



City of Yakima

Community Integration Committee

ATTN: Yakima City Council

FROM: Community Integration Committee

DATE: September 9th, 2019

SUBJECT: Yakima City Hall Council Meeting Equity and Community Integration Plan

INTRODUCTION: In late 2017 the Yakima City Council voted to form a Community Integration Committee with the purpose of assisting the City of Yakima in improving the areas of equity and community integration. The Community Integration Committee (CIC) was appointed by the Yakima City Council by ordinance. In response to requests from the City Council to be proactive, The CIC has taken note of opportunities to enhance the environment of Yakima City Hall during council meetings with the hopes of making council meetings better attended by the public, and more inclusive of the diverse communities that reside in Yakima. The CIC has done research and has brainstormed ideas for best practices for facilitating community meetings, and we wish to submit the following recommendations for consideration. Please note that the present document is a draft and is intended to be a working document that may be subject to edits.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A. The CIC recommends setting up a table outside of the door of the Council Chambers for members of the public to pick up informational materials, sign up to testify, etc. This table could contain useful materials to help educate the community about City resources, and could be offered in English and Spanish.
- B. Council could consider giving the physical inside of City Hall (council chamber included) a make over. This could include decorative furniture, rotating art work done by local artists, and more intimate lighting. The CIC understands that the purpose of council meetings is to conduct official city business, but the environment could be made to be more welcoming to the public and illustrate the identity of our city. By creating a personable environment it makes for an inclusive atmosphere and also sends a message about the type of civility that is expected when people come to City Hall. A

few minor enhancements could give City Hall a nuance specific to the culture and history of Yakima.

- C. The Council could explore the possibility of hosting celebrations and performances at City Hall during council meetings. This may include piggy backing on already existing proclamations that are being presented to community members or as pre gavel items. Some cities celebrate poetry slams, live musical performances, dances, and other cultural activities that are symbolic of the local communities they represent. This brings people to City Hall and makes everyone feel connected to the community. Such events may happen during and outside of City Council Meetings.
- D. The CIC recommends that the Mayor open up each council meeting by welcoming the community to City Hall, encouraging public testimony, and explaining expectations and rules of decorum in the council chambers. The CIC has researched best practices for this and would be happy to assist the Mayor.
- E. The CIC recommends that the Mayor welcome and encourage public testimony on each agenda item throughout the entirety of each meeting, yet also use careful discretion of the 3-2-1 minute duration. The Mayor could show leniency toward anyone who may have failed to sign up to testify in advance, by allowing those community members to speak, and educating them on the sign-up process. The CIC also recommends that the Spanish/English interpreter for City Council be required to stay at least one hour for each City Council meeting.
- F. Council members could remain in their seats during public testimony. The CIC understands that council meetings can be long and it is sometimes necessary for council members to momentarily excuse themselves. The CIC encourages the council to use extreme discretion and, if possible, only leave during opportune moments that won't come across negatively from the perspective of the public.
- G. Council members could behave more professionally at all times, particularly during the council meetings. The CIC understands that the council chamber is a political environment and there are times when emotions run high. However, the CIC also recognizes the council members as official stewards of the democratic process. Council members have an obligation to uphold the highest level of composure and professionalism. Should these standards become compromised by the council members, then the entire democratic process is at risk of becoming undermined, and the results could be catastrophic. There are specific behaviors the CIC has observed over the last year from council members that we find questionable and could be improved upon. They include but are not limited to: making inappropriate reactionary facial expressions, rolling of the eyes, multiple conversations happening at once, sarcastic comments, making physical gestures or using a tone of voice that is unwelcome by the public. The CIC has recommendations on how to improve these behaviors. Some of our suggestions involve using methods of behavior modifications that can be process oriented, behavior

specific, and awareness/mindfulness based. This will include potential group trainings as well as self-awareness practice techniques.

- H. The Mayor could use discretion when using the gavel to regain order in the council chambers during moments of interruption. The CIC understands that certain meetings become emotional. The Mayor, acting as a good facilitator, could be more sensitive to the temperature in the room at all times. If the gavel is overused it could come across as condescending or insensitive to the feelings that some community members may be feeling. The CIC asks the Mayor to be cognizant of these times and use soft voice reminders of the expectations of the council chambers more so than using the gavel, whenever possible.
- I. The council members could be responsive to community members who make specific asks during public testimony. Council members could hand out business cards, or let the speaker know that his/her comments have been heard and that you would like to follow up. This could make the community members who speak feel validated and it could make others who are afraid to speak more likely to speak. The Council Liaison (see Recommendation K) could assist in this process.
- J. The City Council could consider the role of the uniformed police officer in the council chambers. The CIC understands the importance of public safety at all times. However, we also understand that a uniformed police officer may inadvertently have an impact on perception among community members simply by wearing a uniform and carrying a firearm. Thus, we recommend the following ideas for consideration:
 - 1. If the Council continues utilizing a uniformed police officer then the City and the Yakima Police Department could consider this position as a community policing opportunity. The position could be delegated to an officer who is friendly, outgoing, and has good social skills and will interact with everyone at City Hall in a positive way (much of this is already happening).
 - 2. There could also be a conversation about the physical positioning of the uniformed officer while in the council chambers. The current arrangement, while important from the standpoint of police tactics, may nevertheless come across as intimidating by community members wishing to speak, and influence the public testimony portion of the meeting.
 - 3. The Council could consider delegating this role to retired police officers who will fill in wearing civilian clothes. By doing so, this may free up an officer who could be better utilized out on patrol, as well as create an opportunity to honor our retired officers who may want to continue giving back to the community during retirement.
 - 4. The Council could consider utilizing the "Council Liaison" (See Recommendation K) to perform some of the basic administrative duties currently being conducted by the uniformed police officer.
- K. The CIC recommends the creation of an internship position within the City for an official "Council Liaison." The Council Liaison could be assigned the

duty of official greeter at the door of the Council Chambers, manning the desk that features City of Yakima informational materials, including Yak Back, etc. (from Recommendation A). The Council Liaison could be bilingual (English and Spanish), well versed on City of Yakima issues, could assist in directing the public on how to sign up for public testimony, answer questions, and serve as an aide to the City Council (making copies, fetching coffee/water, helping hand out business cards, and assisting with other things between the City Council and the public during council meetings). The Council Liaison could be a socially outgoing person who is possibly interested in pursuing a career in public service, and could use the internship as a stepping stone to achieving those goals. The City of Yakima could expand duties of this intern as they see fit. This internship position may be a good fit for a high school or college student.

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