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Date: November 22, 2024

To: Finance Committee

From: Rachelle Blich, Director of Finance

Re: Public Comment Policy

At the September 24, 2024, meeting, the Finance Committee reviewed the Public Comment Policy. During this meeting, a motion was passed to standardize the policy's language across Council and committee meetings, set a three-minute limit for individual public comments, and establish a 30-minute time limit per side for public hearings. The updated policy was subsequently distributed to all committees for review and feedback, with a directive to return the input to the Finance Committee for further evaluation and a recommendation to the Common Council before the end of 2024. Below is a summary of the feedback received from the committees:

Public Works

In short, they really had no comments to make. They like the format, the consistency and the last paragraph on the first page, "The presiding officer, with the.....wishing to speak on the item."

PARC

Asked about the language in public hearing "Per speaker time is the same." Language needs clarification

Allowing someone to speak twice there are times that someone needs to make another comment. Change the card section use may be used instead of shall be use.

Under the expectation of public keep the unruly behavior and speaking out when not recognized, but remove clapping.

Cable TV Commission

During public comment sessions, particularly when addressing a highly debated or sensitive issue, the council could consider taking a vote to extend the public comment period to 45 minutes instead of the standard 30 minutes. Additionally, it was suggested that guidelines be established to ensure appropriate language is used during meetings, especially considering that minors may have access to these discussions.

Community Development Authority (CDA)

Board member Kachel questioned the 3-minute length of time for an individual to speak. Board member Hicks stated the 3-minute rule is hard and fast; the new rule being considered allows for flexibility. Board member Kromholz stated that a time limit ensures that speakers get to the point in a reasonable amount of time. Chairman Marjzak would prefer the allowance for flexibility. Board member Kromholz would like to see comments limited to those individuals

who live in or own property in Whitewater. Board member Hicks objected to requiring an individual to fill out a speaker card in order to speak. Board member Knight was in favor of encouraging more participation from the public.

Police and Fire Commission

- Due to PFC having relatively few public comments, there was a sentiment that filling out comment cards was “overkill.”
- Overall, the sentiment was that the process makes sense for Common Council, but the PFC desired to have the flexibility not to use that system.

Library Board

The board wanted more clarification about time under the Time Limits section where it mentions “3 minutes with a limit of 30 minutes total” and “5 minutes with a limit of 30 minutes”. They weren’t clear what the 30 minutes meant in correlation to the 3 or 5 minutes. Also, how would a person attending the meeting online monitor their time limit when speaking?

Several of the committees/commissions have not met either due to need or lack of quorum including Parks & Recreation, Landmarks, Ethics, and the EOC. The Urban Forestry didn’t have an opinion as they do not have anyone from the public attend their meetings. The Alcohol Licensing Review consists of three council members so it was not discussed during their meeting.