



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor & Council

**FROM:** Marc A. Ott, City Manager

**DATE:** February 7, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Council Meetings Other Than Formal or Regular Meetings

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### Question

This memo is in response to your question about the types of meetings that municipal governing bodies may conduct as they consider major agenda items or citywide issues, separate from a formal or Regular Council Meeting. Provided below is a summary of the research that was gathered by staff in response to your inquiry.

### Background

City Councils conduct business in a variety of ways. The most common is the Regular Council Meeting, but can also include the following:

- (1) Municipal governing bodies often meet as a **Committee of the Whole** to consider matters usually not heard by Council standing committees. These traditionally involve in-depth discussions on major enterprise-wide initiatives, emergency issues requiring a quick policy decision, or items that require a simultaneous, initial hearing by all council members. These meetings allow the Council to focus their deliberations on a single issue, and to take formal action, if necessary. In municipalities like Albuquerque (NM) and Washington, D.C., these committees meet to specifically consider the annual budget and capital improvement programs proposed by their councils. These sessions are typically open to the public, but usually do not include a citizen comment period. Many large cities, like the cities of Phoenix (AZ), Tacoma (WA) and Minneapolis (MN) meet regularly as a committee of the whole.
- (2) **Work or Study Sessions** tend to be less formal. In these sessions, council members are often briefed by City staff on items of ongoing or future interest to the Council, or on upcoming agenda items that have wide community interest. The main purpose of these meetings is to give council members a chance to delve deeply into an issue, often on matters that are controversial or complex, thereby eliminating unnecessary debate during a

Regular Council Meeting. Generally, city councils do not take formal action in these meetings and citizens are not allowed to offer public comment. Many cities, like the cities of Forth Worth and San Antonio, hold regular – usually at least twice a month – work sessions or pre-council meetings. Except for Regular Council Meetings and executive sessions, this is the most common form of municipal meeting held by city governing bodies today.

- (3) Although not very popular, smaller- to medium-sized cities are sometimes known to conduct **Business Meetings**, which allows a City Council to take formal action to approve contracts, approve bids or pass capital infrastructure and construction-related ordinances. These meetings are usually held once a month, and are more transactional in nature than the policy questions a Council normally considers during its Regular order of business. In these meetings, city councils will usually take formal action to approve items, and may even allow the public to provide citizen input.
- (4) Finally, a handful of cities hold **Pre-Agenda or Pre-Meeting Sessions**. In these meetings, the entire City Council convenes in an informal session to ask City staff questions about specific agenda items in advance of the next Regular Meeting. These are informational in nature, and typically no formal action is taken. Public comment may be allowed depending on a council's rules of procedure. Cities find these meetings helpful because they give staff additional time to do further research while streamlining the Regular Meeting process and enhancing the information made available to the Council and the public. The cities of Port Hueneme (CA), Trinity (NC) and San Marcos (TX) regularly hold these types of meetings.

I trust this is responsive to the question you posed about the types of Council meetings that lie outside of the formal or Regular Meeting process. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let me know. Thanks!