

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: David Chanski, City Administrator/Clerk
RE: City Council Meetings in 2024
DATE: December 15, 2023



Background

At the City Council meeting on January 2, 2024, the City Council will approve its annual organizational resolution as required by State Statute. This resolution sets appointments and meeting times for the year.

Throughout 2023, City Council meetings have, on average, lasted over 3 hours. Much of this is due to the amount of work the City Council has set before it. While the City Council has held numerous workshops over the year to work through numerous topics and projects, this has not seemed to have any effect on meeting lengths.

Throughout the year, staff received many comments about the length of City Council meetings and the drain they are on councilmembers, staff, and the public. Current projects such as Buschmann Road and city hall will continue into 2024, and the City Council intends to commence work on new projects such as the City Code and a Streets CIP. Without some kind of change to the structure of meetings or their proceedings, staff does not see any change to the length of meetings occurring.

Bi-monthly City Council Meetings

In an effort to reduce the length of City Council meetings, the City Council could consider moving to bi-monthly meetings. The cities of Brainerd, Crosby, Baxter, Little Falls, and Staples as well as the Crow Wing County Board meet twice each month. Meeting twice each month does have multiple advantages:

- Bi-monthly meetings would allow staff to strategically schedule agenda items to reduce the length of meeting agendas.
 - o Agendas often become crowded under the current meeting schedule as the Council only meets once per month and many items cannot wait a month for consideration.

- Bi-monthly meetings would allow the City Council more time to consider issues.
 - o Currently, the City Council is often put into a position to make a decision on an issue as delaying a decision one month may have adverse consequences such as missing a submission or approval deadline, causing cost proposals to increase, extending the length of a project, or allowing an issue to become more severe.

- Bi-monthly meetings would provide the City Council opportunity to meet at different times.
 - o For example, the City of Jenkins City Council meets on the 2nd Monday and the 4th Tuesday. Additionally, the City Council could have one meeting time for the 1st meeting of the month and a different meeting time for the 2nd meeting of the month.
- Bi-monthly meetings would allow the City Council to designate certain meetings for certain topics.
 - o For example, the City Council could implement policy that states public hearings will only be conducted during the 1st meeting of the month.

Workshops

When it comes to the future of workshops, the City Council also has options.

- The City Council could continue to schedule workshops to discuss issues as needed or desired.
- The City Council could schedule workshops to take place before each regularly scheduled City Council meeting.
 - o The City of Baxter holds workshops before regular council meetings and the City of Brainerd holds their council committee meetings before their regular meetings.
- The City Council could schedule standing workshops for another day during the month.
 - o The Crow Wing County Board has regular meetings on the 2nd & 4th Tuesday and Committee of the Whole (essentially a workshop) on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council consider moving to bi-monthly meetings beginning February 2024. Additionally, staff recommends that the City Council consider scheduling standing workshops for 5:00pm before each City Council meeting.