

**CITY OF ALBANY  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA  
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: July 19, 2010

Reviewed by: BP

**SUBJECT:** City Commissions, Committees, Boards, and other Advisory Groups

**REPORT BY:** Beth Pollard, City Manager

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

1. That Council direct staff to work with the City’s advisory bodies to transition to implementation of recommended changes to scope, agenda setting, minutes, and meeting procedures; composition; outreach; sunset provisions; training; and other changes in policies, procedures, and protocols to improve efficiency and effectiveness, by December 31, 2010.
2. That staff report back to Council in November 2010 on implementation progress and recommended modifications, if any.
3. That Council direct staff to develop and conduct a training workshop for appointees to City advisory bodies, tentatively scheduled for the evening of Monday, January 31, 2011.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2009, the City contracted with Citygate Associates to conduct an analysis to provide an independent, third party review of the City’s organizational structure to identify potential cost savings, service improvements, or other efficiencies to improve the effectiveness of the City organization. In addition, to the extent possible, Citygate was asked to help the City develop strategies and options for providing services in a tighter fiscal environment over the long term.

One of the findings in the report was that Albany has more advisory bodies than most cities its size, and that its non-public safety staffing – which provides most of the advisory body staff support, is low compared to other neighboring small cities in the Bay Area. As a result, capacity for staff support to advisory committees is stretched thin.

Citygate recommended beginning a discussion between staff and the City Council to discuss the advisory body staff support problem and aligning Council expectations with the City’s limited staffing levels. The specific recommendations included increasing “self-help” advisory committee roles, decrease paid staffing, manage advisory committee expectations regarding staff support, and bi-annually review advisory bodies asking the question: “Can the City get by without this committee or advisory body?”

Council referred the Citygate recommendations to staff for further analysis and report back. To assist in this effort, the City hired a Public Policy Masters Degree graduate to perform an internship project to review the City's advisory bodies; research best practices in other public agencies; survey appointees; Council members, and staff liaisons; attend meetings; and develop recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the advisory bodies. Her analysis is attached.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff has developed recommendations that are generally consistent with the recommendations in the analysis. The recommendations are divided into two categories: Advisory bodies as a whole, and the individual advisory bodies. The recommendations are attached as Exhibit "A."

In broad summary, the recommended changes to the advisory bodies as a whole are to:

- 1) Enhance public presence and communication, through vehicles such as neighborhood/community forums, email addresses, and public swearing-in ceremonies
- 2) Evaluate every two years whether to continue the advisory body, or make changes
- 3) Expand expectations and capacity for members of the advisory bodies to assume roles and responsibilities such as action minutes, research, community outreach, and subcommittees.
- 4) Establish protocols for Council direction on advisory body work programs, agenda items, and referrals for consistency with their purview and Council direction.
- 5) Conduct training on running meetings, group decision making, Open Meeting laws, and subject matter of the advisory bodies
- 6) Eliminate or modify certain types of appointments (Council at-large, Council or Friends liaison, youth)
- 7) Consider Albany demographics when making appointments

There are specific recommendations for virtually all of the advisory bodies as shown on Exhibit "B." Among the recommendations are:

- Civil Service Board: Refer to the Charter Review Committee the development of a proposed charter amendment to dissolve the Board
- Community Media Access Committee: Expand committee by two seats appointed by the Albany School District Board of Education, preferably with connection to the High School media program
- Waterfront Committee: Develop a stewardship working group for efforts and activities on the publicly owned waterfront area, and assign policy advisory duties and responsibilities to the Parks & Recreation Commission, renamed to "Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Commission"

- Police & Fire Pension Board: Change from monthly to quarterly meetings, which may require a voter-approved charter amendment
- Social & Economic Justice Commission: Incorporate sustainability and other environmental policy advisory duties and responsibilities to this group, renaming it the “Social, Economic & Environmental Justice Commission.”
- Sustainability Committee: Transition to a task force to support and augment City efforts to implement the Climate Action Plan, and incorporate the committee’s policy advisory role into a newly named “Social, Economic & Environmental Justice Commission.”

## **ANALYSIS**

The transition of the bodies to more self-help than staff dependent is in recognition of the more frugal fiscal times when cities are looking for ways to do more with less. It also provides residents with a more active role in operating the city in which they live. When capable residents take on more active roles in conducting research, analysis, and other support for developing policy advice for the City Council and staff, they strengthen community engagement and the quality of the decision-making outcomes.

The recommendations are a departure from existing policies and practices, and as such, will test individuals’ and the organization’s courage and capacity for change. Staff anticipates that they will undergo refinement through discussion with the advisory groups over the next few months.

Among the areas needing further discussion and refinement are:

- . How to best provide advisory groups with Council direction on work plans and agendas
- . How working groups, such as for Sustainability and the Waterfront, can most effectively be established and interact with the City
- . Which advisory groups would conduct neighborhood forums and how those would occur

Staff will report back in November with a status report on implementation and any recommended changes. The goal is to complete the transitions in time for the next round of City Council appointments at the end of this calendar year. During this time staff will also review and incorporate amendments as appropriate to the City’s Commission, Committee, and Board member handbook to reflect the recommended changes in policies, procedures, and protocols.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT**

Among the anticipated outcomes of the changes is to create positive avenues for the community to participate in policy advice as appointees or members of the public.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There will be staff time saved in the transition to fewer advisory bodies and more self-help efforts.

### **Attachments**

1. Exhibit "A": Recommended changes to advisory bodies as a whole
2. Exhibit "B": Recommended changes to specific advisory bodies
3. "Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Albany's Commissions, Committees, and Boards", w/appendices
4. National Issues Forum summary