

## **Subcommittee Meeting: July 25, 2011**

### **Subject: Consideration of Change to Commission Election Timing, and Appointment of Council Liaisons to Commissions**

#### **REPORT IN BRIEF**

Two issues have been brought before Council for consideration. The first involves the timing of the election of Commission chairs and vice-chairs, as currently required by Council policy. The second involves consideration of appointing Councilmembers to act as official liaisons to the commissions.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Regarding the issue of timing of chair and vice-chair elections, Council policy requires a commission to hold a meeting in July, even if a meeting is otherwise unnecessary. This is potentially an unnecessary waste of commissioners' and staff's time, and changes to the wording of Council policy may act to eliminate the waste.

Regarding the issue of appointing Council liaisons, Council has historically taken a hands-off policy towards the operation of the Boards and Commissions, only interacting with commissions in response to items reported in official Commission minutes. This hands-off practice has allowed problems to develop, in terms of unresolved conflicts on commissions and incorrect interpretations of Council policy. In general, while Council has adopted policies to govern Commissions' practices, it has been left to Staff to enforce those policies, which has not always produced the best results in terms of policy recommendations to Council. A more hands-on practice involving the appointment and presence of official Council liaisons may act to minimize some of the problems that have occurred in the recent and more distant past.

#### **EXISTING POLICY**

Regarding the issue of timing of chair and vice-chair elections, Council Policy 7.2.19 2G(I) states

Unless otherwise dictated by City Charter, each board and commission shall, within the month of July each year, elect one of its members as presiding officer, to serve following mandatory chair training. The selection of chair and vice chair shall be the last item on the agenda at the scheduled meeting. All boards and commissions shall select their chair and vice chair in accordance with practices and procedures outlined by the Office of the City Clerk.

Currently, no policies exist regarding Council liaisons to Boards and Commissions

#### **DISCUSSION**

The issue of election timing can be simply resolved by changing the wording of Council policy to require election of officers during a commission's July meeting, or during the first regularly-scheduled meeting after July if a July meeting is not otherwise required.

Creating official Council liaisons to commissions is a much more difficult change, but one that may be necessary to resolve and minimize problems. Recently, there have been multiple instances of well-meaning violations of Council policy despite the presence of staff liaisons, all of which would likely have been avoided through the presence of a Councilmember. There have been additional problems in this vein over the past several years. Additionally Council has occasionally expressed concerns about the complacency of certain Commissions and the aggressively proactive nature of certain other Commissions. The occasional presence of a Councilmember may serve to even out Commission activity and keep Commissions focused and productive.

Some of the issues that factor into that decision include

- The availability of Councilmembers to devote a substantial amount of time on a recurring basis to act as liaisons.
- The interest in all Councilmembers to serve in these roles.
- The definition and restrictions of a liaison's role. While there is value in having a Councilmember present to interpret Council policy, there is also the tendency for a Councilmember to insert himself or herself into the actual policy decisions and potentially influence outcomes for reasons not procedural.
- Potential problems with having liaisons on some commissions, specifically the Planning Commission and the Personnel Board, and existing City Charter and MOU mandates.
- The appointment process, should liaisons be desired, and the term of the appointment.
- Whether a Councilmember's familiarity with a commission should be a positive or negative factor in appointment to a specific commission.
- Whether or not Commissioners desire a Council presence at their meetings.
- Other factors not listed.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

A change in wording to the election timing may allow some otherwise unnecessary July commission meetings to be eliminated, reducing required staff time.

Appointment of Council liaisons to Boards and Commissions will result in a slight increase in staffing requirements. Staff must coordinate the appointment of the liaisons. Further, it is likely that the presence of Councilmembers at commission meetings will increase the duration of those meetings, which increases the demands of the commissions' staff liaisons. Finally, the Council liaisons must be included in the distribution list for Commission meeting agendas, which requires staff time to coordinate distribution, in addition to any actual increase in distribution costs.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made by posting the Subcommittee agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's Web site.

Additionally, this report was distributed to all Boardmembers and Commissioners prior to the subcommittee meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The subcommittee recommends: