

September 21, 2022

MEMO TO: Alice Lee
CHAIR

F R O M: Tasha Kama
PRESIDING OFFICER PRO TEMPORE



SUBJECT: Opportunities for Improvement in County Government

Our recent experiences at Council with the recent changes in the State Sunshine Law has prompted me to consider opportunities to improve our legislative process. Our Council meetings seem to take longer and longer each time and the public is confused and frustrated with the process by which they provide their testimony. This memo provides my thoughts on possible improvements to address these issues.

While the change in the State law was imposed on us by the State Legislature, which does not subject themselves to the same restrictions, we are an equal contributor to our issue with meeting length. We have “trained” the public that Council meetings are where substantive changes to legislation happens and that they need to participate in those meetings to get their desired changes to legislation. If we want to improve this situation, we need to be better stewards of the Council meeting time.

If we want to improve, I suggest the following changes be considered:

1. **Substantive changes to legislation and/or resolutions should not occur at Council.** If Council entertains substantive changes at Council meetings, the public is encouraged to request substantive changes and time is taken at Council doing work that should be done at the appropriate committee. If substantive changes are needed in legislation and/or resolutions at Council, Council should send the item back to the appropriate committee for that substantive work to take place. This would eliminate the need for ASF and reduce rush demands on OCS.
2. **More emphasis should be placed on written testimony at Council meetings.** My experience with the State Legislature is that most verbal testimony at committee meetings consists of a simple statement, “I stand on my written testimony.” Testifiers may be encouraged to forsake verbal testimony for written if members went on record that they have reviewed the written testimony submitted 24 hours in advance of the Council meeting.

3. ***Verbal testimony should be encouraged at Committee and discouraged at Council.*** Our rules of the Council could be revised to provide testifiers more time for testimony at committee meetings and less time at Council. At committee meetings, I would suggest allowing 3 minutes for testimony and 1 minute to wrap up. For Council I would restrict testimony to 2 minutes only with no extension to “wrap up.” At Council testifiers should be succinct. I would also suggest that a strict definition of “clarifying question” be employed – the introduction of new concepts or extending the testifiers time by asking “leading questions” should not be permitted under the “clarifying question” concept.
4. ***Virtual Platform – BlueJeans or Zoom.*** While we are riding on the budget coattails of the administration by using BlueJeans, the public is less familiar with BlueJeans than with Zoom. We have experienced some significant performance issues with BlueJeans lately. Moving to Zoom may or may not address the performance issues. If the issues are with the County’s connection to the internet, changing platforms would not solve that issue. I would suggest that if we are going to stay with BlueJeans for budgetary reasons, we should reach out to the community and provide training in the use of BlueJeans that would cover both the technical requirements and the decorum expected (e.g., camera and microphone off for testifiers until they are called on by staff).

I offer these comments as suggestions for discussion only.