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To: Council Member Whitfield Calloway, Chair
Rules Committee

From: David Whitaker, Director 
Legislative Policy Division

Date: August 30, 2023

Re: Suggested Amendments to Council Rules

Council President Sheffield requested that the Legislative Policy Division look at Section 22.0 of the Council Rules which outlines the procedures for persons wishing to address Council. The relevant section reads as follows:

A person shall be permitted to address a meeting of the City Council subject to the following rules:

A brief written notice of a request to address the City Council shall be filed with the City Clerk not later than 2:00 p.m. of the business day immediately preceding the day of the scheduled meeting to which the request pertains. The City Clerk shall provide reasonable assistance in the preparation of such request to any person requesting assistance.

A written notice of a request to address the City Council shall identify the person making the request. Identification shall include: full name, address (both resident and business), phone number, and shall state the subject matter on which such person wishes to address the City Council.

Upon approval of the request by the Body, the Chair of the Standing Committee or Committee of the Whole shall have the discretion as to when during the meeting the person shall be heard and

shall also have the discretion to impose a reasonable limitation on the time allotted to hear such person.

This procedure shall not apply to scheduled public hearings or to persons invited by the City Council to participate in discussions before the City Council.

This Rule was intended to allow the occasional community leader the opportunity to address Council beyond that which is allocated during the Public Comment section of a Council meeting. Over the past few months, however, Council has been receiving an increasing number of requests under this Rule. Often the requests come from the same individuals or others associated with those individuals, speaking on issues and subject matter that has previously been brought before the Council during prior meetings through Public Comment.

There is nothing under the Open Meetings Act or in any other authority that requires a body to allocate extra time, outside of Public Comment, for individuals to speak. Due to the increasing number of requests and their effect on the efficient and orderly process of running Council meetings, it is LPD's suggestion that the language stated above be deleted from the Rules. To do so, will not negatively affect the public's right to speak before Council during the Public Comment section of the meetings. Also, it will not change the process for special presentations during Council's evening community meetings.

An alternative suggestion to the above language would keep it as stated but have all requests to speak before Council, either at Formal Session or at a Standing Committee, be referred to the appropriate Committee based on the topic.

The Committee would then decide if any of the requests should go back to the Formal Session with the recommendation to approve for the whole Body to decide if it wishes to hear from the petitioner at Formal Session. Those requests not sent to Formal Session with the recommendation to approve would be received and filed by the Committee and no other action would be taken on them.

Requests to speak at a Standing Committee meeting would be voted on by the Committee. If approved, the Chair of the Committee would then decide when and the length of time the individual would be allowed to speak.

This process would allow the Committee most knowledgeable of the topic to determine if the information has been previously presented to the Committee or the Body and the value of having this information brought before the entire Council.

However, on the other hand, of course, having the Standing Committee decide who will speak at Formal Session before the Whole Body may raise concerns and objections from Council members, especially if the petitioner is from their district. In addition, it increases the workload of those Committees whose agendas are already full.

In reviewing the Rules, LPD noticed that the Ombudsman is listed in two Standing Committees: Internal Operations and Neighborhood and Community Services. It is properly located in Neighborhoods and should be removed from Internal Operations.

Should there be any questions, please advise.