

Fairfield City Council Process Agreements

(January 30-31, 2009)

1. Review Process for Putting Agenda Together as It Relates to Position of Items

Agreement:

Controversial issues will be placed early in evening and noticed. Retain old business and then new business in agenda sequence. Currently have flexibility/latitude on council agenda to move items before other items. The goal is to move up items on the agenda that will attract large numbers of the public as soon as it is known there will be large number of people attending the meeting. Suggestion: Have a disclaimer on the agenda reading: "Depending on public interest, items may be moved forward in the agenda."

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

2. Process for Adding an Item to City Council Agenda

Agreement:

If a councilmember wishes to add an item to the agenda of an upcoming council meeting, the member needs to go to the mayor to seek his/her concurrence for it to be added. If the mayor does not agree, then, at the next regular council meeting, the councilmember can bring up the request and seek one other member of the council to agree. If a second member agrees, then the item is listed on the agenda for the following council meeting.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

3. Recognition and Presentations

Agreement:

Presentations are put on the agenda with concurrence of the city manager and mayor. It is difficult to set a firm rule that will cover all situations. Mayor and city manager will use their best judgment on scheduling presentations and recognitions. Time limits shall normally be 5 to 10 minutes (made clear to all parties for presentations during council meetings). Presentations may be extended by special circumstances as needed. Exceptions can be made at city manager or mayor's discretion.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

4. Managing the Pace of Council Meetings Agreement

Agreement:

OK to have dialog on selected issues as warranted. Members may call for "expanded dialogue" as an understood phrase. At this point, the mayor will set a time limit on the expanded dialogue.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

5. Study Session Process

Agreement

The purpose of study sessions is to educate and inform the council on particular city issues and to encourage councilmembers to ask wide-ranging questions. The study session is the opportunity for the council to come together to discuss city issues among themselves. Study sessions have a different format than a council meeting.

- a. Staff will come to council in open session under the city manager's report prior to a scheduled study session to get council direction on the study session to be held. Staff will come to the open session with the list of topics for the study session for council review.
- b. Councilmember deadline for submitting questions to be answered prior to the study session is 8:00AM Thursday prior to Tuesday study sessions. Questions received after the deadline will be answered at the study session. Councilmembers expressed a desire to receive information in a timely manner. This process and timeline will be monitored and discussed at future council meetings.
- c. Staff will respond to questions via e-mail by the end of business Friday. Early questions give staff more time to respond. Background material must be manageable for all to have time to read.
- d. Councilmembers including the mayor can excuse themselves after 9:00PM; however, those who wish to continue may do so. Extensions after 9:00PM require a decision by the council to extend the session. This normally would be in 30-minute time blocks. Study sessions will end when there is no longer a quorum of the council or those present are not willing to extend the session.
- e. Time will be devoted at study sessions to discuss questions and issues. In some cases, the council may request a more detailed staff report. Normally, executive summary style of staff reporting will be used.

Two kinds of study sessions:

- Creates a chance for councilmembers to interact and have expanded dialog among each other. This allows open, free-wheeling dialog, as well as allowing councilmembers to ask questions among themselves. Councilmembers commit to coming to this type of study session prepared. Brief or no staff presentation in this type of study session.
- Provides an opportunity to educate constituents on an issue. Most likely the staff presentation would be longer for this type of study session. One example is budget presentation. Budget study sessions will be televised on Channel 26. Topics for study sessions will be chosen by the council. In addition, the council will regularly schedule a session to review progress on longer term on-going projects.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

6. Questions and Follow Up Questions During Council Meetings

Agreement:

Generally one question and one follow-up with permission to ask for additional follow-up questions are permitted. Another option is for a councilmember to request a certain amount of time (generally no more than 5 minutes) to pursue a series of questions. These guidelines may be varied at the discretion of the mayor. If the issue involves an appeal by a member of the public, on a case-by-case basis, the mayor and council may allow the appellant additional time to state his/her position.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

7. Amount of Staff Time and Resources Spent on Individual Councilmember Inquiries Before Requiring Council Concurrence

Agreement:

Ranking of priorities:

- a. Constituent: priority to get an answer right away.
- b. Small/simple question: OK to go ahead (city manager and city attorney alert council if it will take a significant amount of research.
- c. If significant work involved, there must be 2 votes to put it on the agenda for discussion and 3 votes to approve the work to be done.

On those occasions when a councilmember asks for information or research that costs a significant amount of money or takes a great deal of staff time, the city manager will first give the councilmember a brief summary reply of the issue and let the council know that any further information would likely take significant amounts of time, resources, and dollars and will need to be brought to the council as a whole. The council agreed to support the city manager in making these decisions and to review the effectiveness of this agreement and process periodically. When a councilmember does need to talk to a staff member to answer questions or provide information that does not require significant amounts of research the council understands that they will direct this question or concern to the department head of city manager first. Councilmembers understand that staff members need not interrupt their normal duties to respond to council requests unless the councilmember indicates it is an emergency.

If is further agreed that information requested by one councilmember will be shared with all councilmembers.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

8. Chain of Command

Agreement:

Relationship of city council and staff: It is important to stay with the chain of command. City councilmembers should work through city manager and city attorney. Council is welcome to have contact with any city employee, but requests for information should go through the city manager and or executive management team.

Council agrees to stay within the chain of command. All councilmembers are free to speak with anyone within the organization as long as not directing them. Keep the city manager informed of contacts made.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

9. Public Relations

Agreement:

- a. Council is comfortable with current manner in which the mayor handles routine contacts with media regarding city business.
- b. Mayor will serve as the general spokesperson for the city.
- c. When council has not taken a position on an issue, neither the mayor nor any member of the council will speak on behalf of the council. In these situations, the mayor or councilmember will use a phrases like, "Council has not taken an official position. Personally this is what I think..."
- d. Councilmembers should not second-guess the city manager and staff. Staff can e-mail councilmembers on hot issues coming up but councilmembers should not confer with each other on the hot issue outside of council meetings.
- e. The council will develop a tool for more specific direction to council subcommittees and commission subcommittees. See attached form for reference.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

10. Placing Articles on Controversial Issues in Observer, Channel 26, and the City Website

Agreement:

- a. Articles are to be impartial.
- b. Placement of political issues requires a council decision.
- c. If the political piece is approved, staff needs to produce it without city council input.
- d. Items need to be reviewed by the city attorney's office for impartiality in accordance with state law.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

11. Councilmembers Receiving Same Information

Agreement:

All councilmembers will receive the same information.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

12. Ground Rules and Principles for City Councilmember Conduct at Council Meetings or Study Sessions

Agreement:

Ground rules and principles

DO AVOID

- Everyone has the right to be heard respectfully.
- Avoid wording or phrasing that tends to “shut members down” by characterizing them personally in a negative way or characterizing their ideas in a way that becomes personal.
- Avoid personal attack and language that is demeaning.
- Focus on the issue not the person. It is acceptable for the council to question issues, decisions, projects, and process but to not personalize this with regard to staff members in public session.
- Use phrases such as “I see it differently”. “My understanding is...” Avoid seeking to make the other person wrong or demeaning them. “You are wrong to believe...”

DO

- Be careful how you say what you say and be aware of physical clues, body language. Avoid being too thin-skinned.
- Listen fully without interrupting.
- Avoid correcting others behavior in public settings, especially in two areas – relevance of comments to the topic and length of comments – this is the prerogative of the mayor/chair of the meeting.
- Let the mayor balance the tension between moving on in order to get through issues; AND creating the opportunity for members to explore the issue as needed to reach a decision.
- Allow the mayor to run the meeting. Councilmembers to direct their process concerns to the mayor for action.
- Have a “code phrases” or process for “expanded dialogue” with a time limit – Mayor in control of process.
- Avoid people moving beyond their roles or taking over the mayor’s role.
- Avoid pointing out ground rules to others and overlooking ground rules when topic is particularly important to you.
- Use “code phrases” for process and ground rules that councilmembers abide by.
- Council agrees to have the mayor call for a recess when a situation is volatile.

- If there are citizen inquiries to council during public comment, the mayor will direct the questions to staff to be handled outside of the meeting.
- At public meetings, council should praise in public and criticize in private.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

13. List of Code Phrases

Agreements:

The council agreed to develop additional coded words as needed. Current list:

“Expanded dialogue”

“Can we move on?”

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.

14. Council Appointments

Agreements:

When a councilmember cannot attend a meeting of a committee, they will call their alternate in advance. Councilmembers also agreed to periodically report back to the full council on their committee assignments. Councilmembers are welcome to attend committees on which they are not the designated representative or alternate (As a courtesy, try to notify representatives if possible). If 3 or more councilmembers are present at any of these meetings, the non-representative councilmembers must not participate in the meeting.

Level of Agreement: All councilmembers concurred with this agreement.