

Subject: Creating Efficiency through City Council ‘Study Sessions’

PROPOSAL

The Council will hold two study sessions (and remove the work session¹) and two business meetings each month thus eliminating standing committee meetings, except for Finance. The study sessions would and the business meetings would alternate with each other.

How is a City Council study session different than a business meeting?

A study session is a public meeting in which information is presented or discussed, but no vote takes place. A business meeting is a “regular” public meeting in which votes may be taken on specific items. Both types of meetings are open to the public and are based on agendas published in advance.

What is the purpose of having study¹ sessions?

The purpose of study sessions is to learn about and discuss issues without needing to vote on them in the same meeting. The study session fosters:

- More opportunities for reflection, questions, and dialogue
- Consideration of most issues at two public meetings rather than one—the first, a study session; the second, a business meeting (at which a study item may be voted on)
- An opportunity for all Council members and public to hear information, compared to typical committee meetings (which cannot have a quorum of Council members)
- More time to think about complex issues before taking a vote on them
- More productive and efficient business meetings because most items will already have been studied.

Would one study session a month (rather than two sessions a month) be adequate?

The City Council has many issues that need time for discussion and reflection. One study session a month does not seem adequate for the number and types of issues that the Council addresses. In addition, having only one study session puts more pressure on that single session to meet all the needs. After it is over, four more weeks go by before another study session is held.

Do other cities hold two or more regular study (or work) sessions each month?

Yes. Examples include Shoreline, Lynnwood, Mountlake Terrace, and Bremerton.

¹ Sometimes the terms “study session” and “work session” are used interchangeably. However, the term “study session” is proposed at this time to indicate as clearly as possible that this type of public meeting would be for study and discussion purposes, not working to take a particular action.

Why alternate study sessions with business meetings?

An alternating schedule allows a business meeting to take place a week after each study session. When only a week has gone by, the issue is still fresh enough to not need all the information repeated and to be able to reach a decision on most issues. In addition, it would allow City Council members to get information about upcoming business items sooner, so members have more time to be fully informed before a decision needs to be made.

Are study sessions only for items that will be voted on at the next business meeting (or another near-term meeting)?

Study sessions are for any topic that is placed on the agenda, whether or not it needs future City action. While the major focus is on items that may be voted on at a later business meeting, additional agenda items can be scheduled—for example, a topic that's of general interest but not necessarily expected for City action.

Are only two regular business meetings a month enough?

Many cities find that two regular business meetings a month are enough for taking action on City business. Such meetings can be efficient because the key agenda topics have been preceded by a study session. Of course, this approach requires advance planning on the part of staff so that non-routine topics can be scheduled for a study session plus a business meeting (if needed) to take action.

Could some agenda items only be on a business session and not a study session?

Yes, under this proposal, topics that are non-controversial—for example, recognition of an outstanding citizen—or simple or routine in nature—such as an item on the Consent Calendar—can be handled in a business meeting without a prior study session.

Why not keep all existing City Council committees?

Existing committees generally function to: (a) determine whether an item should be on the Consent Calendar of the regular agenda of a meeting; and (b) provide additional information about subjects that will move forward to the City Council as a whole. If study sessions are instituted to provide information on various topics to the whole Council, existing committees (other than Finance for some items) are not needed. Such meetings can therefore be eliminated, helping the City Council's information and decision process be more efficient and open to all Council members.

Without standing committees for most subjects, who would decide which items should go on a business meeting's Consent Calendar?

The Council President and Council President Pro Tem would decide whether to place an item on the Consent Agenda, using the following basic criteria:

- The item is routine in nature
- The item is simple and non-controversial
- The item has no unbudgeted financial impact
- The item has already been approved in the budget process; or
- The City Council provided direction at a previous meeting to put the item on Consent.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that ANY Council member could PULL an item from the Consent Calendar if she/he did not think it met the criteria or otherwise wanted separate consideration of the item.

What would happen with City Council committee meetings under the above proposal?

With the exception of Finance which will meet 30 minutes before the Study Session, standing committees would not be needed. Instead, information that is now presented at committee meetings would be presented to the City Council as a whole during study sessions. This allows all Council members to hear about and discuss items of interest, rather than just the two Council members who comprise each committee.

Under the proposal, if the Council finance committee remained, what would its duties be?

- Review of expenditure payments, if necessary
- Review of Public Facility District quarterly reports
- Financial policy development
- Financial forecasting and budget forecasting

Who would be on the finance committee?

Under this proposal, the Council’s finance committee would consist of 3 members: the Council President plus two other members chosen by the Council President (Finance Committee selection as it is today). The Council President can appoint a Finance Chair, if desired. Each Council President selected each year, will have the opportunity to select the willing Council members to serve on the finance committee.

Would eliminating or reducing committees mean that City Council members have less knowledge of issues (“less touch”)?

No, because the study sessions would allow all members, not just committee members, to learn about and discuss issues.

What if there’s an “emergency” need for the Council to take action during a week in which no regular business meeting is scheduled?

If something urgent and time-sensitive arose, an action item for it could still be placed on a study session agenda, unless the Edmonds Municipal Code is amended to preclude doing so. Alternatively “emergency business” could be handled by scheduling a special meeting for the emergency item. . Most cities have found that such actions are rarely needed.

What is the meeting schedule of other nearby cities?

City Council Meeting Schedule for Nearby Cities

<u>City</u>	<u>Business Meetings</u>	<u>Work or study sessions</u>	<u>Standing Committees</u>
Shoreline	Each Monday	Each Monday, following business items	None
Mukilteo	1 st & 3 rd Mondays	2 nd Mondays + as needed	Finance; Econ. Dev.
Lynnwood	2 nd & 4 th Mondays	1 st & 3 rd Mondays + 3 rd Wednesdays	Finance (monthly)
Mountlake T.	1 st & 3 rd Mondays	Thursday ahead of each business meeting	Finance (monthly)

Should the two study sessions start at 6 pm or 7 pm?

Either way can work. However, under this proposal, 7 pm would be the start time for study sessions as the Finance Committee would meet at 6:30.

What about room set-up?

Room set-up and logistics is important. Often, cities hold study sessions in a different format than business meetings. Instead of sitting at the dais, where Council members line up in a row facing the audience, at a study session, Council members typically sit around a table facing each other. In the Edmonds Council Chambers, one or more tables could be set up in the space below the dais (where the PPP Committee has been sitting) unless a different room is determined to be better suited to the meetings.

Would the study sessions be recorded?

Yes. They would be televised and available to the public, just as business meetings are (unless the City Council chooses a different means of recording).

What about executive sessions?

Executive sessions, when needed, would start at 6 pm ahead of any business meeting. Executive sessions would not normally be scheduled on the same evening as a study session. However, for the occasional circumstance when an executive session might be needed at a different time than before a regular business meeting, it could be specifically noticed and held, consistent with the Open Public Meetings Act, in conjunction with a study session or a special meeting.

Some have asked about the use of a “3-touch” rule?

Most cities don't require 3 meetings on a topic. However, Shoreline's rules of procedure (different than the municipal code) require 3 opportunities for Council information when *ordinances* are considered—except under certain conditions, such as when the Planning Commission has already had a public hearing on the matter or when the ordinance focuses on a routine topic. In Shoreline, the first information opportunity or “touch” is an ordinance topic being placed on the extended agenda (usually 2 weeks ahead of the meeting at which action will occur). The second opportunity is a work session. The third opportunity is a public hearing or other public meeting. Note: these 3 opportunities (i.e., advance agenda listing plus two meetings) don't apply to resolutions, contract approvals, etc.

The same three opportunities to address significant actions are common practice in other jurisdictions, such as Mukilteo, Mountlake Terrace, and Lynnwood, but are not specifically required. In all Washington jurisdictions, routine business may proceed with only one meeting and such business may be placed on either the Consent Calendar or the regular calendar.

Would the City's municipal code need amending to put this proposal into effect?

Yes, at least a minor amendment is likely to be needed, depending on the extent of the changes to be considered relative to the existing code. Based on direction from the City Council about the intended meeting format, an ordinance could be drafted to amend the municipal code consistent with the proposal, state statutes, etc. *[Note: Just as now, not every detail of the Council's meeting format needs to be in the Municipal Code. Some details can be handled*

through common practices and consensus or, if preferred, they can be adopted separately as rules of procedure.]

What does our existing City Code say about the City Council’s meeting schedule?

The existing City Code (ECC 1.04.010) calls for regular meetings each Tuesday of the month, with “work meetings” being each second and fourth Tuesday, as cited below. “Work meetings” is not a defined term, except that the code indicates such meetings must not include required public hearings unless appropriate advance notice is given. ECC 1.04.010 states:

Regular meetings of the city council shall be held on each Tuesday of every month throughout the year in the Council Chambers, Public Safety Complex, at 7:00 p.m. The second and fourth Tuesdays of every month are hereby designated as work meetings, and the city council shall not hold any public hearings for which notice is required to be given by state law or ordinance of the city unless special notice of the same is posted as provided in ECC [1.03.020](#). Council meetings shall adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on the day initiated unless such adjournment is extended by an affirmative vote of a majority of the council as a whole plus one. In the event state law requires an adoption of an ordinance or other action on other than a Tuesday, such as budget hearings, said dates are hereby declared to be additional regular meeting dates upon which date the action, ordinance, resolution or hearing may be taken and/or adopted. Committee meetings of the council shall be held in conjunction with work meetings of the council at such times and in accordance with such procedures as the council and its respective committees shall establish. The 10:00 p.m. adjournment deadline set by this section shall apply only to meetings of the council as a whole and shall not affect the ability of any council subcommittee to meet after such time when so scheduled by the chair or of the subcommittee.

What key details should be considered for drafting an ordinance or deciding Council policy/procedure?

- Whether the study sessions should be on the first and third Tuesdays or the second and fourth Tuesdays
- Whether the study sessions should start at 7 pm
- Whether all standing committees except the finance committee should be eliminated
- The nature of the finance committee’s specific duties
- The use of the consent agenda

To move the proposal forward, what steps are needed?

The next step would be for the City Council to provide any direction on key details of the proposal so that an ordinance can be drafted and brought back to the City Council.

What is the recommendation of the Administration?

For the City Council to direct that an ordinance implementing this proposal be drafted and brought back in a timely manner for City Council review and action.