



CITY OF RAPID CITY

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January 20, 2017

Rapid City Common Council
300 Sixth Street
Rapid City, SD 57701

Re: January 17th City Council Meeting

Dear Council Member:

I am writing concerning some issues related to the January 17th City Council meeting.

One of the issues of contention that came up, and has come up a few times before, is whether a Council member is allowed five minutes of discussion time on each motion and each substitute motion. The Rapid City Council Rules and Procedures manual states the following:

2.12 Time allowed for a member to speak.

Each member may speak on the pending subject before any member speaks twice. No member may speak more than twice nor longer than five minutes on the same subject without the consent of a majority of the members present. However, a member may speak an additional 10 minutes if the time is yielded by individual members of the Council. In computing the time allowed for argument, the time consumed in asking questions is considered. If a member consents to the question, the time consumed by the answer is taken out of the time allowed to the person answering the question.

As you can clearly see, the time limit and number of speaking times is limited to "the same subject" and not each individual motion pertaining to that subject. A substitute motion may not change the subject, therefore no additional time is given. I believe there is a great benefit to this rule:

Imagine an agenda item receiving a motion to approve a certain funding level for project X. A substitute motion is made to change the funding level. The substitute motion is defeated, therefore the original motion is back on the table. A new substitute motion is proposed, and this scenario can go on without limit. Any item on the agenda can take up to 50 minutes, including debate and voting. One substitute motion with everyone's time limit being reset to zero can cause the agenda item to take up to one hour and 40 minutes. Each additional substitute motion can add up to 50 minutes on the conversation.



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The reason there is a time limit for each subject is so that the people's business can be conducted efficiently. Contrary to what some believe, a City Council meeting is not intended to be a brainstorming session with unlimited debate. The time limit ensures that homework will be done on the issue at hand. It also ensures that words for debate will be chosen carefully. In addition, it protects from individual Council members chiming in to defend themselves against a political jab or ill-intended innuendo. In essence, the time limit restriction seeks to ensure that the people's work is done professionally and efficiently. The rules allow additional time to a member with the consent of the Council. In addition, they also allow other Council members to give time to a particular member and even allow for overall suspension of the rules. I believe there is a time and a place for these measures to be enacted, but the typical day in and day out business of the City does not warrant modification of the rules. I would urge that the Council not allow this to happen.

On a related note, when a member has a concern that there is a rule violation in progress, a member can call for a "point of order." In this case, any member may interrupt a speaker to raise the point of order. No second is needed. The meeting chairman will then ask the member to explain the point being raised, after which the chairman will rule on the point of order. Roberts Rules of Order cautions members that a point of order not be raised for alleged minor infractions of the rules.

On a separate note, this week's meeting was littered with a number of sidebar discussions. I have done this myself in cases where the nature of the debate has somehow allowed me to lose track of the motion on the floor, but in those cases I have asked the Council President or Vice President (sitting next to me) about the status of the motion. The last meeting had a number of disruptive and loud sidebars. I was told by someone watching the meeting online that the sidebar discussions could be heard in the background, and they were audible on the speakers throughout the building. Again, if our goal is to conduct the people's business with professionalism and efficiency, these secondary discussions must be limited.

Another issue is the use of microphones. There continue to be a number of motions and comments which are not caught by the recording system due to microphones not being utilized properly. I would ask that additional consideration be given to this issue.

As I have stated several times before, as meeting chair, I am there to enforce your rules. The rules exist to allow us to properly handle the people's business. I am certainly open to discussing these issues with any or all of you at your convenience.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Steve Allender, Mayor
Rapid City, South Dakota