



CITY OF SUN VALLEY  
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

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TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM:   
Susan E. Robertson, ICMA-CM  
City Administrator

SUBJECT: Council Meeting Frequency, Starting Time, and Duration

DATE: February 24, 2013

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### **BACKGROUND**

At the February 7, 2013 Council meeting, some Council members expressed frustration with the length of the last two regular Council meetings and it was requested that this matter be placed on an upcoming Special Council meeting. Consequently, the February 25, 2013 Special Council Meeting agenda has an item to address Council meeting frequency, starting time, and duration. It may be that members of the City Council already have ideas in mind as to what changes could be made to decrease the length of meetings. I thought it might also be helpful to identify some options that could be considered and they follow below. The options are the result of research I have done to see what other local governments may have done to decrease the length of meetings, ideas solicited from City staff that frequently attend Council meetings, and my own experience. In some cases, the idea is just stated and, in others, there may be a comment. It is my hope that you will find this information helpful.

### **METHODS TO REDUCE COUNCIL MEETING LENGTH**

- **Meeting Minutes.** Submit corrections to draft meeting minutes to the City Clerk prior to the meeting. If the City Clerk receives them in sufficient time, a revised draft can be provided to the Council in advance of the meeting.
- **Revised Accounts Payables Information.** Based on questions that arise at the Finance Committee, staff could send updated information to the Council by email in advance of the Council meeting.
- **Consent Agenda.** Items placed on a consent agenda are typically considered routine, information only, and/or not controversial. After any items have been removed from the consent agenda for discussion and action, approve the remaining items on the Consent Agenda as a group with one motion and with no discussion. Cities that use consent agendas may have a statement with the consent agenda that says something to the effect of "All items listed under the Consent Agenda will be approved in one motion without discussion unless any Board member requests that the item be removed for individual discussion and possible action" so that the public can better understand what is happening.

- **Old Business and New Business.** Utilize Old Business and New Business to group discussion and action items. Doing so more quickly clarifies for the Council and the public what type of item is being considered.
- **Ask for Clarification in Advance of the Meeting.** If something isn't clear in the information staff provided for an agenda item, ask in advance of the meeting. The response can be sent out by email or provided at the meeting.
- **Provide Questions For Staff In Advance.** There may be questions a Council Member will want to ask staff regardless of the debate. Any questions that are provided in advance of the meeting will make it more likely that staff will be able to have the information available at the meeting or, if time permits, get it out to the Council in advance of the meeting.
- **Have Two Meetings Each Month.** If two meetings a month are utilized, there are a number of structures that could be used. Some that may be worth considering are:
  - Most commonly, municipalities utilize the same items on their agenda each of the meetings. They count on the frequency of the meetings to reduce the length of the meetings.
  - Some municipalities utilize one of the meetings as the meeting at which to take action on items. The other meeting is then utilized as the meeting to discuss items, possible alternatives, and get input from staff; similar to having a work session but utilizing a more formalized structure.
  - Another possibility is splitting agenda items by meeting. One meeting's agenda could include the minutes, consent agenda, Finance Committee report, permits, and appointments by the Mayor needing Council confirmation. The other meeting's agenda could be bigger items that require more time for discussion.
- **Limit the Length of Speaking Time by the Public During Public Comment.** Many municipalities limit the length of time a member of the public may speak. Three or five minutes in duration are most common.
- **Limit the Length of Speaking Time by Council Members on Each Item.** A three or five minute length is most common. This method isn't used very often and when it is, it is usually used in cities with large legislative bodies. Three, five, or seven minutes are the length of times I've found.
- **Set the Ending Time of the Meeting.** Those municipalities that set the ending time of the meeting usually used 10 p.m., although 10:30 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. were also used. Any items on the agenda that weren't got to were carried over to the next meeting's agenda.