



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: November 16, 2020

TO: City Council Members

FROM: Mary Rose Rutikanga, City Administrator

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Preparing City Council Minutes

RECOMMENDATION

Approve transitioning to “Action” or “Brief” summary style for the City Council’s official minutes as outlined in the City Clerks Association of California Guidelines for Preparing City Council Minutes.

DISCUSSION

The City of Sonora has gone almost 2 years without either approved or signed City Council Minutes. The following Government Code(s) require the City to maintain timely and efficient minutes:

- Government Code 40801. The city clerk shall keep an accurate record of the proceeding of the legislative body and the board of equalization in books bearing appropriate titles and devoted exclusively to such purposes, respectively. The books shall have a comprehensive general index.
- Government Code 36814. The council shall cause the clerk to keep a correct record of its proceedings. At the request of a member, the city clerk shall enter the ayes and noes in the journal.
- Government Code 54953(c)(2). The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.
- Government Code 53232.3(d). Members of a legislative body shall provide brief reports on meetings attended at the expense of the local agency at the next regular meeting of the legislative body.

The City Clerks Association of California (CCAC) has published its Guidelines for Preparing Minutes for City Council meetings and has recommended municipalities consider adopting these guidelines that call for either Brief Summary or Action Style minutes. Attached is a chart describing the features and benefits of both Brief Summary and Action Style minutes.

In 2007, the Sonora City Council adopted Resolution No. 03-05-2007-C, Handbook of Rules and Procedures. Chapter Three, Section Q(2) states that the “minutes of the City Council meeting shall be “action minutes”, which includes the motions made, actions taken, and a brief summary of public comments.”

Presently, the City uses “long-form style minutes”, as opposed to Brief summary or Action minutes. Long-form (“verbatim”) minutes provide a very detailed account of the meeting, covering major points, speaker comments (both legislative body and public), and the flow of the discussion. In past years, these types of minutes have served a necessary purpose, since the public had limited access to live streaming, video/audio recordings, and electronic copies of agenda reports and supporting materials.

Today, the majority of the City's public records requests related to legislative body meetings are for recordings, electronic copies of supporting documents, and occasionally minute excerpts. Few requests are received for the official minutes.

Most California cities have transitioned from long-form minutes to either Brief summary or Action minutes as the most efficient, succinct, and cost-effective manner for preparing a record of City Council Action. Auditors, judicial officers, the public, and other stakeholders rely on minutes to accurately reflect the final decisions of the body. Transitioning to Brief summary or Action style minutes removes the ambiguity and misdirection that is unintentionally created by long-form minutes when the flow of the conversation is included in the written record. Additionally, streamlining to Brief summary or Action minutes reduces the amount of staff time spent in minute preparation. Other cities that have made the transition are spending 50 to 75 percent less time in transcribing and preparing minutes. Another cost savings is a reduction in materials (pages, books) used for preserving archival minutes.

In case of someone wishing to review the discussion leading up to the Council's final decision, audio/video recordings of the Council's proceedings, as well as agenda packets are maintained pursuant to the City's records retention policy.

It is recommended that the City Council direct the City Administrator and Deputy City Clerk to transition from long-form style minutes to Brief summary minutes or Action minutes following the CCAC guidelines.

FISCAL IMPACT

Currently staff spend around 4 hours drafting minutes for each City Council meeting. Transition to the CCAC Guidelines to Action or Brief Summary style minutes will reduce staff time related to writing meeting minutes while still maintaining the legal requirements of meeting minutes. Staff will be able to focus time on priority issues facing the City.

ATTACHMENTS

- Features and Benefits of Action and Summary Minutes
- City Clerks Association of California Guidelines for Preparing Minutes
- Handbook of Rules and Procedures