

Council Budget Review Guidelines

Fall 2012

Budget Schedule

Council's budget review is likely to be quite challenging, as the City continues to face financial difficulties. The attached schedule reflects this reality and recognizes that Council will want to fully engage in the difficult decisions ahead. If you have any questions about the schedule please talk with Councilmember Burgess. If Council members are going to be out of town during budget, please contact Traci and if needed, we will do our best to schedule around such absences.

Suspending Council Committee Meetings During Budget

As has been the policy for the last several years, standing Committee meetings will be suspended from September 24^h to November 19th unless legislative action is required on a specific issue. Suspending regular committee meetings during budget allows Councilmembers and staff to focus (almost) exclusively on budget review. If your committee does need to meet during this time period, this should be approved by the Council President and Budget Chair. If a committee meeting needs to be scheduled, please check the proposed date and time with Traci Ratzliff to be sure it does not conflict with the Budget Committee calendar.

Use of Staff Resources During Budget Review

In order to enable Councilmembers to more effectively utilize Central Staff, we are suggesting continuing our approach to staffing budget as follows:

- To help make best use of Central Staff, we suggest that Councilmembers allow Central Staff to identify and then focus on those issues that are of the greatest significance in the budget process and of the greatest relevance to the Council as a whole. Staff will base the identification of budget issues on factors such as knowledge of Councilmember priorities, the number of Councilmembers interested, the timeliness of this issue, work programs, the level of funding at stake, differences between Council and Mayoral positions, etc. The Central Staff Director in consultation with Council members will determine which issues will be analyzed and carried forward by Central Staff. This does not mean that other issues would not be considered. Instead, remaining issues could be addressed in other ways, perhaps by assigning them to Legislative Assistants or reserving them for a committee work program during the following year.
- Legislative Assistants (LAs) may be called upon to take the lead in staffing budget issues of general interest to the Council. In such situations, LAs will be working for the whole Council, not just for their individual Councilmember. As such, the analysis that is conducted and budget materials that are prepared must be thorough in terms of the information provided and options considered. Consistent with overall budget management process, Central Staff Team Leads and Supervisors will be available for assistance and will review all materials before

they are finalized. LAs who are assigned to budget issues will be briefed about the availability of assistance in developing their budget materials.

Minimum Support Needed for Green Sheets and SLIs

Consistent with the approach taken in recent years, sponsorship from three (3) Councilmembers will be needed for a Green Sheet or SLI to be included on the Budget Committee's agenda. To help manage overall work load, staff may inquire whether sponsors have been identified before they invest significant time and energy in preparing draft materials.

Deadline For Identification of Budget Issues

Councilmembers have agreed that the first day of **Round 1** will be the deadline for the identification of new budget issues. This year, the first day of **Round 1** will be Tuesday, October 30. Exceptions to this deadline are possible, but would be the purview of the Budget Committee Chair. The establishment of this deadline means that Council offices must focus early to identify all relevant issues. The advantage of this approach is that all issues can be fully vetted and weighed fairly against one another.

Information Requests

Consistent with recent practice, Central Staff (or, as appropriate LA's) will serve as 'gatekeepers' to consolidate, screen and submit questions to the Executive during the budget process. This 'gatekeeper' function has proven to be an effective tool for managing the flow of questions and answers. It has resulted in better coordination of information requests, avoided unnecessary redundancy and reduced the sheer volume of such requests.

In addition, Central Staff will identify budget-related questions to pose to the Executive in advance of receiving the proposed budget. We have been doing this for a few years and have found that the responses, which will be received in conjunction with the proposed budget, provide us a good starting point for budget review. In particular, this will help ensure that we receive a consistent set of technical information. It also supports research on broader city-wide questions (e.g., vacancies). Currently, Traci and Ben are working with the City Budget Office and Central Staff analysts on this effort.

Public Access to Council Briefing Materials.

Like the Executive, the Council goes through a deliberative process, and during this process, not all materials are subject to public disclosure. That said, the Council will post on the Council webpage Department Presentations, Issue Identification Papers, Green Sheets, Statements of Legislative Intent, and Budget Guidance Statements, developed by City staff and discussed during Budget Committee meetings. These documents will be posted as soon as possible. These documents are also available in hard copy in the Budget Review Notebook that is available to the public and the press in Council Chambers each day that the Budget Committee meets to discuss such documents.