

FOR INCLUSION IN THE PUBLIC RECORD - December 15 City Council Meeting

2. Consent Calendar Items: a. **Approval of Minutes**

Dear Mayor Kate and Council Members

Ken Dickinson, San Rafael Meadows

Thank you for your recent letter and for explaining your reasoning behind the current public comment structure. I respectfully and ^{wholeheartedly} ~~strongly~~ disagree. The current approach prioritizes efficiency over what best practices show is essential to meaningful democratic participation.

Across California — and especially here in Marin and Sonoma counties — many cities place non-agenda public comment at the **beginning** of meetings. Sausalito, Mill Valley, Tiburon, San Anselmo, Fairfax, Novato, Sonoma, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Healdsburg, Cloverdale, and the County of Marin all do this. Some allow up to 30 minutes at the start, with additional comment later if needed.

This is a widely recognized best practice, adopted not because cities must, but because experience shows it improves access, equity, and the quality of deliberation.

Public comment serves a role that emails or private conversations cannot replace. It is public, collective, and on the record. It allows residents to hear one another and raise shared concerns in the same forum where policy direction is discussed. When non-agenda comment is pushed to the end of meetings, participation predictably declines among people with limited time, family responsibilities, or long commutes. This has a chilling effect on public participation.

Structure sends signals. When public voice comes first, it communicates that community concerns are foundational to the Council's work. It also strengthens decision-making by providing context before positions harden.

You and the Council report to the electorate. Public participation is not an obstacle to good governance — it is one of its clearest measures.

I respectfully request, for the second time, that non-agenda public comment be moved back to the beginning of the agenda, where it was prior to October 2, 2023

Thank you. Ken Dickinson, San Rafael Meadows