

Minutes  
City Council Work Session  
Saturday, August 18, 2018

Council present: John Haila, Gloria Betcher, Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Tim Gartin, David Martin, Allie Hoskins, Chris Nelson

Staff present: Steve Schainker, Mark Lambert, Susan Gwiasda

Mayor Haila convened the meeting at 8:37 a.m. The meeting began with Mayor Haila providing a brief overview of the elements that make an effective governing/decision making body that were discussed at the City Council's January 2018 Goal Setting session.

Following this overview, the Mayor moderated a Council discussion regarding how the Mayor and Council were doing in terms of accomplishing their goal to be an effective governing body. The following list summarizes their evaluation of their effectiveness.

**COUNCIL TO COUNCIL INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS:**

Positives-Plus

- Members can disagree with one another and yet move ahead to the next decision without it negatively impacting relationships.
- Good communication exists between Councilmembers in and out of meetings.
- The newest Council member, David Martin, has done a good job integrating into the decision making body with independent thinking.
- The Councilmembers are deliberate thinkers.
- The Councilmembers have avoided voting blocks.
- Everyone is sharing information, so everyone is on the same page.
- Trust exists between Councilmembers.
- Councilmembers do not "chew" on something to "death."
- Councilmembers do a good job seeking clarification.
- An attempt is made to help the public understand why the Councilmembers voted a certain way.
- Councilmembers are involved in many community activities.
- Councilmembers are staying non-partisan, which is very good.

Possible Improvements-Delta

- \*For non-routine or controversial topics, attempt to bring a draft ordinance before the City Council with all changes that are desired prior to being asked to approve on the first reading. This process will help assure that

Councilmembers will minimize making changes to the ordinance during the second and third readings of an ordinance, which only adds to the public's confusion on what the Council is voting.

- Councilmembers should avoid making decisions because of "time pressure."
- \*The Mayor should periodically update the Council regarding conversations that he had with outside groups (e.g. ISU President, Ames School Board President, etc.).
- \*The Council is spending too much time in weeds. They should spend the most amount of time on the most important issues, and the least amount of time on the least important issues. Need to delegate/empower more to staff.
- The Council should avoid the overuse of motions to reconsider.
- \*The student ex-officio member of the Council should be encouraged to participate more in the meetings.
- \*The Council should continue to work towards achieving consensus (4 to 2 vote) vs. unity (6 to 0 vote).

## **COUNCIL TO STAFF INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS:**

### **Positives-Plus**

- Staff is patient with Council.
- Staff is professional with Council.
- When staff gives professional opinion, Council defends/protects them from personal attacks.
- Staff feels comfortable with City Council.
- Staff is providing good reports to the Council.
- The City Council respects staff.

### **Possible Improvements-Delta**

- Council should maintain set policies uniformly to avoid confusion.
- \*Council should avoid setting policies that are difficult for the staff to enforce.
- \*Funnel all communications (citizen complaints/concerns, Council request for information, etc.) intended for City staff through the City Manager, rather than sending directly to staff.
  - Requests will be handled promptly; Councilmembers can request that the information be given to them or sent directly to the constituent.
- \*All Legal questions/issues should go directly to the City Attorney.
- \*Empower staff more to work out solutions with residents/customers. Will still have to determine what this would look like.
- \*Provide safe and protective environment for staff to make recommendations.

- \*Councilmembers seeking information about another city may interact directly with other Councilmembers from that city, the Mayor will interact directly with the Mayor of the other city, and the City Manager will contact his counterpart and/or the staff members of the other city.

## **COUNCIL TO PUBLIC INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS:**

### **Positives-Plus**

- Residents are willing to write the City Council.
- There is good citizen involvement at Council meetings.
- The switch to the new City of Ames emails addresses for the Councilmembers will be good.
- The City of Ames Facebook page is good (Facebook Live Council meetings are attracting in new people).

### **Possible Improvements-Delta**

- The Council could improve the timeliness of their responses to citizen emails.
- \*If the Council says “No” to a customer, then the Mayor should thank the person/group at the meeting for making the effort to bring the issue to the City Council.
- \*Technical questions from the public should be passed on to the staff through the City Manager.
- \*Councilmembers should defend the City staff when attacked in emails.
- \*The Councilmembers should receive the input and not engage a citizen during Public Forum or during public comments at Council meetings. Councilmembers do not have to convince the citizens that they are wrong. This approach does not apply when accusations or personal attacks are made at the meeting. Those accusations and attacks must be stopped.
- \*Position the Podium so that it predominately faces the City Council and require that the citizens address the City Council and not engage the public or City staff members.
- \*Make sure the City Council/City staff solicit public input on major issues (e.g. parking meters rate increases; rezoning of Lincoln Way, Rental cap)

## **CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS:**

### **Positives-Plus**

- The Council is receiving a lot of good public input at the meetings.
- Because of the quality of the reports, there has been less time needed for staff presentations at the Council meeting.

### Possible Improvements-Delta

- \*Limit public input at meetings to one time per person
- \*Request that Denise Vrchota review the City Council meetings and provide advice regarding how to improve.
- \*Establish a goal to end Council meetings within a certain time limit. A three hour time limit was discussed.
- \*The Mayor will prepare “informal” time limits for the agenda items to help assure the meetings are completed within the approved time limit.
- \*Limit what is pulled from consent agenda by asking the City Manager questions prior to the City Council meeting.
- \*The Mayor will be empowered to reign in Councilmembers from making points more than one time.
- \*All special meetings, including the Council goal setting sessions, should be posted on the City’s web site.

### **ACTION STEPS:**

Those ideas that the City Council identified to focus on as possible improvements were marked with an asterisk on the above “DELTA” lists. The City Manager was asked to bring back these suggestions in the form of a policy plan for City Council approval.

### **SOME ADDITIONAL CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS:**

- The goal should be to become the best City Council in the state of Iowa; and, therefore, Councilmembers should always be trying to do better.
- The City Council should be committed to continuing education; and consider obtaining some sort of board certification.
- The Council should have this kind of session more frequently, perhaps every July, along with the January goal setting meeting.

### **COUNCIL COMMENTS:**

- David reminded the Council that Ames Pridefest will be held on September 29, 2018 and asked if it would be appropriate if the City had a booth/stand at the event. He believes it is important to the people who come to this event to see City representation.
- Gloria urged the Ames citizens to vote for Water Treatment Plant at the Iowa League of Cities All Star project site. She wants us to show support for the effort the staff put in to nominate the project.

- Tim informed the City Council that he had received an email from Merlin Pfannkuk expressing his frustration that agenda for this meeting was not publicized.

Moved to adjourn – 11:44 am

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John A. Haila

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Susan Gwiasda, Scribe