

MINUTES

Eugene City Council
Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson House

April 17, 1995
5:30 p.m.

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Nancy Nathanson, Tim Laue, Shawn Boles, Pat Farr, Kevin Hornbuckle, Barbara Keller, Laurie Swanson Gribskov, Jim Torrey.

The adjourned meeting of April 12, 1995, of the Eugene City Council was called to order by Her Honor Mayor Ruth Bascom.

I. PROCESS SESSION

A. Review Management Decisions of July 20, 1994, Process Session

The council discussed the group process decisions made at the last process session and subsequent agreements. Councilors acknowledged areas needing clarification: 1) questions from individuals may take more than the two-minute limit; and 2) can members of the council yield their time under items from the Mayor, the City Council, and the City Manager. There was agreement that, whatever its problems, the current process worked better than what has been used in the past.

Councilors highlighted some of the problems they were experiencing. Ms. Nathanson said that the two-minute rule inhibits a more natural dialogue and interferes with coming to closure. She said that, often, individuals spend their time pointing out issues to be resolved or areas of disagreement instead of finding areas of agreement around the table. Others agreed. Mr. Laue said the council might want to consider having a more informal question period followed by individual three-minute discussion periods.

Mr. Hornbuckle raised the issue of yielding time during the sharing of items. Mr. Gleason recalled that the council had tried that process without success. Senior members agreed. It was agreed that motions raised during this period would be acted upon at the council's discretion.

Mr. Farr called out an additional problem, the amount of time spent making and discussing motions to extend discussion time. Mr. Laue said the council could choose to make it an undebatable motion. Ms. Nathanson disagreed, saying individuals may want to take the extension time from a different item.

Ms. Keller said the council's agendas continued to contain too many items and often there was insufficient time to adequately address them. She said the council should consider adding meetings. Mr. Boles agreed, adding that the

body should be compelled to meet more often, if required, to adequately address the issues.

Mr. Hornbuckle agreed with councilors Boles and Keller and said the council should look at the material causes for "jammed packed" meetings. He suggested that members start by avoiding using the phrase "our plate is full." A more accurate statement is, he said, "The City Councilors do not have enough time to do the business of the City."

Ms. Nathanson said that four items per work session were too many, suggesting scheduling only two substantive items per work session--or three at most. She expressed her frustration, as an officer, in having to continuously plead for less items.

Mr. Boles said the council should be more thoughtful about how items are scheduled, adding that the problem would continue if items continued to be scheduled on an ad hoc basis. He said the Council Committee on Working Relationships (CCWR) was organizing the work activities of the organization, calling it a change in management style that should help.

Ms. Swanson Gribkov said officers may wish to consider a 12-month meeting calendar for the council, perhaps designating four meetings for decisions--coinciding with election dates.

Ms. Nathanson proposed having "Items from the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager" last on the agenda, and discussing substantive issues first. The majority of councilors disagreed with the suggestion, noting that it had been tried before and the item was consistently pushed off the agenda for lack of time.

Mr. Boles recalled that the council had agreed that when a councilor raises an agenda item, the item would either happen immediately or be scheduled at the officers' discretion or go in the queue for trimester review and then get added to the work plan. He acknowledged that there were some issues over which the council lacked control and had to address on an ad hoc basis; however, 80 percent of the council's work had to do with the current or historical work plans.

Mr. Laue noted that no items had been pushed off any council agenda since before the new year.

Mr. Laue expressed concern with individuals asking for consensual head nods. Ms. Nathanson said sometimes unfamiliar issues are raised for consensual head nods, placing people in an uncomfortable position--it is an intimidating process. Mr. Boles said it was a waste of time to formalize approval of the initial contingency fund request process. The council agreed to continue the practice for simple items; e.g., community event contingency fund requests, pending further clarification.

There was some disagreement about whose responsibility it was to set the agenda. Mr. Gleason clarified that the charter gives the Mayor the responsi-

bility of setting the agenda, leaving the authority to govern to the majority of the council. Mr. Boles said it was important that officers take great care in the scheduling of items, with attention to follow-up to "close the loop."

Ms. Nathanson asked that individuals be given permission to put off making a decision on unfamiliar items, which does not necessarily mean disagreement, and flagged the issue for further discussion. Mr. Boles asked her to distribute something in writing to facilitate discussion.

The council agreed to briefly address topics identified by individual councilors at the end of the meeting due to time constraints.

B. Elect Chair for Remainder of Meeting

Mr. Torrey nominated Mr. Hornbuckle to chair the remainder of the meeting. The council concurred.

C. Rules for Public Forum

Mr. Hornbuckle said the rules for the public forum proposed by the Mayor and City Attorney were a good starting place for discussion. He said "disrespectful remarks" and "personal attacks" were subjective perceptions. He suggested allowing three-minute responses from individuals on the council following the public forum.

Mr. Boles said the process was working and there was no need to change it. He noted that the charter protects members from personal attacks, but agreed that councilors should be given an opportunity to respond if they wish. He was opposed to "grounding" people for their behavior.

In response to a question from Ms. Nathanson, Mr. Hornbuckle said his suggestion for individual responses referred to both personal attacks and requests for information. Ms. Nathanson said it seemed more appropriate to stop people in the act of breaking the rule instead of barring them from making future comments, which may be relevant.

Ms. Keller said there should be a security person at council meetings. She agreed with the majority that "grounding" people was inappropriate, adding that people should be stopped in the process if attacking someone other than councilors. She was opposed to responses from the council because it could easily add 10 to 20 minutes to the agenda.

Mr. Laue said it was the chair's responsibility to call people out of order and recess the meeting if necessary.

Mr. Farr wondered if a "two-or-three-strikes-and-your-out" approach might work in relation to "grounding." He favored Mr. Laue's suggestion.

Mr. Torrey cautioned against making disruptive, abusive people martyrs. He expressed concern with attacks against the City Manager and City Attorney.

Mr. Hornbuckle argued that when councilors are attacked, they may want to defend themselves, given that the community may be watching the exchange on television. He expressed concern that stopping a speaker in mid-testimony would require the Mayor to make the determination subjectively about "attacks."

Mayor Bascom summarized the discussion, saying she heard consensus on not grounding, there was a possibility a plain clothes security officer would have to attend meetings, and if a person were to be ejected, the meeting would be recessed to avoid disruption.

Mr. Gleason said the decorum of the meeting affects citizens considering taking an official position, adding that abusive behavior may instill in audience members a fear of testifying. He said it may be time to reconsider whether to allow the forum at all.

The council agreed to extend discussion of this item by five minutes.

Ms. Keller suggested that community members be limited to speaking at public forums once per quarter. Others disagreed. Mr. Hornbuckle said all community members should not be punished for the misbehavior of one person.

Ms. Keller suggested that officers develop and distribute a process based on this discussion for councilors' approval. Mr. Hornbuckle asked individuals with suggestions for the process to contact officers.

D. Setting Council Agendas

Mr. Hornbuckle asked for council direction for how to use the remainder of the meeting time.

Having discussed this topic earlier in the meeting, Ms. Nathanson suggested asking officers to distribute information on their role in setting council agendas in writing. The council agreed.

E. Topics Identified by Individual Councilors

Ms. Keller raised the following with regard to process: 1) Robert's Rules of Order are being overly used; 2) the Lunch Bowl--a good idea that is not happening, adding that the entire group should meet informally more often; and 3) the council should consider approving one FTE dedicated to councilors' clerical needs.

The council majority supported continuing the use of "Robert's Rules." Mr. Torrey noted that the council has been functioning more effectively since implementing them. Mr. Hornbuckle said discussion of process issues should not be limited to process sessions and encouraged the council to discuss these more often.

Mr. Boles asked council officers to distribute a summary of this session in writing. He said he liked the idea of staff support for councilors, but the

larger issue for him was service to the council, noting that items previously flagged by councilors for discussion at a process session were not on the agenda.

F. Closure

Mayor Bascom said she appreciated having someone else chair the process session and asked that the practice be repeated at the next session.

Mr. Laue said he appreciated people's willingness to bring their issues to the meeting.

Ms. Nathanson said that variety of responses to the issues raised at the meeting help make people sensitive to the different ways of doing things, adding that the council needed to continue having informal discussions such as this.

Mr. Farr said it was a productive meeting and added that the council over the last six months had regained the public's trust.

Mr. Torrey suggested that a subcommittee composed of a senior councilor and a junior councilor; i.e., Mr. Boles and Ms. Swanson Gribskov, design the next process session.

Mr. Hornbuckle said that people seemed satisfied with the discussion because they have been able to "speak frankly about the materialism involved." He added that there was no way to judge public trust, but there had been a "marked decrease in slander and pejorative reporting by The Register-Guard."

Ms. Swanson Gribskov expressed appreciation for the session.

Mr. Boles declined Mr. Torrey's invitation to help design the next process session. He added that there was no change in the functionality or dysfunction of the council, simply a political change.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Gleason
City Manager

(Recorded by Yolanda Paule)
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