



City Council Report

City Council Meeting: December 13, 2011

Agenda Item: 3J

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Maria M. Stewart, Director of Records and Election Services
Subject: Resolution Establishing a Formal Civility Policy for Public Meetings

Recommended Action

Staff recommends that City Council adopt the attached Resolution establishing a Formal Civility Policy and establishing standards to promote fair participation and dialogue for all public and community meetings; and adopt a Resolution amending the Council Rules of Order and Procedure for the Conduct of City Council Meetings to incorporate the new Civility Policy.

Executive Summary

This report complies with Council direction to staff at the November 8, 2011 City Council meeting, to return with a Resolution adopting a formal Civility Policy to help establish a new set of expectations on public conduct during Council meetings, board and commission meetings, and forums which the City participates or sponsors. This policy will establish six basic Principles which will serve as a reminder to people to treat each other with respect – even if they disagree, at public meetings; and to incorporate the new Civility Policy into the City Council Rules of Order.

Background

At its November 8, 2011, City Council meeting, staff returned with information requested by Council at the July 26, 2011 Council meeting, to review civility policies adopted by other cities, as well as the principles outlined in "The United States Conference of Mayors Civility Accord" that was adopted in January of this year at the United States Conference of Mayors, and return with a recommendation for a local policy. Staff returned with information and gave examples of other government agencies policies, and practices promoting Civility in local government.

Discussion

The City Council acknowledges that there has been a noticeable increase in the uncivil manner that the general population has shown when it comes to public discourse and politics. Council commented that although most discourse with public bodies in this city are respectful and members of the public refrain from outburst and disruptions, there have been times in recent years when certain individuals have been disrespected, and even threatened because of a difference of opinion. There is a consensus that this type of behavior is not a true representation of Santa Monica. It is expected that a formal Civility Policy will be a reminder of the principles for civil behavior and set the tone for the conduct of all present at public meetings.

The Principles are:

- Treat everyone courteously;
- Listen to others respectfully;
- Exercise self-control;
- Give open-minded consideration to all viewpoints;
- Focus on the issues and avoid personalizing debate;
- Embrace respectful disagreement and dissent as a democratic rights, inherent components of an inclusive public process, and tools for forging sound decisions.

Implementation and Outreach

Once the resolution is adopted, staff will begin promoting the policy by disseminating it to all Council-appointed board, commissions, task forces, and ad hoc committees and will encourage staff to implement the principles at their respective board/commission meetings, community meetings, and forums. Staff proposes that the principles will be included in the City Council Rules, added to the cover page of all meeting agendas, and as appropriate, that all public meetings will begin with the announcement of these principles. The policy will also be shared with private neighborhood groups who express an interest in receiving them. In addition it will also be shared with any other entity interested in promoting the principles such as the School District, College District, and Rent Control Board. Mention of the principles will be included in materials routinely published by the City and in mailers as appropriate, and aired as public service announcements on CityTV.

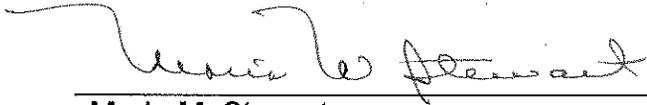
Financial Impacts & Budget Actions

Staff expects the cost of this recommendation to be minimal as notification of this policy will be printed in documents for which the expense is already budgeted.

Prepared by: Denise Anderson-Warren, Assistant City Clerk

Approved:

Forwarded to Council:



Maria M. Stewart,
Director, Records and Election Services



Rod Gould
City Manager

Attachments:

- A. Resolution Establishing a Formal Civility Policy
- B. Resolution Amending the Council Rules of Order and Procedure for the Conduct of City Council Meetings.