



**City of Santa Ana**  
**20 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana, CA 92701**  
**Staff Report**  
**November 2, 2021**

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**TOPIC:** Streamlining City Council Meetings

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**AGENDA TITLE:**

Options to Streamline City Council Meetings

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Accept informational report and provide direction to staff.

**DISCUSSION**

At the October 5, 2021 City Council meeting, the City Council directed staff to prepare a report on best practices for streamlining City Council meetings. Staff conducted research on existing policies relating to the rules and procedures for City Council meetings, meeting duration for City Council meetings during the 2021 calendar year, and best practices on streamlining City Council meetings.

**Review of Duration of City Council Meetings**

Staff analyzed City Council meetings dating back to January 2021. Over the course of 18 meetings, the average meeting duration hovered just above seven hours. Two of these meetings lasted over twelve hours each. Closed sessions were determined to take approximately two hours on average, and at times were resumed at the end of the City Council meetings if the initial session ran past 6:00 p.m. The proclamations and presentations period takes over an hour on average. Pulled Consent Calendar items averaged ten minutes per item, with an average of pulled items hovering at five per meeting. Business calendar and public hearing items averaged thirty minutes per item. Lastly, contentious items account for over five hours of public comment period alone, on average.

**Streamlining City Council Meetings at a Comparable City: Long Beach, CA**

In March 2019, the City of Long Beach conducted a study, referred to as the Council Meeting Streamlining Outreach Survey, to obtain feedback from constituents regarding the then-current structure of their City Council meetings. This study was conducted in response to an inquiry from a councilmember relating to the duration of their City Council meetings. A community survey, composed of six questions asking for feedback from constituents about their thoughts on streamlining City Council meetings, along with demographics-related questions, received 210 responses. Common suggestions to their

survey included the following suggestions to streamline their meetings: (1) limit public comment during high attendance meetings; (2) limit councilmember discussion; (3) limit repetition of praise and agreement between councilmembers; (4) adhere to the agenda order; (5) establish time limits for agenda items; (6) limit presentation/ceremonies at the beginning of meetings; (7) publish agendas and estimated times for each item at least a week in advance; and (8) meet more frequently than their then-once-a-week schedule of regular City Council meetings.

In response to the community survey and discussion at their City Council meetings, the Long Beach City Council adopted an ordinance to implement procedures that they believed would shorten the duration of (or “streamline”) their meetings. Examples of some of the procedural changes imposed by the ordinance include the following: (1) reducing individual public comment from three minutes to 90 seconds if ten or more people request to speak on the same topic; (2) requiring individuals requesting to speak during public comment to sign up to speak before an agenda item is called for discussion; (3) imposing a five-minute speaking limit for individual council members while they’re discussing items; (4) updating the order of business for the City Council meeting agenda; and (5) limiting the number of ceremonial presentations.

Long Beach isn’t the only city to have conducted such studies or imposed procedures to streamline their City Council meetings. The Cities of Anaheim, Downey, and Los Angeles, for example, have all recently enacted changes to their City Council meeting procedures to respond to the increase in duration of their City Council meetings.

### **Existing Policies that Establish Procedures for City Council Meetings**

In addition to general rules set forth in the City Charter and the Santa Ana Municipal Code relating to conduct of the City Council at public meetings, there are three specific guidance documents that set forth rules and procedures for City Council meetings: (1) Resolution No. 2013-2019 amending the City Council rules and procedures for calling special meetings, altering the agenda format to provide for reports from the City Council, and changing the day of regular City Council meetings; (2) Robert’s Rules of Order; and (3) the City Council Handbook. Resolution No. 2013-019, also referred to as the “City Council Rules and Procedures Resolution”, sets forth procedures that encompass the time and place of City Council meetings, the City Council meeting agenda, and decorum. Robert’s Rules of Order is a manual of parliamentary procedure that governs the meetings of organizations that have adopted it as their parliamentary authority. The City Council Rules and Procedures Resolution incorporates Robert’s Rules of Order as the parliamentary authority that governs City Council meetings and City Council committee meetings. The City Council Handbook is a guidance document that incorporates written procedures from both the City Council Rules and Procedures Resolution and Robert’s Rules of Order.

Separately, there exists a City Council Recognition Policy, and administrative policy that was approved by the City Council in June 2018. This policy sets parameters for members

of the City Council to recognize individuals, groups, and events by issuing proclamations and certificates of recognition.

### **Methods to Streamline City Council Meetings**

Staff researched methods to reduce the duration of City Council meetings so as to streamline the meetings. Below is an overview of options that the City Council may consider.

1. **GET ANSWERS TO TECHNICAL QUESTIONS PRIOR TO THE MEETING.** It is suggested that members of the Council reach out to staff prior to the City Council meeting to reduce the amount of time devoted to technical questions or general clarification during the City Council meeting.
2. **IDENTIFY PARAMETERS FOR CEREMONIAL PRESENTATIONS.** Set scheduled time and time limits for ceremonials and presentations. Presentations for the community are an important part of the meeting and are valued by the community. Having a set time to conduct presentations would provide structure to this part of the meeting and limit their carryover into the general City Council meeting. Staff recommends setting a time limit of five minutes per presentation, with the goal of limiting the number of presentations per meeting to three. The Clerk of the Council would keep track of time during the presentations.
3. **DECREASE TIME FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS.** Reduce the public comment time to 90 seconds if ten (10) or more speakers are speaking on the same item, with language access and ADA exceptions.
4. **REARRANGE THE TIME, PLACE, AND MANNER OF PUBLIC COMMENTS.** In addition to encouraging members of the public to submit written comments to share their thoughts on City Council agenda items, the City Council may consider rearranging public comments so that the Public Comments portion of the meeting is either staggered, categorized by item type, or scheduled to a different section of the City Council meeting agenda.
5. **SCHEDULE SPECIAL MEETINGS WHEN NECESSARY.** Schedule special meetings for contentious items. For items where large crowds are expected, it is recommended to schedule a special meeting for the stand-alone item.
6. **CALL FOR A POINT OF ORDER.** Call for a "point of order" after discussion on any one item has gone longer than 30 minutes. The City Council will be required to vote by majority to continue discussing the item or table it for the next meeting.
7. **START THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING EARLIER.** Start the Closed Sessions at 4:00 p.m. instead of 5:00 p.m. and start the regular City Council meetings at 5:00 p.m. If Closed Session items require additional discussion, then the closed session can continue upon adjournment of the regular City Council meeting. Or consider starting the City Council meeting earlier altogether.
8. **ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER TRAINING.** Hold a Robert's Rules of Order refresher training for the City Council by the City Attorney. The City Attorney can explore modified rules used by other agencies and could provide information on those rules at an upcoming meeting.

9. **UPDATE THE ORDER OF BUSINESS.** Revise the agenda order so as to hear items in the following order: public hearings, business calendar, and then consent calendar items. Standard or frequent types of items are placed under the Consent Calendar. Staff recommends hearing the items that would require discussion first before hearing the routine items. Members of the Council would always have the opportunity to pull items from the Consent Calendar for discussion
10. **SURVEY CONSTITUENTS TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY THINK.** Conduct a City Council Meeting Streamlining Outreach Survey. To increase our community outreach efforts, staff recommends obtaining feedback regarding the current meeting structure. The survey does not need to be a formal, scientific survey with requisite controls; but instead will allow members of the community to vote on different options and allow them to suggest how City Council may streamline meetings.
11. **INCREASE THE FREQUENCY OF CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS.** Schedule one or more additional regular City Council meeting each month.
12. **TIME LIMITS FOR COUNCILMEMBER COMMENTS.** Impose a time limit that councilmembers may speak on any City Council agenda item.
13. **IMPOSE A SET MEETING END TIME.** End City Council meetings at a set time.

#### **Next Steps**

The options presented in this staff report are for discussion by the City Council. Should it be the desire of the City Council, staff can prepare a revised City Council Rules and Procedure document, in the form of a resolution, to include revised procedures to streamline City Council meetings. Alternatively, staff can return to the City Council with additional information at a future meeting.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

There is no environmental impact associated with this action.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

Submitted By: Daisy Gomez, Clerk of the Council

Approved By: Kristine Ridge, City Manager