

In Bloomington, Indiana on Monday, December 21, 2020 at 12:00pm, Council President Stephen Volan presided over a Special Session of the Common Council. Per the Governor’s Executive Orders, this meeting was conducted electronically via Zoom.

COMMON COUNCIL  
SPECIAL SESSION  
December 21, 2020

Councilmembers present via Zoom: Matt Flaherty, Isabel Piedmont-Smith, Dave Rollo, Kate Rosenbarger (arrived at 12:10pm), Susan Sandberg, Sue Sgambelluri, Jim Sims (arrived at 12:01pm), Ron Smith, Stephen Volan  
Councilmembers absent: none

ROLL CALL [12:00pm]

Council President Stephen Volan summarized the agenda.

AGENDA SUMMATION [12:02pm]

Stephen Lucas, Council Attorney/Administrator, presented a report on Council Standing Committees. Lucas stated that the report looked at council meetings and activities over the previous four to five years. Lucas provided additional details within the report.

REPORTS  
• COUNCIL STAFF [12:05pm]

Rollo stated that the standing committees were less efficient in terms of time allotted to legislation and asked council, city, and clerk staff if it required more time and effort, or less, or about the same.

Council discussion:

Lucas stated that there was more work involved for council staff with standing committees but that was not a judgment on whether they were good or bad. He explained that committee reports for the full council were either written by committee members or by council staff, and that coordinating that was additional work. Lucas also explained that there was an increase in notices and uncertainty about which committee legislation might be referred to. Lucas stated that some administration staff had told him that they appreciated the ability to know exactly what time a committee would start, which wasn’t clear before. Lucas also commented about down time in between committee meetings.

Sgambelluri asked what was measured in the councilmember minutes section. Sgambelluri asked if it was assumed that councilmembers only attended their committees, and asked if the number of minutes would increase if a councilmember attended other committee meetings.

Lucas confirmed that was correct, and that it was based on the councilmembers that were on a particular committee.

Piedmont-Smith said that use of time was not the only important aspect to consider and asked if anyone analyzed standing committees having two meetings before reporting back to the full council. She said that allowed time for amendments to come forward and not take that time from the full council.

Lucas stated that there were five pieces of legislation in 2020 that were carried over into two committee meetings, two pieces in 2019, and one piece in 2018. Lucas referenced Table F in the report that outlined the time spent on legislative items and its efficiency on regular or special sessions.

Mick Renneisen, Deputy Mayor, thanked council staff for the report and spoke about bringing legislation forward to council meetings. He said that it was challenging to not know if legislation would go to one or two committee meetings, and the timing of the committee meetings. Renneisen commented that staff would have to present two times, or three times, if there were two committee meetings, as well as to the full council. He said that previously, staff presented once at the Committee of the Whole (COW), and then returned to the full council, primarily to answer questions.

City Clerk Nicole Bolden discussed the increase of work including memos for committee meetings, an increase in balancing clerk staff's time, and the down time between committee meetings. She spoke about staffing concerns and balancing weekly hours, paid time off, and compensatory time.

- Reports (*cont'd*)

Council discussion:

Jeff Underwood, Controller, stated that the standing committees did not work for appropriation ordinances because of the advertising notices that were required. He also stated that it added four weeks to the process. Underwood commented that while it was helpful to know what time he and his staff needed to attend the committee meeting, it was difficult when there was down time in between.

Scott Robinson, Director of Planning and Transportation, thanked council staff for the report. He commented on the feedback from staff including consistency of knowing when to attend, the downfall of not knowing if there would be two meetings, and that it would be helpful to know what information was expected from staff at each meeting. He also commented that a lot of what was presented to council had been vetted through boards and commissions.

Alex Crowley, Director of Economic and Sustainable Development department, thanked council staff for the report and for the support in responding to the pandemic. Crowley stated that there were pros and cons for standing committees, and explained that one improvement was that staff knew what to present and avoided surprises at council meetings. Crowley stated that a negative was the amount of time spent preparing for, and participating in meetings. He also reiterated the difficulties with scheduling staff time in multiple meetings.

Philippa Guthrie, Corporation Counsel, stated that she attended one committee meeting and it was successful, was very generous, and made the full council meeting easier. She said it could have been specific to the legislation at that meeting.

Rollo asked about redundancy in questions for staff presentations at committee meetings and full council meetings.

Underwood confirmed that did happen. He stated that questions that were answered in committee meetings weren't communicated to other councilmembers and there was some repetition, which was inefficient.

Crowley stated that repetition was not inherently bad, and did allow staff to prepare and have a "dress rehearsal" of questions that might come up.

Robinson commented that in committee meetings, it was helpful to have a second chance to answer questions, but that some dialogue prior to COW was lost. Robinson mentioned that transparency of amendments had not happened at the committee level. He said that staff didn't know what was coming and thus were not able to prepare answers ahead of time.

Piedmont-Smith asked about the amendment process not being transparent and referenced the Land Use Committee (LUC) process for amendments. She explained that there were amendments brought to the second LUC meeting which allowed for more time to present, and that the amendments were then put in the packet for the full council with a recommendation. Piedmont-Smith clarified that wasn't the case 100% of the time.

Robinson clarified that he meant that there were areas for improvement in the amendment process. Robinson explained the

difficulties that staff encountered before and after the standing committees and expressed concern with how the amendment process would work with larger legislative pieces like the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

Piedmont-Smith stated that she would follow up with staff to improve the amendment process and transparency for the public.

Piedmont-Smith stated that it was too early to evaluate the process since it had only been 10 months and during a different year due to the pandemic.

Rollo stated that he was processing the information but that he was surprised that the standing committees did not lead to more efficiency. Rollo commented on the feedback from staff.

Flaherty thanked council staff for the report, and stated that he was also processing all the information. Flaherty commented on the differences during the pandemic year and that time was an odd metric for success and was hopeful to hear about other metrics to consider, with staff input. Flaherty explained that less time spent on legislative items, or more time spent, could both be indicators of inefficiencies. He referenced staff feedback regarding amendments. Flaherty said there were pros and cons to standing committees and COW.

Sandberg stated that more time was needed to reflect on the pros and cons, and that she hoped for a hybrid approach. Sandberg explained that she appreciated the COW, because she was able to hear legislative items, as opposed to hearing from a committee of four. She stated she liked to hear the details herself. Sandberg stated that while virtual meetings helped enable attendance and participation from the public for some, it also made it easier to not be as collegial as when one was face to face. Sandberg clarified that there were tradeoffs and reiterated the potential for a hybrid approach.

Sgambelluri commented on the discussion, including the pandemic year, and perhaps needing more time to evaluate standing committees. She stated that it was helpful to hear councilmembers' questions about legislation at the COW. Sgambelluri explained that her commitment to standing committees was dependent on that structure producing better legislation. Sgambelluri said she would like to hear from the public regarding standing committees. Sgambelluri also commented that she was leaning towards refining the current model, rather than dismantling the standing committees or keeping them as they were.

Smith stated that after reading the report and hearing from staff, it seemed that more time was spent on legislation, amendments, and interfacing with the city. Smith explained that it had fragmented his understanding of legislation and processes, and that he did not learn from the transmission of information from the committee to the full council, based on votes. Smith commented that there were repetitive questions. Smith stated that refining the process might work, but that there had been a good discussion and comments.

Sims thanked council staff for the report and President Volan for the special session. Sims explained that a hybrid approach had been mentioned, and that it was very appropriate to start having discussions since there wasn't to be a vote at the meeting. Sims iterated that there would be new leadership on the council the

- Reports (*cont'd*)

Council discussion:

following year, and that more discussion was needed because the will of the council was very important. Sims asked about how the structure affected those that must work with it, including staff, department heads, and the administration. Sims also asked about councilmembers' time if they chose to join other committee meetings. Sims also commented on time, other metrics, and feedback from stakeholders to gather as much information as possible to make an informed decision moving forward.

Rosenbarger stated that she appreciated the discussion and that efficiency wasn't the only metric to consider. She said that other considerations were discussed including predictability, collaboration, what makes the best legislation, better understanding of legislation, and an increase in public participation. Rosenbarger commented that understanding was important and that councilmembers could go to all the committee meetings. Rosenbarger also commented on the importance of asking what the problem was they were trying to solve, and how the structure could be improved. She explained that the COW timing was unpredictable for staff to know when it was their time to participate. Rosenbarger stated that the standing committees allowed for each councilmember a chance to lead by chairing a committee. Rosenbarger discussed other items that worked or didn't work for standing committees including appropriation ordinances, second meeting for some legislation, and some legislation that was not ready.

Volan commented that a close reading of the numbers from the report showed that the average COW reached a six-year high of 164 minutes. He said that there was an increase in overall meetings. Volan explained that the public participation increased due to the ability to virtually attend meetings. Volan commented on the number of minutes per meeting, and that it was important to consider predictability, collaboration, time for amendments, and deliberation, and not just efficiency. Volan spoke about a potential consolidation of committees since legislation was not referred to some committees. Volan also spoke about legislation that went to multiple meetings over the last several years though most did not need to. Volan stated that the majority of councilmembers were in favor of modifying the current structure. He said that it was important to think about clerk staff's and city staff's time and the impact of standing committees. Volan thanked council staff Becky Boustani for compiling the report.

Mick Renneisen thanked council for allowing for feedback from the administration and staff.

Becky Boustani, Assistant Administrator/Legal Research Specialist, suggested that going forward, it would be useful to plan ahead for metric considerations and what data would be good to have.

Volan suggested that the length of processing amendments, and the length of public comments be included.

Clerk Bolden mentioned that the roll call sheets, maintained by clerk staff, tracked the votes taken in meetings and could facilitate data on legislation.

Piedmont-Smith said that knowing at what point amendments were introduced, and when they were added into the packet would be good to include.

- Reports (*cont'd*)

Council discussion:

Sims commented that measuring and tracking was important but that each councilmember brought something different based on their experiences which was just as important as efficiency. Sims spoke about scheduling as an important consideration moving forward.

- Reports (*cont'd*)

Council discussion:

Lucas thanked Boustani for her work on the report and stated that there were items to keep track of moving forward. Lucas commented on the upcoming process on voting and council schedule.

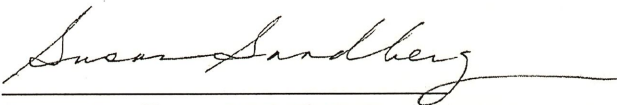
Volan adjourned the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT [1:31pm]

APPROVED by the Common Council of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana upon this 2 day of February, 2022.

APPROVE:

ATTEST:



Susan Sandberg, PRESIDENT  
Bloomington Common Council



Nicole Bolden, CLERK  
City of Bloomington

