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Agendas

(i.e., the basis for efficiently-run meetings)

The basic authority for establishing an agenda for city council meetings rests with the city council under its authority to adopt rules of procedure. The form of an agenda may be prescribed by ordinance or resolution, by city council rules, or simply by informal custom and practice. In many cities preparation of the agenda is delegated to the mayor, city clerk and/or city administrator, and this system seems to work satisfactorily in most cases. However, it would be possible for the council to establish formal rules and regulations for the preparation of the agenda and to indicate in those rules who may place items on the agenda and how they are to be placed on the agenda.

General

Perhaps one of the most crucial items in providing for orderly meetings is a well-organized and well-prepared agenda. A systematic order of business may be the difference between haphazard wrangling and a well-run, well-timed meeting. The agenda must be handled so that councilmembers are given adequate information on items to be considered. They should get that information far enough in advance to give it appropriate study. While it is not mandatory at a city council meeting, opportunity should be provided for appropriate public participation. State law requires each city and town to establish a procedure for notifying the public of the agenda for forthcoming council meetings (First Class Cities: RCW 35.22.288; Second Class Cities, 35.23.221; Towns, 35.27.300; and Optional Municipal Code City (That's what Sultan is), 35A.12.160. This advance notice to the public can be accomplished by posting the preliminary agenda in an accessible location. Items on the agenda should be prioritized and organized as efficiently as possible, allocating adequate time to major issues and minimizing time spent on trivial, non-controversial issues. Citizens can also be given the opportunity to address the council on other subjects of interest.

An important consideration in making the agenda manageable is keeping things off of it that don't belong there. The formal council agenda is the place for formal actions on the part of the governing body. In general, every regular meeting agenda item should include an instrument for council action. Items that are solely for the information and advice of the council should be provided outside the formal agenda process.

When the agenda process is well-managed, it provides for a smooth flow of information to the governing body and of policy decisions from them. This makes the entire operation of government run more smoothly and saves a great deal of valuable time.

The Council Meeting Agenda

There is no required format or particular order for the council meeting agenda. However, a typical agenda for a city council meeting looks like this:

- Call to Order
- Roll Call/Pledge of Allegiance
- Approval of Agenda/Minutes
- Citizen Comments
- Consent Agenda
- Ordinances and Resolutions
- Public Hearings
- Unfinished Business
- New Business
- Council Action/Discussion
- Committee Reports
- Executive Session
- Adjournment

Consent Agendas

The consent agenda is a tool used to streamline council meeting procedures by collecting routine, non-controversial items into a group whereby all are passed with a single motion and vote. This method has grown in popularity in recent years and there are many variations on the theme to meet specific needs. In some cities, the actual items to be placed on each consent agenda are selected at a weekly city department head's meeting. In others, an agenda committee chooses the consent items. Commonly, no debate is allowed on the consent agenda or on any item included in it. The motion for adoption must receive unanimous approval.

Consent items may be read by title only in the body of a single consent agenda resolution. However, any councilmember can have an item removed from the consent agenda for separate consideration. In addition, cities may allow any person attending the regular council meeting to request that an item be removed from the consent agenda, read completely, and voted on independently. The remainder of the consent agenda can be voted on, omitting the challenged items. Setting up a consent agenda system usually requires preliminary action by the council in the form of adopting an ordinance or resolution, but a consent agenda can be used by most councils on a trial basis temporarily.

RCW 35A.12.160

Publication of ordinances or summary -- Public notice of hearings and meeting agendas.

Promptly after adoption, the text of each ordinance or a summary of the content of each ordinance shall be published at least once in the city's official newspaper.

For purposes of this section, a summary shall mean a brief description which succinctly

describes the main points of the ordinance. Publication of the title of an ordinance authorizing the issuance of bonds, notes, or other evidences of indebtedness shall constitute publication of a summary of that ordinance. When the city publishes a summary, the publication shall include a statement that the full text of the ordinance will be mailed upon request.

An inadvertent mistake or omission in publishing the text or a summary of the content of an ordinance shall not render the ordinance invalid.

In addition to the requirement that a city publish the text or a summary of the content of each adopted ordinance, every city shall establish a procedure for notifying the public of upcoming hearings and the preliminary agenda for the forthcoming council meeting. Such procedure may include, but not be limited to, written notification to the city's official newspaper, publication of a notice in the official newspaper, posting of upcoming council meeting agendas, or such other processes as the city determines will satisfy the intent of this requirement.