Policy 7.4.4 Council Travel and Conferences

POLICY PURPOSE:

It is the purpose of this policy to establish guidelines and standards regarding City resources and support for Councilmembers. This policy is supplementary to and in no way intended to conflict with the City Charter. For further information on this subject, see:

- City Charter, Section 807
- Code of Ethics and Conduct for Elected Officials (available on the City’s internal Web site or in the Office of the City Clerk)

POLICY STATEMENT:

I. Authorized Travel and Conferences. Councilmember attendance at conferences and meetings can be both beneficial and cost effective to the City. Attendance for one or more of the following reasons, would be viewed as an extension of official City responsibilities. Councilmembers may attend conferences and meetings that meet one or more of the following purposes, subject to individual budget limitations and prior Mayoral approval:

A. Voting Delegate: The City is usually requested to designate an official delegate from among the Council who will cast the City’s vote and represent the City’s position on business presented before a conference delegation.

B. Committee Membership: Councilmembers may choose to serve on local, state and national committees which provide the opportunity to represent state or City interest in key policy and legislative areas. Meetings are often held in conjunction with annual conferences as a means of saving cost and encouraging wider attendance.

C. Education: Most conferences are workshops and seminars, which are used to brief Councilmembers on key legislation, policies or programs impacting local government.

D. Advocacy: A conference environment offers Councilmembers the opportunity to articulate the City’s position on key legislation and funding policies with key elected/appointed officials on both the state and federal levels.

E. Sharing of City’s Expertise: Sunnyvale is widely viewed nationally and internationally as a model in local government management. Sunnyvale Councilmembers may on occasion be invited to present papers or presentations to a conference or workshop with the goal of improving the efficiency and performance of government in general.
F. **Affiliations.** Each year the Council will assess the benefit of City membership in the following organizations which have traditionally been identified as providing support and service to local governments:

- The National League of Cities (NLC)
- U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM)
- League of California Cities (LCC, including Peninsula Division meetings)
- Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)
- Santa Clara County Cities Association (SCCCA)

G. **Conferences.** The following conferences and meetings are approved for inclusion by Councilmembers in the annual Council Travel Budget Proposal cited in this policy:

- Annual Meeting (NLC)
- Congressional Cities Conference (NLC)
- Annual Conference (USCM)
- Mid-Winter Meeting (USCM)
- Annual Conference (LCC)
- Annual Executive Forum (LCC)
- New Councilmembers Conference (LCC)\(^1\)
- Bi-Annual Legislative Conference (LCC)
- General Assemblies (ABAG)
- General membership meetings of the Santa Clara County Cities Association
- Committee/board meetings of NLC and LCC\(^2\)
- Conferences that are of obvious benefit to the City
- Councilmember has been invited to present a City/State position
- Councilmember is lobbying on behalf of a City/State program
- Conferences that provide professional development for Councilmembers in carrying out official City responsibilities

II. **Unauthorized Travel and/or Conferences.** Any travel or conference attendance not specifically listed above shall be considered unauthorized unless approved in advance by the Mayor. No travel or conference attendance shall be authorized for functions designed for political campaigning or fund-raising.

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1 Newly elected Councilmembers may attend only.

2 Once a Councilmember has obtained Council approval to travel to meetings of a specific NLC or LCC Committee, the Councilmember has authority to fulfill these travel commitments through his/her committee tenure, subject to individual budget limitations. The Councilmember is not required to obtain Council approval annually under this circumstance.
III. **Budget.** The cost of the proposed travel shall be established by approval of the annual budget by Council. As a reference, the Council has approved $6,675 per Councilmember for FY 13/14; the Mayor is to receive an additional $6,675 for travel associated with Mayoral duties.

Since Councilmember terms do not coincide with the fiscal year, Councilmember budgets must be prorated. The percentage of travel funds allocated to outgoing Councilmembers will be determined by staff and based on the scheduled dates of annual conferences, including those mentioned above, plus any unspent funds originally allocated to the outgoing Councilmembers’ respective seats. The Mayor’s budget will be allocated similarly.

Each Councilmember will be provided with an update of his/her travel expenses compared to the budget on a monthly basis by the Executive Assistant to Council. In addition, the Mayor (who authorizes payment of expenses) will also receive the same information on each Councilmember’s expenditures. The Executive Assistant to Council shall inform the Mayor and the City Manager when any Councilmember’s budget is close to being overdrawn.

Councilmembers are not to exceed authorized amounts budgeted for travel. Any and all travel expenses in excess of a Councilmember’s approved budget shall be reimbursed to the City by the Councilmember.

Mid-year increases in travel budgets are discouraged and generally will be considered only if Councilmembers can demonstrate that additional amounts are for unforeseen expenses that could not be anticipated prior to the initial adoption of the annual travel budget. However, it is not always possible to anticipate all the future plans of every organization or group. As such, there are two ways for a Councilmember to increase his/her approved travel budget:

First, the adopted travel budget can be amended on a case-by-case basis during the fiscal year by approval of the City Council at a public meeting. Councilmembers desiring an increase in their annual travel budget shall provide an estimate of the additional amounts prior to actual travel or expenditure of funds. Justifications for the budget increase also shall be included with the request for additional funds. All increases in travel budgets must be approved by a majority vote of the full Council prior to actual travel or expenditure of additional funds.

Second, Councilmembers may choose at any time to relinquish a portion of their unspent travel budget to another Councilmember. Any Councilmember wishing to do so shall notify the Executive Assistant to Council and the City Manager in writing. Otherwise, the remaining balance of unspent funds at the end of the fiscal year shall return to the General Fund.
Any carryover of Council travel budgets from one fiscal year to the next shall require the approval of the Council during the annual carryover process in the summer.

IV. Travel Arrangements. Unless Councilmember’s opt to book their own travel, the Executive Assistant to the City Council makes arrangements for City Council travel including registrations, transportation and lodging, travel advance requests, and travel cash advances (if requested by the Councilmember).

V. Travel Information Packets. The Executive Assistant to the Council prepares a travel information packet for each Councilmember traveling. The packet contains either originals of or copies (if already submitted to Councilmember) of the following:

- Transportation ticket
- Hotel reservation
- Conference registration material
- Travel advance funds (if requested)
- Detailed itinerary
- Issue papers, as appropriate
- 10 lapel pins for exchange
- Expense report forms

VI. Travel and Conference Expenses. The Charter provides for payment of actual and necessary expenses incurred by Councilmembers when on official duty on order of the City Council. In furtherance of this Charter provision, the following guidelines are established.

Expense statements submitted by Councilmembers are processed by the Executive Assistant to the City Council and submitted to the Department of Finance, including any refunds of non-expended funds. The Mayor's signature is required as approval of Council expense statements. The Vice-Mayor approves the Mayor’s expense statements. Councilmembers traveling at City expense to conferences and committee meetings of National League of California Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the League of California Cities when appropriate may submit a written activity report to the entire Council. The written activity report shall be submitted at the same time the expense statement is submitted.

1. Expenses Reimbursed. Expenses will be paid by the City for conferences, conventions, meetings, workshops, seminars, activities and the like on the following basis:

   a. Registration fees, if any, shall be paid directly by the City in advance.

   b. Transportation.
(i) Conferences or meetings outside of the San Francisco Bay Area:

(A) Air travel expense shall be paid by the City in advance on the basis of the most direct route to the site, at coach rates, provided such accommodations are reasonably available.

(B) Transportation to and from the airport shall be by the most practical and efficient means available.

(C) Rental vehicles may be used for business purposes at the destination subject to the following:

(1) no other reasonable transportation is available

(2) taxi fare would exceed the cost of the rental vehicle

(D) The expense of driving a personal automobile shall be paid by the City on the following basis:

(1) if air transportation is reasonably available, payment shall be limited to the cost of coach air fare

(2) if such air transportation is not reasonably available, payment shall be made on the basis of the established City rate per mile

(ii) Local conferences, meetings or activities:

(A) Councilmembers shall be reimbursed for use of their personal vehicles at the established City rate per mile while on official City business, which includes, but is not limited to the following:

(1) authorized attendance at any conference, meeting, convention, workshop or seminar

(2) attendance at assigned intergovernmental meetings
(3) travel within the City regarding official City business

(iii) Councilmembers shall be reimbursed for all incidental expenses such as bridge tolls and parking fees incurred as the result of a Councilmember's authorized use of a vehicle while on City business.

c. Lodging.

The City will pay in advance the amount necessary to reserve a hotel room. The Councilmember may either pay the remainder of the hotel bill in its entirety or the City will pay such bill upon receipt from the hotel. In the latter case, if non-reimbursable items appear on the bill, the Councilmember shall pay for the same promptly upon return to the City.

Hotel accommodations will be at the hotel serving as the official host site of the conference, where reasonably possible.

Additional charges arising from the sharing of a room with a spouse or guest are not reimbursable.

d. Meals.

Expenses incurred for meals by any Councilmember while on official duty shall be paid by the City, including but not limited to the following instances:

Meals while attending any conference, meeting, workshop, seminar or convention; or

Meals occurring during a local conference, meeting, workshop, seminar or convention; or

Meals hosted by Council members for the purpose of discussing City business; or

Where a meal is part of an activity which the Councilmember is attending in his or her official capacity.

Alcoholic beverages consumed by the Councilmember shall be considered a personal expense and are not reimbursable. If the entire Council invites a guest to a meal, the guest’s alcohol shall be paid for by the City.
There shall be no cap on the amount allowed to be spent on meals by Councilmembers, but the City shall pay only for those expenses for which receipts are submitted.

e. Phone calls. Reimbursement shall be made for reasonable long distance or toll telephone charges for calls related to City business. The City shall pay for one personal phone call per day during Councilmember travel requiring overnight stay. If the Councilmember uses a personal cell phone for that call, the City shall reimburse the Councilmember.

2. Expenses Not Reimbursed. The City will not pay personal expenses. In addition to those items identified as personal expenses throughout this policy (e.g., alcohol consumed by a Councilmember), personal expenses include in-room movies, spas and gyms, laundry or dry cleaning, miscellaneous sundries, or other items of a personal nature.

Personal travel shall not be mixed with business travel if it will cost the City anything in dollars or lost time or if it will harm the City’s interest in any way. All additional costs incurred by the Councilmember that are over and above the normal cost for City travel shall be considered a personal expense of the Councilmember. The City will not pay for any expenses of a spouse or other person who accompanies a Councilmember on business travel.

The City shall not pay for any unauthorized travel or conference-related expenses.

To the extent that another agency or organization pays for the travel or conference expenses of a Councilmember, the City shall not pay for those same expenses. Councilmembers shall either submit the other agency’s payment to the City (in which case the City shall pay for the Councilmember’s entire expenses), or refrain from claiming expenses for that portion of his/her expenses paid for by the other agency.

Consistent with the City’s practice and policy to procure goods and services at the lowest possible cost, the City shall not pay for travel related expenses that could be procured at less expense through another means.

3. Miscellaneous Expenses. Expenses not specifically covered hereunder shall be paid by the City when such expenses are incurred in the performance of City business. In determining whether such expenses were necessarily incurred in the performance of City business, the applicable Internal Revenue Service publication number 463 and the regulations of allowable deductions for business expenses may be considered as authority. The preceding sentence shall not be interpreted to require the
substantiation or documentation required pursuant to said Act or regulations, as the subject of documentation is treated elsewhere in these guidelines.

4. **Reporting of Expenses.**

a. Statements of expense shall be submitted to the Director of Finance on forms provided for such purpose. The statement shall show all expenses incurred which are chargeable to the City.

b. Documentation. Hard copy receipts shall be required for all expenses, including air travel, lodging, meals and rental vehicles.

c. Statements of expenses for conferences, that include all expenses incurred, shall be submitted to the Executive Assistant to the City Council no later than 21 days after return from a conference or meeting, so that they can be forwarded to the Director of Finance no later than 30 days after return. Statements of expenses incurred for local meetings or activities should be submitted within 30 days of the time such expense was incurred; provided, however, that statements of expense for local mileage should be submitted monthly. Statements submitted after the dates specified shall be received and claims based thereon be paid if in order.

d. Review of Statements of Expense. The Mayor shall review and approve statements of expense for the Vice-Mayor and all other Councilmembers, and the Vice-Mayor shall review and approve statements of expense of the Mayor for compliance with these guidelines, provided, however, that neither the Mayor nor the Vice-Mayor shall be responsible for reviewing statements for arithmetical correctness.

e. For multiple Council meals paid for by a single Councilmember, the total expense for the meal shall be submitted on the expense report of the Councilmember who paid, along with a written breakdown of amounts to be charged to the budgets of other Councilmembers.

f. When Councilmembers attend a group dinner where the individual cost of each meal is unavailable, the Mayor shall determine a fair and equitable method of distributing the charges among the various Councilmembers in attendance. The City may pay for meals of official guests of the Council. Costs for meals of guests invited by a single Councilmember shall be charged to the individual Councilmember’s budget. The cost of meals, including alcohol, for guests invited by the Mayor or four or more Councilmembers will
be paid by the City out of the Council program budget but need not be charged to any Councilmember’s travel budget.

VII. **Implementation.**  
The City Manager shall monitor those provisions of this policy within the City Manager’s Charter responsibilities. Disagreement in interpretation shall be resolved by the City Council. The City Manager shall institute administrative policy to implement this policy. At the time a new Councilmember is seated, the Mayor and City Manager should review this policy with him/her.

Annually, the City Manager shall review the resource requirements necessary to support the level of service specified in this policy, and recommend as a part of the proposed budget necessary changes of budget resources.

(Adopted: Council Policy Update, RTC #14-0061 (November 25, 2014))

Lead Department: Office of the City Manager

For reference, see also: 7.4.1 Staff/Administrative Support for Councilmembers; 7.4.12 City Council Appointments to Intergovernmental Agencies; 7.4.15 Council Advocacy