

CITY OF LA PALMA
COUNCIL POLICY

NUMBER: 1

DATE (Adopted/Amended): March 3, 2015

SUBJECT: City Council Norms

POLICY:

General

City Council Norms are intended to guide City Council, City Manager and staff behavior in order to promote positive, productive, and effective public meetings, public business and organization. The Norms are also intended to inspire public trust in the City of La Palma and the services it provides.

Public Meetings and Meeting Agendas

Public meetings shall be for the purpose of conducting City business and/or educating the citizens. They are not “show time” for individual Council Members. Council Members are expected to focus on the business at hand and on giving their full attention to the public.

The City Manager and staff are responsible for formulating agendas for public meetings. The Consent Calendar shall be used for routine City business items and items already approved in the City Budget. The City Manager shall exercise judgment in determining whether an item is appropriate for the Consent Calendar. Council Members may request items be placed on a meeting agenda at any time and should indicate whether or not they wish a written staff report prepared. Such requests are encouraged to be announced under “Council Reports and Comments” in order to alert the full City Council to the request and to determine the estimated staff time required to research the item.

Items may also be “pulled” from an agenda for a public meeting. Any Council Member may pull any agenda item at any time during a public meeting, particularly when something new comes up or more information is needed. Council Members are encouraged to contact the City Manager in advance to ask questions, get clarification, or discuss any agenda item. Council Members planning to pull or ask questions publicly about an agenda item should notify the City Manager in advance to inform her/him of their intent and the reasons for it. To the extent possible, Council Members should indicate the questions they plan to ask to allow staff to prepare, including doing any additional research. Staff recognizes that sometimes questions arise in the course of discussion where such notice is not practical. Corrections to minutes should be shared with the City Manager or City Clerk before the meeting so that they can be corrected before the City Council approves them.

Speaker Cards and Public Testimony

For clarity and transparency in the official record, and to facilitate follow up with the speaker if needed, members of the public wishing to address the City Council, Planning Commission or Successor Agency, shall be requested to complete a speaker card. Completion of the card is voluntary. The speaker will be encouraged by the Mayor/Chair to complete the card in advance of the item the speaker wishes to discuss before the elected body.

Speaker cards shall be available in the lobby prior to every City Council meeting. Cards shall be delivered by the City Clerk to the Mayor/Chair in chronological order based on when they were received and based upon which item on the agenda the individual wishes to address. The Mayor/Chair will ask speakers to announce their name and city of residence for the record when they come to the microphone. The Mayor/Chair shall return all cards to the City Clerk at the conclusion of the meeting for the official record.

Speakers will be asked to adhere to a five-minute time limit and may not transfer unused portions of that time to another speaker. The Mayor/Chair has discretion to permit additional time to individuals in order to rebut testimony. Large groups are encouraged to designate a spokesperson to speak on their behalf and the Mayor/Chair has discretion in such situations to grant the spokesperson additional time in lieu of multiple speakers.

Council Discussions Prior to Voting

Council discussions are designed to allow Council Members to express their views and opinions prior to taking a vote. Council Members should state their reasons for their positions. As a general rule, the Mayor should allow other Council Members to speak before giving his or her opinion. Attempts will be made to reach consensus on each large issue prior to voting. When it appears that the City Council lacks consensus or is “stuck” in determining a course of action, the City Manager may offer assistance upon the request of the City Council.

Support for the Majority

Once a vote has been taken, the Mayor, if required to take action based on the motion, will do as directed by the majority of the City Council. If a Council Member wants a matter to be reconsidered, she or he will inform the City Council. Under Rosenberg’s Rules of Order, only those who voted with the prevailing side may call for a reconsideration and a request for reconsideration must be made during the same meeting at which the original vote occurred.

City Council Comments and Reports

Time is provided on each agenda for individual Council Members to report on activities relevant to the business of the City, including their service on regional boards and committees.

Meals

Where City Council meetings begin prior to 6:00 p.m. meals will be provided for Council Members as a courtesy to those who are attending the meeting straight from their normal jobs.

Reorganization – Seating, Selection of Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem

After reorganization of the City Council, the Mayor shall be seated in the center and other City Council Members shall be seated in alphabetical order (left to right when viewing the public). Council Members other than the Mayor may trade seats if mutually agreed. Council Members wishing to trade seats should make such arrangements in advance of the meeting in order to facilitate the efficiency of the reorganization process.

Interaction and Communication

Public confidence in the City of La Palma depends upon the behaviors and interactions of its elected leaders. City Council Members shall strive to show courtesy and respect for one another in all public settings. One way to demonstrate this is through flexibility in covering for each other and explaining each other's absences to the public when appropriate.

Public confidence also depends on the interactions of its elected leaders with the City Manager and staff and effective communications are essential to staff effectiveness. In general, Council Members should call the City Manager before going to the Department Director. Council Members should always go through the City Manager to direct staff to do research on items. Council Members can go directly to department directors for answers to simple questions. Answers to individual Council Member inquiries of common interest will be shared with the City Council through the City Manager's weekly report.

When Council Members email Directors or staff for information, they should copy the City Manager as a courtesy. Directors are also responsible for keeping the City Manager informed of any communication with City Council Members. If a Council Member has a concern about, or is unhappy with, a City employee, he or she shall discuss it directly with the City Manager and Council Members shall not criticize staff in public. The City Manager is responsible for informing the City Council whenever an unusual event occurs that the public would be concerned about (ex. significant safety event). The City Council, City Manager and staff shall not blindsides each other in public.

Citizen complaints should be referred to staff with adequate time for response. Staff will report back to the City Council through the City Manager on the resolution of citizen complaints and when a written response has been requested or as appropriate, staff will assist the Mayor or Council Member in drafting an appropriate response.

Committees

The City Council may create external committees, internal standing committees, or ad hoc subcommittees.

1. Internal Standing Committees – The Mayor has authority to create or suspend internal standing committees when it is determined that a standing committee is required or no longer required.
2. For external committees and internal standing committees, the appointment process will be placed on the agenda, usually at the first meeting following a reorganization of the City Council, and the City Council will confer about each of the committee positions. Council Members are encouraged to openly discuss their desires and availability for each position. Appointments are made by mutual consent of all Council Members. In the event of multiple nominees for a specific position, a roll call vote will be taken using the following process:
 - a. Mayor will entertain nominations for the contested position. No second is required and Council Members may nominate themselves.
 - b. A motion is made to close the nominations and nominees will then be voted on in the order received by the Mayor until someone is selected. Once a nominee receives a majority vote, the election stops.
3. Ad Hoc Committees – The Mayor has authority to create, suspend, and appoint members to ad hoc subcommittees after determining individual Council Member interest.
4. Committee and subcommittee members are responsible for keeping the rest of the Council informed; other Council Members are responsible for letting subcommittee members know if they want more information.
5. Committee and subcommittee members will refrain from giving mixed direction to staff. When there is a disagreement between committee or subcommittee members, staff will be excused from the discussion or from implementing direction until such time as the disagreement has been resolved.

Selection of the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem

Council Members wishing to be considered for Mayor or Mayor Pro Tem should express their interest to the other members. Procedures for selection of the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem shall be per Rosenberg's Rules of Order. Mayor Pro Tem is not a natural ascendancy to Mayor. The Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem are peers of, and serve at the pleasure of, the other Council Members.

Role of the Mayor

The Mayor serves as the primary elected spokesperson for the City of La Palma. As such, the Mayor presides at public meetings, represents the City Council at events and activities in the community and is available to respond to requests for appearances from community organizations. The Mayor has no more or less official authority than any other Council Member. At public meetings, the Mayor:

1. will do his or her best to keep things moving;

2. will pay attention to the consensus of the entire Council and will assist in building consensus among Council Members when necessary;
3. may use discretion to allow citizens to speak longer than the allotted five minutes and shall ensure that fairness prevails and speaking time is balanced for all speakers;
4. shall encourage large groups coming to a public meeting to designate one spokesperson and has discretion to allow that spokesperson more than five minutes to speak in lieu of multiple speakers; and,
5. shall remind citizens to show respect for the City Council and staff, when necessary.

Travel and Meetings

Attendance at conferences, seminars, or meetings of benefit to the City is encouraged within the limitations of budgeted appropriations. Monies shall be budgeted each fiscal year for City Council Members to attend conferences, monthly meetings, meetings required due to internal or external committee appointments, and for miscellaneous meetings and trainings including such events as attendance at the Americana Awards and City Council goal setting. Miscellaneous meetings and training monies are intended to be allocated somewhat equally to each City Council Member as they see fit, within the limitations of the total travel fund allocation. Council Members can also make requests to the full City Council for additional funds. Travel and registration arrangements are made through the City Manager's Executive Assistant.

Only expenses that have been incurred from authorized travel and meetings will be considered for reimbursement. Expenses incurred include items for the individual City Council Member only such as registration fees, hotel charges, mileage, airfare, car rental, meals and similar expenses. Any charges for a second person, such as an added charge on a hotel room, are the responsibility of the Council Member and are not reimbursable. Rates for reimbursement shall be as established in administrative policy and require completion of the administrative reimbursement form.

For extensive travel expenses, an advance may be authorized with the filing of an estimate of expenses with supporting documentation. Meals reimbursement may be for actual cost (receipts required) or via a per diem rate (no receipts required) and any meals covered in conference registration shall be deducted.

Use of Stationary

Use of City stationary by the City Council shall be limited to the following:

1. Used by the Mayor at the direction of the full City Council, such as for communicating legislative positions taken by the Council.
2. Used by the Mayor or any Council Member for the purpose of thanking citizens or groups, extending invitations to City-sponsored events, extending congratulations to persons or groups to note achievements, or to answer correspondence sent by constituents.

Accountability

The City Manager is responsible for holding staff accountable for adherence to the City Council norms. The City Council members are responsible for holding each other accountable for adherence to the City Council norms.

BACKGROUND:

This policy consolidates and amends several prior policies relating to the conduct of City Council business including Travel and Meetings, Seating Arrangement of Council Members After Reorganization, Use of City Stationary by Council Members, Public Meetings and Meeting Agendas, Selection of Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem; Role of the Mayor, Council Norms, Speaker Cards, and Meals.

This policy guides the smooth operations of the City Council and City organization and promotes a positive, productive, effective organization which inspires public trust in the City and in its services and activities. It represents a shared set of expectations on a variety of logistical issues. The prior policies were originally adopted on December 15, 1987, January 17, 1989, August 7, 1990, August 16, 2005, August 16, 2005, August 16, 2005, December 19, 1995, and May 3, 2005 respectively.

REVIEW:

This policy is to be regularly reviewed every two years or more frequently as required.