

MEMBERS

Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair
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Councilor William H. Dwight
Councilor Karen Foster



Report of the City Council Rules Select Committee

Summary of Recommendations

The City Council Rules Select Committee was formed pursuant to a resolution adopted by the Northampton City Council on April 15, 2021. Sponsored by Councilor At-Large William H. Dwight, **21.233 A Resolution to Review and Revise the Rules and Committees of the City Council** requested that Council President Gina-Louise Sciarra appoint a select committee made up of three city councilors and two community members to review the Council Rules and Council Committees and present its recommendations to the City Council for deliberation and vote before the end of the current term. The committee was appointed on April 30, 2021 and held 10 virtual meetings by Zoom on June 28, 2021, July 13, 2021, August 5, 2021, August 23, 2021, September 15, 2021, September 29, 2021, October 12, 2021, October 26, 2021, November 9, 2021 and November 23, 2021. The meetings were open to the public and an opportunity for public comment was provided at every meeting.

This document summarizes the recommendations of the select committee resulting from its study of the current rules, as adopted by the 2020-2021 City Council on January 7, 2020. The Rules Committee's recommendations for changes to the council rules are attached as Exhibit A.

The committee considered several issues which did not result in recommended changes to the rules. These are listed in Exhibit A under the subheading, "Changes Considered and Not Agreed to."

REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL NORMS

Additionally, in the process of reviewing the rules, the Rules Committee became aware of numerous 'norms' or common practices of the City Council which have developed over time and are cultural in nature rather than being authorized or required by a specific council rule. An example of this is the practice of the Finance Committee meeting within the regular meeting of the full council rather than meeting separately on a different day as other subcommittees do. Members discussed and debated the advantages and disadvantages of these norms and decided to identify some of them within this report to encourage the council as a body to think critically about them going forward. Exhibit A contains a partial list of these unspoken rules.

Finally, due to time constraints, the committee was not able to have as full a discussion as desirable around some topics. These are listed as 'Topics Recommended for Further Study.'

Respectfully submitted,

City Council Rules Select Committee

By _____

City Councilor Rachel Maiore, Chair

Dated: November 23, 2021

Rules Committee Recommendations:

- Public comment be limited to 90 minutes and two minutes per speaker (July 13, 2021; November 9, 2021).
- Rule 4.8 be modified to add that the city council will take public comment in person or by remote participation as the technology allows (August 5, 2021)
- Rule 4.14.1.4 providing that councilors may not participate remotely more than six times in a calendar year be removed and 'family illness or family caretaking' be added to permissible reasons for remote participation under 4.14.2 (August 5, 2021)
- Not to set a firm end time and to leave the 7 p.m. start time as is with the knowledge that it can be revisited either later by this committee or by the next council (August 5, 2021)
- Remove the Finance Committee from the set agenda (4.5 Order of Business) listed within the council rules (August 23, 2021)
- Financial orders will be introduced at a full City Council meeting and referred to either the consent agenda or the Finance Committee for more granular discussion and recommendation. The Finance Committee will then convene separately outside of the full council meeting and before the next meeting. (As voted September 15, 2021 and restated and clarified at the September 29th meeting)
- Amend Rule 4.5 Order of Business as follows (September 15, 2021):
 - Place public hearings at the beginning of the order of business
 - Combine 'Updates from Council President and Committee Chairs,' 'Recognitions and One-Minute Announcements by Councilors' and 'Communications and Proclamations from the Mayor' into 'Announcements from Councilors and the Mayor' and put immediately after roll call
 - Place resolutions after ordinances
 - Remove recess for Finance Committee
 - Put small subheadings explaining what each of the categories mean on the agenda as published so members of the public and councilors know what each agenda item is
- Substitute the following for existing language in Section 5.5 Matters Requiring Two ~~Votes~~ Readings: "Before a vote on a matter may be held, it must first have been introduced at a prior City Council meeting. Introduction shall include a description of purpose and effects. Council discussion is allowed for questions and clarification." (September 29, 2021)
- Change the title of Section 5.6 to 'Matters requiring one reading' instead of one 'vote' and eliminate administrative orders from the list. The text would read, "The following shall require only one reading of the council. . . (September 29, 2021)
- Delete Rule 2.5.1.6, the rule requiring the Administrative Assistant to obtain two copies of the recording of each meeting (October 12, 2021)
- Amend Rule 2.3.7 (Council President – Duties and Powers) as follows:

2.3.7 To hire the Administrative Assistant to the City Council and to supervise the individual in that position generally, including conducting an annual performance review. The administrative assistant appointment must be ratified by the full City Council. (October 12, 2021 and October 26, 2021)
- Amend Rule 2.5.1.5 (Administrative Assistant to the City Council Duties) to read as follows:

2.5.1.5. To ensure that all documents addressed to the Council shall be provided to each Councilor, and that any documents reviewed during the meeting become part of the permanent public record of Council-that meeting. ~~at which the documents are distributed.~~ (October 12, 2021)
- Amend Rule 2.5.1.2 as follows:

- 2.5.1.2 To provide staff support and recordkeeping to ~~all~~-standing Council committees and select committees as assigned and to assist committees with all aspects of reporting. (October 12, 2021)
- Move Public Comment into the body of the convened meeting after Roll Call (Roll Call>Public Hearings>Public Comment) (November 23, 2021)

Changes Considered and Not Agreed to:

- Limiting overall Public Comment to one hour (July 13, 2021)
- Removing the responsibility of acting as parliamentarian from the Administrative Assistant position (Rule 2.5.1.9) (October 12, 2021 meeting)
- Removing Rule 4.13.2 Votes Required to Pass Measures/Roll Call Votes and the requirement to rotate the order of roll call by alphabetical order so that no one member always votes first. (October 12, 2021)
- Combining City Services and Community Resources (9/15/2021. No vote taken, but consensus reached to leave two committees 'as is.')
- Change to membership and definition of Youth Commission to make sure it meets the robust legal requirements for a committee sponsoring/initiating legislation. This was agreed to be outside of the purview of the Rules Committee. (September 29, 2021)
- 2.6.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES. All committees are required to have 4 members, **reduce committee membership to 3 members**-odd numbers better to voting
- 3.1.1 SELECTION OF AN OUTSIDE AUDITOR. **Currently Select Committee is set up to recommend. Eliminate this and give responsibility to Finance.** Are multiyear contracts allowed? Language is silent, but infers it is to be done yearly.
- 4.13.2 VOTES REQUIRED TO PASS MEASURES
Eliminate requirement for roll calls in subsections 1,2,3 except as required by statute. The Presiding Officer can currently call for roll calls at its discretion. Use of raised hand or voice votes also at discretion of P.O.
- 5.1.5 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS. This is an example of unnecessary instruction. A requirement that information be presented in a clear manner doesn't ensure that it is! **Eliminate this.**

EXHIBIT A

[An outline summarizing the committee's 'Reflections on City Council Norms' drafted by Councilor Foster is to be presented for acceptance at the time of presentation of the final report.]

Topics Recommended for Further Study:

- Committee Structure and Purpose
- Policy for Onboarding New Councilors
- Youth Commission Structure and Purpose
- Compensation for Elected Officials