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Subject: Notes on Preferential 5 minutes for NC's
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15-0524



Notes on Neighborhood Council Item --

On September 16, 2015 Councilmember Wesson is proposing a new set of rules so Neighborhood Councils and Neighborhood Council Alliances (of whatever nature and status) will be given preferential treatment (5 additional minutes for argument, before public comment) at City Council and other City agency meetings/hearings (CF 15-0389).

Some groups are supportive, mostly the Neighborhood Councils eager for preferential treatment, and some are opposed to the rule unless it applies to their non- Neighborhood Council groups. As a resident from CD2 who has attended virtually every City Council meeting for almost the last year the proposed new rule is beside the point. The man does not have a great enforcement of his own rules track record.

His proposal only exacerbates a problem which is already untenable in which regular people come to the City Council meeting, pay 20 dollars to park, to express their thought-out opinions about important matters are treated with astonishing contempt and disrespect.

A meeting hardly goes by that a handful or more taxpayers, who take time from work, travel from as far as twenty miles, pay twenty dollars in parking, with the expectation and hope that their elected leaders will be interested and concerned about what they have to say. Maybe it is the 85 year old woman who came to City Hall last Tuesday to passionately share her idea of possibly using an abandoned Caltrans lot for a homeless housing project. Or like the other day, when a beekeeper had come to express his concern about a pending ordinance that will make it impossible to continue his business, or the large group of individuals who were concerned about the pulsating problem of homelessness and desiring to share their ideas on that topic with the council and public via taxpayer funded channel 35.

As someone who has attended most of the City Council meetings over the last year, I can tell you first hand and with genuine sadness what these civic minded individuals almost invariably discover upon arrival at City Hall. As they step up to the table to sign up, they are greeted by an LAPD officer who politely informs that they will not be able to address the council on the topic they are interested in because it was discussed already once in a sub-committee, earlier in the week, and as you can see, he'll point to some fine print, the rules state that if comment was permitted in committee, there is no opportunity for public comment when the item reaches the full council.

The reaction of these citizens is almost always the same, one of honest disbelief. It seems impossible to your average citizen that such a policy could be for real and they assume that given all the effort they've put in to get there, the council will certainly waive the requirement this once and let the speakers address the council, after all, that is what council members are paid to do. But, again, it is genuine disbelief as the comely grandfatherly council president tells everyone in the home audience, that, no, there will no chance to be heard, because it has already been satisfied.

In the example of the eighty year old woman, it resulted in her bursting in to tears. She requested an extra sixty seconds, she'd waited all day, but Mr. Wesson accused the little old lady of disrupting the meeting. And so, she was led out of the chambers flanked by two comforting cops from LAPD.

For those who will not lose their job by taking an extra three hours from work or don't have to collect small children from school, there is the option of waiting until the very bitter end of the meeting before the adjournments for the fallen, where general public comment is heard.

General public comment, unlike that for specific agenda items, is supposed to afford the individual an opportunity to participate in the civic discussion on any topic that falls under the jurisdiction of the City Council. How much time does a taxpayer who has waited three or sometimes four hours to address the council? Sixty seconds. And whoa to the public speaker whose ideas are considered not precisely on topic by the council president, because that person's sixty seconds will quickly be eaten up by interruptions by the president telling the speaker that she is off point and disrupting the meeting. Should the speaker disagree and respond, he will be accused of disrupting the meeting, and be given some kind of warning.

I signed up to speak about discretionary funding for NC's recently and Mr. Krekorian who does not like to debate normally, I know this because I'm demanding that he return the 44k in public matching money that he took while brazenly flouting the significant requirement that he debate his challenger... moi. Krekorian jumped in several times to derail me and had

Englander attempt to tag me as disruptive. Both failed.

As for Wesson's proposal, the City Attorney noted that the NC alliances are non-City entities and that providing them with the same level of basic benefits of the NCs, such as additional time to speak on matters before the Council and having a "seat at the table," could open the door for other non-City entities to request the same. Committee Chair Wesson, thanked the City Attorney for the information. The City Attorney advised that there are other options that the Council can consider. May I suggest that Mr. Wesson let members of the public speak.

If the Council President permitted the many folks who show up at City Council meetings ready to speak, to speak, it might have a positive effect.

There might be some interesting comments that might drown out some of the less interesting ones, we hear all too often.

A reporter from a quasi-reputable publication, speculated that the September 9, 2015 closed session with LAPD Special Ops was about the public comment. Wait, that would mean (welling up with emotion)... someone's listening?

They're certainly not seeing public speakers on channel 35. At present, only council members, city staff and honorees appear in a recognizable format, during the taxpayer funded telecast on channel 35. Members of the public are systematically reduced in size (by a widening out ordered by Council President Wesson) so that they appear unrecognizably, roughly the size of #Blumenfield's nose in a typical City Clerk or Councilmember frame size.

So, to call it a 'seat at the table' feels wrong. There is definitely a big City Banquet, and the public is definitely invited, but not to eat and share ideas, the public is invited to watch the City Council eat...

The public, is supposed to accept that it had a chance to eat last week in Committee with Mitch O'Farrell.

"That takes us... where?"