

The City Council Meeting Process in the City of Berkeley

A Review of the City of Berkeley's City Council Meetings

By Jillien Davey

For Council Member Lori Droste

Mills College Public Policy

April 29, 2016

Disclaimer

This Report was written for City Council Member Lori Droste. It in no way reflects the views or believes of the City of Berkeley.

Executive Summary

City Council Meetings in the City of Berkeley often seem inefficient and unable to accomplish a reasonable amount of City Business. It is not unusual for members of the public to shout and jeer at Council or for Council to shout and jeer at each other. The current City Council meeting process lacks control, efficiency and effectiveness. Adding technology and adopting best practices from similar cities will allow Berkeley to have a public meeting process that captures better public input and streamline meetings while taking care of city business.

The City of Berkeley has a unique culture tied to active citizens in government decision making. Berkeley's organizational chart sets citizens above all government entities. This means that any decisions city officials make must include consensus from citizens. The Brown Act governs the City of Berkeley's Public Comment rules. Though citizens have a legal right to participate in City Council meetings, the Brown Act outlines rules of conduct and guides city officials on how to maintain control within meetings.

City Council meetings often run late. This is a key factor in the Council's inability to accomplish a reasonable amount of business. When citizens become disorderly, city officials do not use the tools provided by the Brown Act to restore order. All of these factors attribute to the inaccessibility of City Council Meetings.

Four alternatives were analyzed to improve Berkeley's City Council Meeting process: The Status Quo, Plus Technology, Best Practices, and Best Practices and Technology. These alternatives were scored against the following criteria: Effectiveness, Political Feasibility, Equity, and Efficiency. The technology component included the use of a smartphone application specific and unique to the city of Berkeley. The Best Practices were pulled from Council Meeting processes in Vallejo, Fairfield, Santa Clara, Richmond, Antioch, and Concord.

The Best Practices and Technology alternative requires City officials to condense committees, commissions, and departments with overlapping goals and values. It sets limits on the amount

of agenda items City Councilmembers can refer each year encouraging them to refer more to the committees and commissions. The Agenda Setting Committee will be given more power to send agenda items back for review, deny, and accept agenda items encouraging those referring items to refer more wholesome and relevant material. Meetings will require speaker cards giving the City Clerk a better prediction of timeliness of meetings and agenda items. Finally, the Sergeant at Arms will be utilized to restore order when the public and Council get out of hand. This alternative will bring effectiveness and efficiency to City Council meetings and provide more wholesome public input to aid in decision making.