KZGN News Talking Points

Editorial for Thursday, December 18, 2014.

By: Tom Wiknich

Today’s topic will be “Should we reduce council meetings to 1 per month?”

At the end of the first meeting December 3rd, Mayor Breeden brought up 5 things for council consideration:

1. Bring back committee meetings

2. Bring back town hall meetings

3. Change council meetings to one per month

4. Review all staff contracts

5. Asked for public feedback

She asked that these items be considered by the council and to possibly them bring back for later action by the council. At last night’s meeting, the council decided to bring back council committee meetings. That is great.

Now the 3rd suggestion: Reducing council meetings to one per month. Once again at the end of last night’s meeting, the mayor recommended to reduce the council meetings from 2 per month to 1 per month. I strongly object. I find it amazing that she suggested this huge change to how the council does the peoples’ business at her first meeting. Literally, 2 weeks ago she got sworn in as the new mayor, and within minutes of being sworn, she brings up this idea. Seems this must be really important to her. Yet during the campaign, I never heard a mention about this idea. She didn’t mention it once. Yet, now she has said that this idea needs to be considered. Why? Because of staff work load. You might ask, why is this important? I can tell you as one who has sat up on the council before, if you have a topic that the council is taking up, the people want you available. You want access to them. You don’t want to have to try and hunt them down at their business, or calling them, leaving messages, and hoping they call you back. The council has been operating on 2 meetings per month for 50 years. It’s never been a problem for them or the staff. There are many reasons for my objection:

1. To make this change would require a change to the current municipal code. That takes time and increases staff workload. There is a high probability that the change would not work, and then have to be undone in the future. More staff workload.

2. The staff that supports committee meetings are mostly salary people, except a secretary. There is little cost to support these meetings.

3. There is no increase in staff workload. This is a fallacy started by certain past elected individuals that wanted to stop committee meetings, because they didn’t want to take the time to do the peoples’ business, what we elected them to do.

Every issue needs the same effort of staff to get all the necessary information to the whole council anyway. The only increase to staff is the time it takes attending a couple evening meetings per month.

4. Further, committee meetings are only held when necessary. They don’t even meet unless there is a topic that needs a lengthy discussion.

5. Council transparency. There would likely be an effort to speed meetings along to fit everything into one meeting. A lack of thorough information provided to the people could result. Transparency means to take the time to make sure all pertinent information and data is provided to the people, so we understand the issues and why the council decides the way they do.

6. Decision timeliness. Many issues require action by the council within short time periods. I’d bet there were at least 8 meetings just last year that had topics on the agenda that was just provided to the council that night…and…needed to be decided that night, due to some external deadline.

7. They are paid for 2 meetings a month. If they reduce the meetings by half, will they cut their pay in half?

8. The mayor says this idea has nothing to do with her business demands. I accept her word on that issue.

9. This change would probably affect the people’s participation during meetings. It is very likely that single monthly meetings would result in very lengthy meetings going well into the night. Even as late midnight, at times. This will deter the people’s attendance, as waiting all night long for an item to come up would be not fair to the people.

10. Finally, this cuts in half the opportunity for the people to meet with and have discussions with their elected officials. The mayor campaigned at every candidate forum that she wanted to hear from the people and would be there to listen to them. Well, how does cutting access to the whole council in half fulfill the campaign promise that she would be available to the people?

In conclusion, I’m strongly opposed to the suggestion of only one council meeting per month. I’ve provided 10 reasons to not change. I challenge the mayor to provide 10 reasons to change. Not just one. There is no increase in staff workload. Every issue needs the same effort of staff to get all the necessary information to the whole council for their discussion and decisions. Who is more important? Staff or the people? The council and staff are employees of the people. Not the other way around. The council has been operating on 2 meetings per month for 50 years. It’s never been a problem before. Why now? I don’t understand why decreasing availability to the people is so important to her. And staff work load is not a valid reason to change. Mayor, fulfill your campaign promise of availability and being there to listen to the people.

Tell me what you think! I encourage your email comments. Whether you agree with me or not, I’d like to read your comments. I may read some email comments on my next editorial. Or, if you have a suggestion of an issue you’d like me to discuss, email that to me as well. Please email them to info@kzgn.net.

This has been a KZGN talking points editorial. Seen right here on KZGN TV Tuesdays and Thursdays. Until next time, I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think!