



MEMORANDUM

TO: Sandpoint City Council

FROM: Mayor Jeremy Grimm

DATE: February 13, 2026

RE: Council–Staff Communication Policy – Mayor’s Remarks

Councilmembers,

First, I want to acknowledge the intent behind this draft. I believe we all share the same underlying goal: clarity of roles, efficient governance, transparency, and compliance with Idaho law. In that respect, much of this document reflects principles that are already embedded in our adopted form of government.

I appreciate that the draft clearly states that the Council acts only as a body, that individual councilmembers have no independent authority to direct staff, and that day-to-day administration rests with the Mayor and department heads under Idaho Code. Those are important guardrails, and I support reinforcing them.

That said, I would like to raise a few “what if” questions—not as opposition, but as a way to thoughtfully stress-test the policy before adoption. My intent is collaborative: to ensure we strengthen our structure without unintentionally creating ambiguity in how it functions in practice.

1. Direct Communication Without Notice

The policy allows councilmembers to communicate directly with department heads for informational purposes without notice to the Mayor.

In many cases, that is perfectly reasonable. However, what if multiple councilmembers begin contacting a department head about the same policy issue? Even if each conversation is framed as “informational,” it could create a perception—internally or externally—that direction is coming from the legislative majority.

I simply want to ensure that department heads are never placed in a position where they feel they



are balancing expectations between two centers of authority. Under Idaho's strong-mayor structure, administrative alignment is critical. We should consider how to ensure informational communication does not gradually blur that line.

2. Agenda Routing and Staff Workload

The agenda routing provision is thoughtful in that it seeks informed decision-making. I support the idea that Council should understand fiscal and operational implications before deliberation.

My question is more practical and structural.

What if a councilmember submits multiple agenda requests that require substantial staff analysis? Even if advisory, those analyses require real staff time and capacity. Department heads do not operate with surplus bandwidth; they are actively managing ongoing operations, capital projects, personnel matters, regulatory deadlines, infrastructure maintenance, grant compliance requirements, and public safety responsibilities that may not always be visible in a single agenda item.

Under our form of government, only the Mayor has full visibility into all operational priorities occurring simultaneously across departments. At any given moment, staff may be responding to matters that require immediate coordination and focused execution across the organization. In certain situations, the City requires 100% staff availability and alignment.

If staff are placed in a position where they feel drawn between responding to a councilmember's analytical request and executing an executive priority, that becomes an impossible situation. It creates tension, divided accountability, and operational risk. That dynamic cannot function effectively over time.

So the practical question becomes: What is the mechanism for prioritization?

Perhaps we clarify that staff analysis associated with agenda requests will be provided consistent with available resources and subject to executive workload prioritization. That preserves Council's ability to request information while maintaining a clear chain of administrative accountability and ensuring that urgent or citywide priorities are not unintentionally displaced.

My intent in raising this is not to restrict information flow, but to ensure that we do not inadvertently create a structure where staff are navigating competing expectations. Clear



prioritization protects everyone—Council, staff, and the City as a whole.

3. Coordinated Communication for Efficient Use of Resources

In the spirit of efficiency and collaboration, I would suggest that when possible, councilmembers begin by discussing their information needs or policy questions directly with the Mayor. In many cases, I may already have the relevant information or background context available, which could resolve the question quickly without requiring additional staff analysis.

Where additional review is necessary, this approach allows me to more efficiently allocate staff time based on current operational priorities. It also helps ensure that requests are addressed in a way that aligns with ongoing work, budget capacity, and broader citywide objectives.

This suggestion is not intended to limit Council's access to information, but rather to streamline communication, reduce duplication of effort, and protect staff from navigating overlapping requests. Beginning with a conversation at the executive level may often lead to faster answers and more coordinated outcomes.

4. Compliance Language

The draft references potential corrective action for failure to comply. I believe this section would benefit from additional clarification to ensure it aligns fully with Idaho's strong-mayor form of government.

Under our adopted structure, department heads and staff are accountable to the Mayor for supervision, evaluation, and discipline. To avoid unintended ambiguity, we may wish to clarify that this policy governs expectations and conduct but does not alter existing statutory lines of administrative authority.

One possible approach would be to specify that:

- Questions regarding staff compliance with this policy shall be referred to the Mayor for administrative review; and
- Any corrective action involving executive staff remains within the Mayor's authority, consistent with Idaho Code.

Alternatively, if the intent of the compliance section is primarily to guide councilmember conduct, that could be stated explicitly.



The goal here is not to weaken accountability, but to ensure that our enforcement language reflects our form of government and avoids creating uncertainty about supervisory authority. Clear delineation protects both branches and preserves the integrity of our administrative structure.

5. Emergencies

The emergency provision is appropriate. Public safety must always come first.

However, we may wish to clarify that while councilmembers may raise urgent concerns directly, operational control remains with the Mayor or designated authority. This would preserve clarity during high-pressure situations and avoid confusion regarding command structure.

I recognize that much of this draft reinforces existing law and reflects our shared commitment to good governance. My comments are offered in that same spirit — to ensure that as we adopt formal language, it continues to support clear accountability, efficient administration, and a healthy working relationship between the legislative and executive branches.

- The chain of administrative accountability remains clear.
- Department heads are not placed in divided-loyalty situations.
- Staff workload remains appropriately prioritized.
- We avoid even the perception of dual governance channels.

If we can refine these points together, I believe this policy can strengthen—not complicate—our working relationship. I am committed to collaboration. My goal is not to resist structure, but to ensure that structure aligns cleanly with Idaho’s strong-mayor framework and supports efficient administration of the City.

Thank you for the work that went into this draft. I look forward to refining it together.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Grimm
Mayor, City of Sandpoint