



"Great Apartments Start Here!"

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Via Electronic Mail

Mayor Rex Richardson and
Members of the Long Beach City Council
Civic Chambers
411 West Ocean Boulevard
Long Beach, California 90802

Re: Agenda Item 46 – Public Comment Process for City Council Meetings

Honorable Mayor Richardson and Members of the Long Beach City Council:

The Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles (“AAGLA”) represents more than 10,000 rental housing providers and 350,000 units throughout Southern California, including the City of Long Beach. More than 80% of our members are independent, mom-and-pop owners. Founded in 1917 (in Long Beach), we have since grown into the largest local trade association representing rental housing providers throughout the Southland. In addition, we are fully vertically integrated with our state organization, the California Rental Housing Association (“CalRHA”), and national organization, the National Apartment Association (“NAA”).

AAGLA is strongly opposed to several of the changes being proposed by City Attorney staff for city council meetings and the public comment process (agenda item 46). The City Attorney’s report provides no information whatsoever as to why any changes are being proposed much less rationale for each of the many changes being proposed. **Many of these changes will only make community engagement and transparency far more difficult and result in less informed decisions by the City Council. We urge the City Council to slow down this revision process by taking appropriate and measured time to engage with stakeholders before making any permanent changes.**

Start Time For City Council Meetings Moved To Earlier In The Day

The first change proposed is to move the start time up by one hour from 5:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. As the city council members themselves have full-time jobs, it is unclear why the City Attorney would even be proposing this change that would make it more difficult for Council Members to appear on time for their meetings. Similarly, the vast majority of residents and business-owners have full-time jobs that would not allow for them to attend meetings or arrive late.

Further, this change compounds the problem with requiring general public comment speakers to now provide written requests to speak no later than 4:30 p.m. As a result, most members of the public will be prevented from participating in any general public comment sessions at any and all City Council meetings. This is not transparency and this is not community engagement.



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If the City Council wishes to change the start time for its meetings, then it should be pushed back to a later time to allow for more members of the public with regular 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. jobs to be able to attend and participate. Many other city councils do not start until 6:30 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. in order to provide this enhanced opportunity for public participation.

Speakers For Agendized Items Capped At 90 Seconds Each

Agendized items are those that the City Council intends to take action on. They are not merely “ideas” as under general public comments. As such, it is absolutely VITAL that speakers be given sufficient time to express their full concerns and suggestions prior to the City Council acting.

The City Council is responsible for taking actions that impact ALL community members, including residents, businesses, renters, and workers. Many of the policy items that must be decided are extremely complicated and have long-term, substantial impacts on a vast number of people. To expect a speaker to get their comments out in 90 seconds is simply unreasonable. Even television advertisements put on by highly paid professionals take as long or longer and they are allowed to show written statements that they cannot say in time (like side effects for a new medication). **For the City Council to use 90 seconds as a default for agendized items is completely unfair and unworkable.**

Further, it creates an uneven playing field where general comment public speakers receive preferential treatment compared to speakers that showed up to specifically speak on items that are being considered by the City Council for immediate action. Agendized items for new ordinances, resolutions and requirements are far more important than simply voicing a new idea for the city council to consider later. Any preference should be given to speakers for agendized items.

Instead of reducing the speaking time for agendized items, the time should be increased to a default of three minutes per speaker regardless of the number of speakers. Policies should not be rushed through without proper engagement with the community. While this may increase the time needed for certain controversial items, those are precisely the items that need more discussion and input before the City Council makes its final decision.

Creating A New Cap Of 60 Minutes In Total For All Speakers On Agendized Items

This is the most egregious change that is being proposed by City Attorney staff. **Capping all speakers on items that the City Council is deciding is the most harmful and least democratic policy that can be imagined.** It is irresponsible and counter to principles of fairness to arbitrarily deny a speaker the opportunity to speak that has already taken the time and effort to appear, complete a speaker’s card or writing and patiently waited for their turn to speak on an item being decided by the City Council. **It shows complete disrespect for the community by the City Council.**

The City Council agenda often lists many issues or importance that are completely unrelated to one another. Each speaker that appears is showing up for their particular item of concern to provide input for consideration. The fact that one item takes up the total speakers time for all agendized items leaves NO REPRESENTATION for all of the other items listed on that agenda and prevents the City Council from receiving proper feedback from the community on issues being decided. **This cap would serve as a death blow to community engagement on many important issues.**

Taking Speakers For Agendized Items All At One Time

Taking speakers for agendized items all at one time makes no sense whatsoever and will only create a hodgepodge of



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facts, questions and statements. As said, there are many unrelated items on any given agenda. By taking all speakers at the start, the City Council risks misremembering or completely forgetting important points made by community members that took the time to speak to the City Council during the meeting. **This approach seems intended to create chaos rather than respecting legitimate community input.**

What Problems Have Been Identified That Are Trying To Be Solved?

The City Attorney staff report completely fails to identify any specific problems that these changes are intended to remedy. Further, it shows no research into any potential alternatives.

If the issue is that on certain contentious issues that there are “too many speakers”, then the item should be held over for a “special meeting” or at least until the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting. If the issue is that all city council meetings are running “too long”, then a far better solution would be to set a time limit for the city council meeting itself. Other cities have done so using 10:00 p.m. as their official end time. Any items that have not been discussed by that time are automatically held over to the next regularly scheduled city council meeting. These approaches preserve full community engagement while providing appropriate guardrails.

Conclusion

The process by which the community is able to directly engage with the City Council is extremely important for fully identifying significant concerns, unforeseen impacts and better alternatives. It is also paramount to basic principles of democracy, transparency and accountability. Any changes to the existing process should not be “rushed through” based on a draft from city staff without any supporting data, outreach to the community, or research on alternative approaches. We urge the City Council to delay taking any action on this proposal until a thorough review process with substantial community input has been conducted.

AAGLA welcomes the opportunity to actively participate in further detailed discussions on this matter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet M. Gagnon".

Janet M. Gagnon, Esq.

CC: Daniel Yukelson, Executive Director, Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles