



CITY OF WAUWATOSA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MINUTES • OCTOBER 1, 2013

Regular Meeting**Common Council Chambers****7:00 PM**

7725 West North Avenue, Wauwatosa, WI 53213

PRESENT: Alds. Hanson (7:37 p.m.), McBride, Moldenhauer, Organ (7:32 p.m.), Pantuso, Roznowski, Tilleson, Walz-Chojnacki, Wilke, Wilson, Berdan, Birschel, Causier, Dubinski, Ewerdt, -15

EXCUSED: Ald. Donegan

ALSO Mr. Archambo, City Administrator

PRESENT: Ald. McBride in the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ITEMS

1. Discussion of possible modification of current meeting times/days for Council Committees

Mr. Archambo began the discussion by outlining the tentative meeting schedule for Council Committees, Council, and the Committee of the Whole through October in an effort to highlight how busy the month is.

In addition, staff is recommending the November 5, 2013 Common Council meeting begin one-half hour earlier, at 7 p.m., to accommodate an especially heavy public hearing schedule.

Against this backdrop, the subject of the current council/committee schedule has come up again for discussion.

Ald. Pantuso stated that at a recent chili-judging contest, he, the Mayor, and Alds. Moldenhauer and Tilleson talked about the frequent late-night meetings, their impact on clear-headed decision-making, their effects on functioning at work the next day, and the ongoing problem of early meetings running over into late-meeting start times.

He offered the following as a possible solution and a way to start the discussion process: Hold Common Council meetings every Tuesday at 7 p.m., immediately followed by Council Committee meetings. Ald. Pantuso speculated that Committee meetings would be shorter if held every week as there would be fewer items on each agenda. The Council meetings would deal with the issues from the previous week's Committee meetings, just as they do now. He suggested that Committee start times could perhaps be 7:30 p.m. and 8:15 p.m., since Council meetings tend to be very short. On the fifth Tuesday of the month, meetings would also be held to continue the flow. The entire month of August would be off; no meetings would be held Christmas Eve/Day and New Year's Eve/Day. A three-month trial period could be enacted.

Ald. Birschel noted that years ago, a Committee Chair (Ald. Paulson) opted to recess a late-night meeting to the next day, much to the chagrin of then-Ald. McCarthy. He suggested that it may be useful to at least consider the possibility of creating a 'spill-over' meeting night, such as the Thursday following a late-night Tuesday.

In response to a query, Mr. Archambo stated staff will accommodate the wishes of the Council to the extent it is able. He suggested that as a start, perhaps Common Council meetings should begin at 7 p.m., rather than 7:30 p.m. Perhaps the big (8-member) committees should begin earlier than 8 p.m. as well, perhaps 7 p.m. He noted that City ordinances do permit starting Committee meetings as early as 6 p.m.

Several comments were generated about a 6 p.m. start time; many Council members indicated they could accommodate an early start time, while several other stated that they could not.

Ald. Wilson indicated that while he likes the current rhythm of the Council/Committee schedule, he appreciated the opportunity to look at the situation again. Could better use be made of the 5-Tuesday months in terms of relieving pressure on the meeting schedule? He was unsure about the advisability of taking an entire month off from city business. He spoke of the difficulty of having the early meetings run late such that quorum issues arise for the 8 p.m. committees. Should smaller committees be folded into larger committees? Perhaps that should be the issue of discussion, rather than start times.

Ald. Tilleson agreed that the meeting times on Tuesday need to be maximized. He voiced support for earlier starting times, and suggested that perhaps committee structures ought to be part of the larger strategic planning process.

Ald. Moldenhauer expressed reservations with holding weekly Council and Committee meetings, stating that such a schedule may not allow for thoughtful consideration of complex issues. He agreed that a 7 p.m. start time for Council should be considered. He added that when significant issues come before the big (8-member) committees, a firm start time must be adhered to. Earlier start times for all committees may be warranted.

Ald. Wilke opined that firm start times for all committees would be less confusing. Could the 5-Tuesday months be reserved for Committees of the Whole? He suggested that consideration be given to coming off of an August recess before Labor Day. Resuming meetings right after Labor Day, coupled with having to get children into their school routines, can be challenging.

Ald. Roznowski remarked that having Committee meetings right after Council meetings sounds like a lot of meetings. While it has been good and necessary of late that many Committees of the Whole have been held, it may be difficult to work them into the proposed schedule revisions suggested thus far. He acknowledged that earlier start times will be more difficult for some members than for others, but when a heavy agenda calls for it, the Council should take advantage of the ability to begin meetings as early as 6 p.m.

Ald. Walz-Chojnacki pointed out that 6 p.m. start times may be too early for members of the public as well. He urged that more consideration be given to a streamlined Committee structure. A variety of committees does assure a good mix of opinions, though.

Ald. Berdan concurred that constituents and colleagues with family responsibilities may find early start times difficult to accommodate. She mused that with just two large committees, representation for every district is assured. Could smaller committees be absorbed by the two large committees?

(Ald. Organ present 7:32 p.m.) -14

Ald. Birschel questioned whether it may be advisable to occasionally use a Thursday evening as an overflow committee night if heavy agendas are anticipated for committees. The public has a right to provide input, but when meetings run late, this can create problems.

Ald. Wilke responded that while he was willing to give up the fourth Tuesday (a free night) in a 5-Tuesday month, he was unwilling to regularly lose another night in his week. Creating an optional Thursday meeting night would make it only too easy for meetings to begin to regularly spill over to that second night. He urged that the discussion about committee structure be held first.

Ald. McBride observed that the number of committees has varied over the years depending upon the needs of the City. He voice concerns about committees starting as early as 6 p.m. on a regular basis, noting that it could negatively affect both elected officials and their constituents. A 6:30 p.m. start time might be more reasonable, as people need to eat once they get out of work before heading out to meetings. The idea of reorganizing committees is a good one to have.

(Ald. Hanson present 7:37 p.m.) -15

Ald. Causier agreed that a 6 p.m. start time may be too early for many; she also had reservations about weekly Council and Committee meetings in terms of staff having adequate time to prepare for issues on agendas. The pace sounds rather frenzied.

Ald. Pantuso offered another suggestion regarding Committee scheduling - that the small committees meet after Council meetings, and the 8-member Committees continue to meet on the 2nd/last Tuesday schedule.

Ald. Organ stated that with three children, it is difficult for her to get to meetings before 8 p.m. She opined that establishing early meeting times will create a new demographic of who can attend meetings and who can run for elected office in the city.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, CMC, City Clerk