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Title: City Councilmembers' Town Hall Meetings with the Community [Council Pillar: Enhance Community Engagement and Transparency]

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

City Councilmembers' Town Hall Meetings with the Community [Council Pillar: Enhance Community Engagement and Transparency]

BACKGROUND

As part of the yearly Council Priority Setting Session, the Council discussed the desire to “Enhance Community Engagement and Transparency” as a top goal. As part of the discussion, one key attribute to enhanced community engagement was providing more opportunities for the residents to discuss issues with their elected officials in their neighborhoods outside of regularly scheduled Council Meetings.

DISCUSSION

One of the challenges residents face with engaging with their elected officials in a Council Meeting is the limited opportunity and time afforded to them for items not on the official meeting agenda, in addition to the uni-directional communication resulting in a non-agendized item of discussion. Residents have little other formal avenues of engaging with their elected officials in an open and public setting for their concerns to be heard and questions to be answered.

To facilitate more opportunities for residents to engage with their elected officials, the City Clerk is proposing that Councilmembers avail themselves to the residents on a regular basis in a free-form setting unlike that of a City Council Meeting. These series of meetings would be in the form of an open-mic Town Hall, where Councilmembers would be scheduled to appear at a time convenient to residents based on a pre-determined and advertised schedule. The City Clerk would facilitate, not moderate, the discussion, allowing residents to ask questions of their elected officials and raise concerns and make their voices heard.

There are several models that the Council can explore. One possible and recommended model is the following:

- The Town Halls are held on a monthly basis.
- Each month's Town Hall would be host to 2 Councilmembers, based on district, on a rotating basis.
- Town Hall meetings are held at the 3 public libraries, to facilitate easier attendance by residents in those neighborhoods.
- Given the rotating basis of the Town Halls, and hosting 2 Councilmembers per Town Hall, Councilmembers would be participating in a Town Hall once every 3 months.
- Residents can attend any monthly Town Hall, not necessarily just the Town Hall in which their district's Councilmember is participating.
- Following such a model would allow for Councilmembers of District 1 and 2 to participate at the Northside Library, Councilmembers of Districts 3 and 4 to participate at the Central Library, and Councilmembers of Districts 5 and 6 to participate at the Mission Library.
- The Mayor would be free to participate in any of the available Town Halls.
- The Town Halls would be televised and livestreamed to residents.

Any variations can be made to the model recommended above, including the frequency of the Town Halls, Councilmembers co-hosting the Town Halls or conducting them individually or the locations of the venue. If alternative models are desired, consideration should be made to ensure that a majority of Councilmembers are not actively participating in the Town Hall meetings.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact will depend on the City Council's direction and willingness to participate on a per-Councilmember basis. If the City Council chooses to actively participate in such a Town Hall series, the cost will primarily be on staff time to support these activities, any potential facility costs, as well as costs for community outreach in publicizing the events to the community.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City's website and in the City Clerk's Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (408) 615-2220, email clerk@santaclaraca.gov <<mailto:clerk@santaclaraca.gov>> or at the public information desk at any City of Santa Clara public library.

RECOMMENDATION

The City Clerk recommends that Council approve the proposed/recommended Town Hall model, or any other model the Council feels appropriate, including authorization of the necessary budget to proceed.

Approved by: Hosam Haggag, City Clerk