

Plan Commission Special Meeting of August 5, 2020 re Options to Shorten Plan Commission Meetings
Summary conclusions

	Conclusion	Comments	Steps needed
1.Traditional Legislative approach*	Do not pursue	Commissioners generally prefer having testimony and conclusion/vote at the same meeting. They believe that with testimony fresh, better decisions are made. Also felt that registrants were more likely to be available to answer questions should need arise.	NA
2.Limit items on a single agenda which are likely to be lengthy*	Yes. Urge staff and chair to do this to the extent possible.	Consensus was that given staff's insights as to the likelihood of specific agenda items requiring more or less time that this approach could be extremely helpful. This was done successfully for the last PC meeting with several applicants being willing to shift their PC hearing date.	Staff should actively pursue this approach on an ongoing basis.
3. 1 intake deadline/mo.*	Yes. Explore with a goal of implementing.	Commissioners anticipate this would make it easier for staff to balance agendas. This will need further investigation by staff in conjunction and coordination with other departments in order to implement.	Staff should actively pursue this approach, taking necessary steps, in conjunction with other departments, to determine implementation approach and to report back to PC about timeline and possible barriers.
4. Limit informational items to 30 min*	No.	Not seen as a significant problem. Also, the informational items tend to be more policy related and very important to the future of our city and so necessitate well informed commissioners.	NA
5. Limit Commissioner talk time*	No.	Not seen as a problem.	NA

6.Hard end time*	No.	Concern expressed that this would end up with a backup of proposals and would inconvenience those who made arrangements to attend meeting as a result of their interest in an item, which under this approach might be delayed.	NA
6a.Ask for motion to end meeting, referring remaining items (e.g. at 10:00 pm)*	Yes.	Consensus was that this could be a “relief valve” if it appeared the meeting would go to an “unreasonable” hour. That said, the belief was expressed that this adjournment option would be seldom, if ever, used.	Can be implemented after formal agreement by PC. Should then incorporate this approach into PC Policies and Procedure Manual.
7. Auto referral of item taking a “long” time.*	No.	Consensus that this could lead to unintended consequences such as filibustering simply to lead to referral of item.	NA
8. Extra meeting*	No, unless absolutely necessary.	This would be difficult/impossible to schedule such that alders could attend given their packed schedules	NA
9. Earlier start time*	No.	Consensus was that this could prohibit people with day jobs from being a member of PC and for some people who wish to testify from getting to/attending an earlier meeting.	NA
10.Enforce 3 min/add “shot clock”*	Yes (absent the “shot clock”).	This has been done for the last several meetings and was agreed that this approach should be continued as it does save some time. Also agreed that speaker should be doing their own timing.	NA
11. Take Q’s at end of public testimony*	Yes.	This has been done for the last several meetings and it was agreed that this approach should be continued as it does save some time.	NA
12. Reduce #/type of proposals requiring PC review*	Yes.	This was discussed at the last “Big Picture” PC meeting about housing. There are several changes being pursued as a result of that meeting that would reduce the number of proposals requiring PC review.	Pursue as determined at the 7/30/2020 PC meeting.

13. Don't read consent items into the record	Yes...with modification.	Concern was expressed that the work of the PC is difficult enough for the public to follow and that reading only the Legistar number would exacerbate that problem. Agreement to not read agenda item word for word but rather shorten to its essence.	Can be implemented after formal agreement by PC. Should then incorporate this approach into PC Policies and Procedure Manual.
14. Earlier public hearing start time	Yes.	Agreed this provides possibility of shortening meeting somewhat. Post that the Public Hearing could begin as early as 5:35.	Can be implemented after formal agreement by PC. Should then incorporate this approach into PC Policies and Procedure Manual.
15. Must be totally complete application	Yes.	Staff indicated they currently require this but that in some instances additional information is required due to Alder or neighborhood requests. Will continue to try to catch these as early as possible to have such information available for the PC meeting at which the proposal is considered.	NA
16. Group developer presentation(s)	Yes.	Consensus that this provides a more complete/coherent proposal picture. Concern raised about "fairness" to non-developer viewpoint. Agreed that if there is an organized alternate viewpoint, that group should also be permitted to present in sequence to allow for a more coherent statement. Given the Zoom format, this will be challenging to implement because of randomness of registrations in the queue. Limit to a maximum of 9 minutes for each group.	Can be implemented after formal agreement by PC. Should then incorporate this approach into PC Policies and Procedure Manual.

17. Tool to help public give good input – web page?	Yes.	Agreement that at times registrants do not speak to the standards used by PC to make decisions (e.g. talk about jobs which may be created) and that testimony can be very repetitive. Agreed it would be helpful to Commissioners and the public to educate/help public improve their communications for better impact.	Staff work to develop a prototype to share with PC members. [Note: Commissioner Sundquist developed a sample tool after the meeting.]
18. Do not accept registrations after the start of the meeting	No.	Commissioners noted that particularly for the Zoom approach to meetings, some people are challenged using the technology and may not get signed in before the meeting starts.	NA
19. Limit responses of registrants, when responding to a question by a Commissioner, to two minutes per question	Yes.	It was noted that those responding to questions sometimes go far afield from what was asked by a PC member and that limiting the time may help the respondent to focus. Chair should also step in when the respondent goes on to topics not asked about.	Can be implemented after formal agreement by PC. Should then incorporate this approach into PC Policies and Procedure Manual.
20. Require chair to cut off speakers who are not addressing standards.	No.	Difficult/impossible to determine whether speaker simply takes a long time to get to the point re a standard or is not speaking to a standard. Attorney Strange indicated that as long as the speaker is talking about the noticed proposal, they should not be cut off.	NA
21. Post agenda no later than the Thursday before a Monday meeting	Yes.	This could help Commissioners with a complete review of materials and help stakeholders to better tailor remarks to be useful. Will require staff assessment.	Staff should assess difficulty of doing this with a goal of implementing this approach and to report back to PC about timeline and possible barriers.

*For complete description of item see document: **“Options to Shorten Plan Commission Meetings”** attached.

Options to Shorten Plan Commission Meetings

Discussion at Special meeting of the Plan Commission

Wednesday, August 5, 2020

Problem: Some Plan Commission meetings extend late into the evening (or early morning). As noted by several Commissioners, after a full work day, Plan Commissioners do not do their best work late in the evening (or early in the morning). The decisions being made have long term impacts on people, neighborhoods and the city. We would like to make the best decisions possible.

Solution options: The following* are for consideration by Plan Commissioners with a goal of ending Plan Commission (PC) meetings at a reasonable hour. By vote of the PC, one or more or none of the options can be added to the Plan Commission Policies and Procedures Manual. Plan Commissioners can add an option not included below or modify those listed.

1. Adopt a more traditional legislative hearing approach and separate public input from decision making for items garnering lots of public interest. For example, the state legislature and federal government do not gather public input and make decisions on an item in the same day. Instead, they hold separate hearings on proposed legislation and/or gather input through other means. Then, in a separate session, they come together to make a decision. Within our structure, PC could create a rule that it will refer deliberation and decision of any item on which more than (20?) people register wishing to speak. There isn't a magic number but such a rule would ensure that a 2-5 hour public input session is not followed by a 1-2 deliberation period, practically guaranteeing a decision being made after midnight. It would also give Commissioners time to process what they heard and do some critical thinking before hopping right into making a decision. If this approach were taken, the PC would close the public hearing once public input is over and refer it forward for deliberation and decision. Alternatively, to make things more predictable all public hearing items could be treated in this manner.
2. Staff generally has a sense of items that will create a lot of public engagement. In consideration of that insight, limit the number of items on any given agenda if it is anticipated one will take a lot of time. While most applications must be acted on in a reasonable time, they do not have to go to the PC as soon as possible. Implementing this approach, would give the staff and the chair some extra leeway to manage the agenda to facilitate being done by a certain time.
3. Have only 1 intake deadline per month, rather than 2. When staff review the intake for the month, projects then could be assigned to one of two future PC dates (8-10 weeks later), providing staff a better opportunity to balance agendas. This would also preserve at least some predictability for applicants/interested parties, as there would be a determination on dates shortly after the internal intake meeting. (Note from staff: need to think through in greater detail how this idea would impact workflow for the many other agencies reviewing plans.)
4. Limit informational non-action items to 30 minutes or less and limit the number of such items on each agenda.

5. Limit the number of times (and length) commissioners can speak on a single item. Currently, there is an ordinance limiting council members to speaking twice on any item for 10 minutes each.
6. Implement a rule to end the meeting at a certain time. Any items that have not been reviewed or are under discussion at that time would be referred until the next Plan Commission meeting.
 - a. Or establish a bit more flexible but similar rule something like: “after 10:00, the Plan Commission Chair may ask for a motion to adjourn, and refer any additional items to a future meeting”. This policy would give the PC the opportunity to adjourn or to decide to continue to deliberate and work through items where the “end is in sight”, or where action is very time-sensitive (affordable housing proposals seeking WHEDA credits, for instance).
7. Rule to automatically refer an item that has taken up a lot (TBD) of time during a meeting.
8. Schedule an extra meeting when staff is aware that there may be several controversial items that are likely to take an extended time to address.
9. Start Plan Commission meetings earlier. While this would not shorten meeting length it could mean an early end time.
10. Provide better clarifications regarding the “3 Minute” speaking rule. For example, add a note to all agendas that this time limit will be enforced for all speakers on each item and discuss with IT if there is a way to have some sort of “shot clock” so that speakers are aware of their time.
11. Always take questions from Commissioners to registrants at the end of the speakers for each item (rather than after each individual speaker) perhaps working through all speakers quicker. Some questions might be answered by later registrants, and commissioners could otherwise take notes during the public hearing and raise questions at the end.
12. Reduce the number/type of proposals that require Plan Commission review. (Note: This is part of a larger discussion, some of which will happen at the late July PC Big Picture Work Session related to housing. In preparation for that meeting, staff is reviewing the frequency and project types that have been approved on recent consent agendas. A possibility may be converting some conditional uses to permitted uses, perhaps in combination with an alternative administrative review process for items determined not to be appropriate as “by-right” permitted uses).

*Thank you to Attorney John Strange, several Plan Commission members and staff for thoughts on approaches to address this problem.