seek to attend a Common Council meeting, 2) reducing administrative barriers and 3) improving participation techniques. Identifying which of these strategies might work best for Madison's residents, especially those who have faced historical barriers to public participation, may require further research or a community survey.

This memo explored moving a Common Council meeting to a different location with the intention of reaching more audiences. The Common Council meeting has historically been held on the first and third Tuesday of each month at the CCB. This pattern provides a great deal of predictability for the public and could be argued that it is very accessible to the public given the frequency of bus service to the Capitol Square. After many years of hosting the Common Council meetings in this manner, staff and resources have been shaped to support meetings at this location (most notably audio visual services including livestreaming of the Common Council meetings). Any changes to the location and timing of the Common Council will require careful management of the logistical challenges as well as the new issues related to predictability and accessibility.