



**AGENDA
CITY OF CEDAR FALLS, IOWA
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2020
5:15 PM AT CITY HALL**

The meeting will ALSO be accessible via video conference and the public may access/observe the meeting in the following ways:

- a) By dialing the phone number +13126266799 or +19292056099 or +12532158782 or +13017158592 or +13462487799 or +16699006833 and when prompted, enter the meeting ID (access code) 962 7287 1738.
- b) iPhone one-tap: +13126266799,,96272871738# or +19292056099,,96272871738#
- c) Join via smartphone or computer using this link: <https://zoom.us/j/96272871738>.

Call to Order by the Mayor

- 1. City Council Goal Setting Format.

Adjournment



MAYOR ROBERT M. GREEN

CITY OF CEDAR FALLS, IOWA

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FROM: Mayor Robert M. Green
TO: City Council
DATE: July 28, 2020
SUBJECT: FY22 Council Goal Setting - Proposed Process Improvements for Consideration

REF: (a) Code of Ordinances, City of Cedar Falls §2-216: City Council Policy Guidance
(b) Iowa Code Chapter 21: Open Meetings
(c) FY21 City Council Goals, Part I.C.7.d – Local Governance Objectives.

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.** This memo proposes eight process improvements to the Cedar Falls City Council Goal Setting process. These are:

1. Adopt an after-interview survey to determine council interest in various initiatives.
2. Provide detailed agendas for four distinct work sessions.
3. Use the draft City Council Goals document as the discussion framework.
4. Reduce the number of Council Goals from seven to five.
5. Move the Short Term Financial Plan to a separate annex.
6. Convert appropriate lists and data to tables for readability.
7. Cite and link to external references.
8. Eliminate jargon and acronyms whenever possible to appeal to a resident audience.

I am sending this memo to you after receiving helpful advice and suggestions from the City Administrator and the Director of Finance and Business Operations, and am confident that these changes will not add appreciably to staff workload.

2. **TIMELINE.** These and other Council-driven process suggestions will be considered in a Council Goal Setting Process Work Session slated for August 17, 2020. If the Council does not object to the proposed changes, I will incorporate them into the FY22 Goal Setting cycle in the Fall of 2020.

3. **BACKGROUND.** Each year, the City Council meets in a Goal Setting Work Session over two days. This dialogue and consensus is vital for the effort to “annually adopt broad goals, objectives and program performance measures to guide the city administrator in the development of an annual operating budget, capital improvements program and administration of city projects and programs” (Reference (a)). The current overall approach is sound, yet also open to continuous improvement. As a city-led process, no state, county or federal requirements exist for this process, giving the City Council and Mayor great latitude in making modifications to the system.

4. PROPOSED WORK SESSION IMPROVEMENTS.

a. *Adopt a Post-Interview Survey to Determine Council Interest in Various Initiatives*

- 1) ***Current State:*** In the weeks preceding the Goal Setting Work Session, hired consultants solicit topics and concerns from Council Members. These topics are then listed on a worksheet at the meeting, in an order determined by the consultants. If only one council member wishes to discuss a given topic, then that person must ‘pitch’ that idea to the rest of council, typically leading to awkward silence or dismissal.
- 2) ***Proposed Improvement:*** After interviewing the Council Members individually, but prior to the Goal Setting Work Session, proposed discussion topics / initiatives should be sent as a simple follow-up survey to Council Members. It would employ a Likert-scale (1 to 3) for each item, from “*No desire to discuss*” to “*Neutral*” to “*Strong desire to discuss*”. Using this approach, the facilitator can easily cull out the items which are very unlikely to gain any traction for discussion.

b. *Provide Detailed Agendas for Four Distinct Work Sessions.*

- 1) ***Current State:*** A single generic agenda is posted for one Work Session that covers two evenings. This approach hinders the City’s ability to adequately meet the spirit of the Iowa Open Meetings Law (Reference (b)), which requires that “*the basis and rationale of governmental decisions, as well as those decisions themselves, are easily accessible to the people.*” This is especially relevant since Work Sessions are normally not recorded or broadcast to the public through other means. A resident cannot reasonably be expected to attend all eight hours of the single Work Session in order to be present when a topic of interest is discussed.
- 2) ***Proposed Improvement:*** Four separate two-hour Work Sessions would be conducted over the course of two nights. Each Work Session would have its own agenda of topics to discuss. A half-hour dinner break would separate the two work sessions on each night. Each work session will be limited to the topics contained in that session’s agenda; if any items cannot be covered adequately within the timeframe, then a follow-on Work Session would be scheduled and devoted to consensus-building on that topic. This would improve the public’s ability to observe the deliberative process as required by reference (b). This new approach would also provide more structure, and time-budgeting for each session, so that topics receive the necessary deliberation for informed consensus. Controversial topics could be reserved for the later work session on each night, in the event that the appointed time “runs over” and Council Members are amenable to staying late.

c. Use the Draft City Council Goals Document as the Discussion Framework.

- 1) **Current State:** The facilitators use an informal bulleted worksheet as the ‘agenda’ for the Work Session. As a result, most items in the draft Council Goals document are not considered at all, and are later approved without scrutiny. As such, a marked disconnect exists between the Goal Setting Work Session and the draft Council Goals.
- 2) **Proposed Improvement:** The actual draft Council Goals document would be used as the discussion framework for each Work Session. At each Work Session (organized by Council Goals), the Council Members would first review the text within the applicable Council Goal.. The Council would address any new items which council members noted an interest in, using the questionnaire described in paragraph 3.a. 2) above. This approach would help the Council discussion to remain focused and productive, as well as to ensure that each Council Member has an understanding of the contents of the draft Council Goals.

5. PROPOSED COUNCIL GOALS DOCUMENT IMPROVEMENTS.

a. Reduce the Number of Council Goals.

- 1) **Current State:** The Council Goals document currently contains seven stated organizational goals. They are:
 - Goal 1: Continue to provide a representative system, which identifies and anticipates concerns, problems, and opportunities, which are effectively addressed with thoughtful and decisive governmental actions.
 - Goal 2: Maintain and improve effective communications and marketing programs for the citizens of Cedar Falls.
 - Goal 3: Deliver public services in a cost-effective, efficient, professional, and timely manner.
 - Goal 4: Equitably allocate the community’s resources in a manner which cost-effectively accomplishes the city’s mission
 - Goal 5: Preserve the community’s physical, human, and aesthetic assets by assuring that “Quality of Life” services are available for the leisure, educational, cultural, and personal enrichment of residents.
 - Goal 6: Create an environment conducive to economic development.
 - Goal 7: Select, train, motivate and retain highly qualified employees who represent the city in a professional manner.

The wordiness and number of these goals do not lend themselves to easy memorization or communication to the public; the length of the text is more appropriate for specific objectives or strategies.

- 2) ***Proposed Improvement:*** If we simplify the annual Council Goals, our communication efforts with the public will be eased, and each goal will be more memorable and relatable. The Council’s existing seven goals can easily be incorporated into one of five subject areas:

- Goal 1: Deliver Responsive Local Government (Previously Goal 1)
- Goal 2: Ensure Governmental Efficiency and Effectiveness (Previously Goal 2, 3, and 4)
- Goal 3: Promote Economic Development (Previously Goal 6)
- Goal 4: Enhance Quality of Life (Previously Goal 5)
- Goal 5: Foster Organizational Development (Previously Goal 7)

If the Council desires, the new goals could be further amplified and defined, such as:

“Goal 1: Deliver Responsive Local Government – Continue to provide a representative system which identifies and anticipates concerns, problems, and opportunities, which are effectively addressed with thoughtful and decisive governmental actions.”

b. ***Move the Short Term Financial Plan to a Separate Annex.***

- 1) ***Current State:*** The financial planning text is contained in Goal 4. This text adds significantly to the Council Goals document length of 31 pages. While this annual guidance is very important to staff, it is largely not relevant or useful to the average resident who wishes to know the government’s plan for the upcoming year.
- 2) ***Proposed Improvement:*** For better readability and organization, I propose moving all of the Financial Plan related content to an annex called “Short Term Financial Plan” at the end of the Council Goals document, and then to simply refer to it in the Council Goals as “Follow the approved Short Term Financial Plan (Annex A)”.

c. ***Convert Appropriate Lists and Data to Tables for Readability.***

- 1) ***Current State:*** All of the content in the Council Goals document is in bulleted list format. In the past year, an alphanumerical outline has been added, enabling better referencing of individual list items. Despite this, some content consisting of tabular data is not well-served by remaining in bulleted list form.

- 2) **Proposed Improvement:** Some content within the document would be well-served as data tables. For instance, the Cash Reserves Plan (IV.A.7), (Revenue Plan (IV.A.8), Expenditure Plan (IV.A.9) and Debt Service Plan (IV.A.10) text is inherently columnar (Title / Purpose / Criteria). This would improve readability, provide some helpful visual variety to the document structure, and likely also reduce the page count.

d. **Cite and Link to External References.**

- 1) **Current State:** Though the Council Goals document refers to several external documents (Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map, Capital Improvement Plan, Community Wide Strategic Plan, Northern Cedar Falls Development Master Plan), it provides no guidance for how to find or access these publications.
- 2) **Proposed Improvement:** All reports and documents noted in the Council Goals document should be cited (perhaps as footnotes) along with web links for downloading/viewing PDF versions of those reports. This will help Council Members and residents better understand the context of the goal, objective or policy, if desired.

e. **Eliminate Jargon and Acronyms Whenever Possible to Appeal to a Resident Audience.**

- 1) **Current State:** The Goal Setting document contains many acronyms and technical terms. Sometimes these acronyms and technical terms are defined or spelled out, but often the reader is expected to already be aware of their meaning. As a result, casual readers may be intimidated by the language and unable to understand what the goals, objectives, and policies entail.
- 2) **Proposed Improvement:** The Goal Setting Document text should be simplified whenever possible. With few exceptions (such as “UNI”), acronyms such as CFU, CJIS, CDBG, MET, RUT, and LOST should be spelled out for readability and comprehension. Simple, non-technical language should also be used to help residents better understand these goals, objectives, policies and plans.

6. **NEXT STEPS.** On August 17, 2020, I will arrange a ‘Council Goal Setting Changes Work Session’ as directed by Reference (c) to discuss these proposed changes with the City Council. Other process improvement ideas are welcome, either before or at the work session.
7. **FINAL NOTES.** In proposing these changes, I have great respect for those who have brought us this far in building an effective goal-setting process for our City Council. We do stand on the shoulders of giants, and have the advantage of experience in being able to propose helpful enhancements to their well-designed Council Goal Setting process. Building on that success will allow Cedar Falls to remain a model for collaborative and deliberative decision-making.

xc: City Administrator
City Clerk

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