

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR COUNCIL MEMBER BETCHER TO ATTEND
 “GROWING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES” CONFERENCE**

BACKGROUND:

At the August 18 City Council workshop, the City Council referred a request from Council Member Betcher to attend the Growing Sustainable Communities Conference in Dubuque on October 6-7. **City staff estimates the cost for one Council Member to attend this conference is \$675, including mileage, registration, hotel, and meals.**

The City Council’s FY 2015-16 budget includes \$16,980 for the City Council and Mayor to attend conferences. The breakdown of the conferences budget is as follows:

Conference	Location	Budgeted Amounts		
		# CC Members	Individual Cost	Total
NLC Congress of Cities	Nashville, TN	4	\$1,800	\$7,200
NLC Congressional City Conf.	Washington, DC	3	\$2,250	\$6,750
ILC Annual Conference	Cedar Rapids	2	\$565	\$1,130
ITGA Annual Conference	Chicago, IL	1	\$1,700	\$1,700
ILC Annual Meeting	Unknown	1	\$200	\$200
TOTAL				\$16,980

Because it is early in the fiscal year, the City Council needs only to decide at this time whether to authorize this additional conference; it does not need to make decisions about how to allocate this cost in the budget. During budget preparation the staff must guess how many Council members will be available to attend the national conferences. Historically, more funds have been budgeted for the two national conferences than have been utilized. This is to ensure that the City Council Members who wish to take advantage of the unique opportunities at these national events are able to do so. Should a greater number of City Council members ultimately choose to attend the conferences/workshops than the budget allows, City staff can initiate a request at a later date to take a portion of the conference expenses out of the Council Contingency account.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Authorize Council Member Betcher to attend the Growing Sustainable Communities Conference in Dubuque.
2. Do not authorize Council Member Betcher to attend the Growing Sustainable Communities Conference in Dubuque.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

City Council member attendance at state and nation conferences should be encouraged in order to gain a wider perspective about possible new or unique policies that have been implemented in other cities throughout the country in an effort to better our community. In the past, Council member attendance has focused on the National League of Cities conferences and the Iowa League meetings, since the City is a member of both organizations and these meeting are specifically designed to cover a wide variety of policy alternatives and the most relevant local government issues. However, it should be recognized that there could be value in attending a conference/meeting that focuses in more detail on one of the Council's top priorities, such as this sustainability conference.

In the absence of a formal policy regarding City Council attendance at conferences, the staff would suggest the following criteria in determining if Council member attendance is warranted.

- **The conference/meeting should be designed to provide information relevant to policy makers.**

(For example, there is no need for a Council member to attend a conference/workshop on how to design a roundabout. That type of implementation information is more appropriately left to the City staff.)

The literature describing the upcoming conference/workshop traditionally describes the audience to which the program information will be geared.

- **The information to be gleaned from the conference/workshop should be of interest of the total City Council, and not just the one member who wishes to attend.**
- **The topics offered at the conference/workshop should focus on one of the City Council's goals/objectives.**
- **The City Council should formally authorize a request to attend a conference/workshop other than the National League of Cities, Iowa League of Cities, and International Town/Gown meeting.**

The process utilized to address Councilperson Betcher's request provides an example how this issue should be handle in the future.

The request to attend the Growing Sustainable Communities Conference appears to satisfy the criteria offered above. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative #1 thereby authorizing the Gloria to attend the conference.

City staff feels comfortable that the current funding in the City Council's conferences budget will be sufficient to cover the cost of attending this additional conference. If it is not, City staff will return to the City Council to request that Council Contingency funds be used to pay for a portion of the City Council's conferences.

Since there is no approved policy regarding the Council member's attendance at conferences/workshops, it would be advisable for such a policy be discussed and approved at the next Goal Setting session. Consideration could be given to the four criteria mentioned above or some other set of criteria.