



# TOWN OF FAIRFAX

## STAFF REPORT

### July 1, 2020

**TO:** Mayor and Town Council

**FROM:** Garrett Toy, Town Manager

**SUBJECT:** Discuss the concept of holding two regular Council meetings per month and schedule a special Council meeting for further discussion

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#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Discuss the concept of holding two regular Council meetings per month and schedule a special Council meeting for further discussion.

#### **BACKGROUND**

During the May 15<sup>th</sup> budget workshop, the Council discussed the concept of holding two regular Council meetings per month. At its June 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council requested staff to analyze the cost of conducting two regular Council meetings per month.

In order to better understand the need, we thought it would be helpful to provide the data below pertaining to Council meetings.

#### **March 2019- March 2020**

Number of Council regular/special meetings: 16 meetings (avg. 1.3 meetings/month)  
Average meeting length: 5.5 hrs.

#### **April 15 to July 1, 2020**

4/15 Special Council meeting (replaced canceled regular 4/1 meeting)  
4/21 Special Council Closed Session  
5/1 Regular Council meeting  
5/15 Council budget workshop  
5/20 Special Council closed session  
5/27 Council Outdoor public space forum  
6/3 Regular Council meeting  
6/17 Special Council meeting (budget hearing)  
7/1 Regular Council meeting

Over an 11-week period, there have been 5 regular/special Council meetings, 2 closed sessions, and 2 workshops/forums. If you only count the regular/special meetings and

workshop forums, the Council has held 7 meetings which is a meeting approximately every 1.5 weeks (11 weeks/7 meetings). Attached are meeting statistics compiled by the Town Clerk.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff believes the concept of two meeting per month should be discussed at a special or future Council meeting. With the potential formation of two new Town Committees, it is highly likely the Council will be scheduling more special meetings over the next several months. These special Council meetings would probably affect the implementation of a second regular meeting per month. We recommend the Council discuss the matter of two regular meetings per month at its mid-year budget review scheduled for the fall (October) because we will have a better idea of the financial position of the Town and data on the special meetings to date.

Below are several key policy/questions for the Council to discuss regarding a second regular meeting. The list is not intended to be comprehensive, but it is meant to show the issue does require more in-depth discussions.

- What is the purpose of two meetings per month?
  - To get to public hearing/regular items earlier in the agenda.
  - Allow for more discussions of consent calendar items
  - What is the optimal time for discussions (e.g., 7:00pm to 10:00pm)?
  - Is it ok to only discuss 1-2 matters per meeting?
- Start the meetings earlier?
- When to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting (e.g., 3<sup>rd</sup> Wed)?
  - There are regular conflicts with other meetings on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month.
- In lieu of scheduling special meetings, would the Council just rely on the 2<sup>nd</sup> regular meeting?
  - There will still be the need for a few special meetings such as the Council retreat and budget workshop, but this could eliminate the need for others.
- If the Council is already meeting twice a month, maybe it should just schedule a regular meeting.
- Should the agendas for the first or second meeting be limited only to specific items (e.g. no planning items on second meeting if the Planning Commission meets the next evening)?
- Impact to available staff resources.
- Understanding that meeting twice per month will not make the meetings shorter.
  - On the contrary, our experience is that the combined time of two meetings will far exceed the time spent in one meeting.

The Council discusses the concern of how to get to items of significant public interest earlier in the meeting every year at its retreat. The Council has discussed moving the consent calendar and “open time” to different portions of the agenda. However, when the Council suggested the idea, the public responded that they wanted open time at the beginning of the agenda. From April 2019 to March 2020, “Open time” for items not on the agenda took an average of 22 minutes, with a median time of 20 minutes.

If you combine the time for “Open Time” to the time for announcements/protocols and consent calendar, the Council generally does not get to the public hearings/regular agenda until approximately 8:00pm (+/- 15 mins.). If the optimal time is to complete discussions on matters of community interest by 10:00pm every meeting, the Council would probably only be able to have 1-2 such items for discussion every meeting. We usually have a minimum of two items per meeting requiring significant Council discussion.

Below is a brief analysis of the key issues/concepts that the Council should consider at a future meeting.

#### Direct Cost

The out-of-pocket costs to conduct a second regular Council meeting a month are:

- Town Attorney to attend (\$225/hr.)
- CMCM to broadcast/live stream the meeting (\$100/hour).
- Contractual clerk to prepare the minutes (\$40/hour)
- Estimated combined approx. hourly costs- \$375/hr.

The incremental costs are the combined hours for two meetings versus one meeting. For example, if two meetings are a combined 10 hours and one meeting is 6 hours, the incremental cost is for 4 hours of out-of-pocket costs. There are obviously more costs involved such as meeting preparation time required by the Town Attorney and CMCM, but we simplified the hourly costs for the sake of discussion.

It is difficult to estimate these costs, but let’s assume additional costs ranging between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year. The estimate does not include any staff costs to attend the meeting. Management staff do not receive any additional compensation for attending evening meetings. However, part-time staff are paid hourly to attend Council meeting, but usually we try to adjust their work schedules so there are no additional costs to the Town.

## Indirect Cost

The primary impact of 2 meetings a month is the staff time to prepare the agenda which includes the staff reports and associated materials. The production of the packet, which includes the printing, scanning, and on-line posting, is a minor part of the agenda process. We estimate it takes between 3-5 hours to produce the packet, depending on its size.

Most of the staff reports are prepared by the Town Manager (TM), Assistant to the TM/Town Clerk, and Planning staff. The Town Manager and Town Clerk review and edit all staff reports. In general, the Town Manager prepares or, is intimately involved with, the staff reports regarding complex or potentially controversial matters. On the average, the TM writes between 30% to 50% of the staff reports for any regular Council agenda. It is also important to remember the time it takes for preparing staff presentations and answering Council questions prior to the meeting. For the special meetings, the TM probably writes a high percentage of the staff reports. From April 2019 to March 2020, there were a total of 219 agenda items (avg. 18 per meeting).

With the past special meetings, the challenges of COVID-19, and the programs developed in response to COVID-19, it has become clear that staff does not have the bandwidth or resources to continue have Council meetings every other week. For example, the Assistant to the TM/Town Clerk has been spending a significant amount of time in preparing the agendas and preparing for and conducting remote meetings. This has resulted in her putting aside her other task/assignments. The TM has put on hold almost all public works capital projects because of other pressing priorities and the time needed to prepare meeting materials.

To create more bandwidth will require the hiring of more professional staff, rather than administrative support. However, if the administrative staff is also intended to support Town committees, that is a different consideration that would be best discussed during the mid-year budget review. The hiring of Public Works Director/Town engineer would significantly free up the time of the Town Manager who also serves as the Public Works Director. The estimated net costs would be a minimum of \$100,000 per year. The net cost assumes that a portion of the outside project management and engineering costs could be shifted to the Public Works Director. However, given the projected shortfall in General Fund revenues, it would not be ideal to add such a significant cost to the FY20-21 budget. However, it can and should be discussed during the mid-year review. Please note that every budget year, the Council discusses this issue during its budget workshop. The irony is that since the Council has not filled this position for quite some time, the Town has been able to build its operating reserves up in the event of such a downturn in the economy. While a Public Works Director would help the Town Manager, it would only provide minimal support to other staff working on the agenda packets.

Again, it is difficult to assess the impact on staff because managers do not receive overtime for attending evening meetings. However, additional evening meetings will take a toll on all staff involved, we just can't quantify it.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

To be determined

**ATTACHMENT**

Town Clerk meeting statistics