



Rules Subcommittee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

Present: Councilors Baker (Chair), Krintzman, Noel, and Humphrey

Also Present: Councilors Albright and Gentile

City Staff: Nathan Giacalone, Committee Clerk

Notes: The Subcommittee began the meeting discussing when to schedule its next meeting. After reviewing the Budget Meeting calendar, the Subcommittee decided that the next best date to meet on would be Wednesday, May 5 at 6:00 pm before the Programs & Services Meeting that night.

Chair Baker began the discussion, saying that the Subcommittee would pick up its work by reviewing the outline in the April 21 Agenda memo, as well as suggested rules changes in the marked Rules copy attached to the agenda. The areas of discussion and Councilor comments that ensued are as follows:

Conceptual Questions:

Presently, items are docketed then referred to the appropriate committee by the Clerk. In recent years, the practice has been to reduce the number of committees, which hold their current schedule for specific reasons. Some questions raised so far ask if there is a better way way to talk about an item that is not formally docketed. This has been the practice for 40 years. Another historical point is with the Council accepting the docket. There was a case where a stadium was to be put on the site of Woodland golf course. If the Council accepted this item then it would have had to address it so it decided not to accept it into the docket saying that it was outside its purview.

Item Referral and Docketing

C: There is currently an item referred to Programs & Services about reducing the size of the Council docketed by a resident in January 2020. If residents can docket items on their own, then it is more concerning to have the current rule of discussion within a year.

C: It is both good and bad that the Committee Chair has so much discretion over the items which get discussed in their committee. This power helps ensure that the President is especially thoughtful with chair assignments. If Councilors are required to docket an item, then with 24 of them there is plenty of representation for this.

C: Depending on when an item is docketed, it can be delayed for two weeks before being discussed in Committee. Should there be a rule for taking up an item within a certain time period? It would be fair if residents are allowed in this process to give them a firm time of when they can expect to hear their item.

C: The current docket deadline was set in order to give the Clerk's Office enough advance notice to properly put the agendas together.

Q: Can the late filing process be changed so that it is a request for a specific item that is read out rather than a request to add an undetermined written item?

A: On the late filed items it was practice that the item would need to be read into the record. If this is not in the Rules than it should be.

C: Without a time requirement on when an item should be heard in committee, it allows a chair to block any one item. If it is a case where additional information is needed before an item can be discussed at length, a brief explanation and motion to hold until such time would suffice to meet this rule.

Committee Structure

C: The question has been raised on whether the Council has the right number and types of Committees. The current structure was agreed upon as the best way to split up the workload. Holes have arisen for certain matters such as environmental and housing which apply to multiple areas. These multi-committee issues could provide an opportunity for cross-committee work. One example of this question is whether public safety and transportation should be one committee.

C: Road redesigns for instance are in Public Safety & Transportation due to the safety perspective often needed for these plans.

C: The issue with including transportation in PS&T is that it is not the main focus of the committee.

C: Housing is one of the most frequent subjects of these referral conversations. While many housing questions are referred to Zoning & Planning, some are referred to Programs & Services. However, the Planning Department is often involved with housing and it does not have much of a relationship with Programs & Services.

C: The President is also able to appoint a special committee when appropriate.

C: When projects involve large degrees of overlap, there can be a joint meeting which helps the item move more effectively through the full Council. Committees are also able to split the

workload however they choose. There are concerns that altering some committees could have a negative impact on others.

C: The system of Committee composition might be considered for some change. Some committees such as Zoning & Planning and Land Use benefit from the structure of one member from each ward. For others such as Finance this is not as big of a concern. Moving away from solely eight-member committees could open up new options as well.

C: A good thing about the current committee structure of one member from each ward is that it benefits local outreach and opportunity for members.

C: The larger role of the committee chair should be discussed. Are they just facilitating meetings or are they working towards a set of goals?

Dress Code

C: The consensus so far seems to be against having one.

C: The tradition for business in the chamber has been for councilors to dress formally.

C: Dress codes can be an area of sexism and double standards, with concerns raised by members of the LGBTQ community about how these standards might be used against them.

C: While there are standards the Council should meet, such as no jeans at a full council meeting, it is not good to tell members how to dress. Councilors will dress in the manner which they want to form perceptions of themselves and this will largely be a self-regulating issue.

C: If there is a dress code it should only mention a respect for the institution and nature of the meeting.

C: Councilors dress according to personal preference, so a code is not appropriate.

The Chair said that he would plan to present more of these small proposed Rules changes to the Subcommittee for its next meeting on May 5.

The meeting adjourned at 6:57 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

R. Lisle Baker, Chair