



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE **FROM:** Councilmember Donald Rocha

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOODS COMMISSION **DATE:** March 9, 2017

Approved

Don Rocha

Date

3-9-17

PH

RECOMMENDATION

That the Rules Committee enact the following:

1. Direct staff to bring forward recommendations on how the structure and scope of the Neighborhoods Commission could be revised or clarified to promote the success of the Commission and also to ensure that staff resources used to support the Commission are deployed efficiently. These recommendations should come to Council on a timeline established by the City Manager's Office that allows the Council to consider them in a timely fashion. Staff should have the freedom to make any recommendations they think would be beneficial to the Commission's work, but should at minimum consider the following items:
 - a. **Size of the Commission:** Currently the Commission has 20 members, with two members representing each council district, making it very large in comparison with many other City commissions, which mostly range from 5 to 11 members. Staff may want to consider whether reducing the number of members from 20 to 10, with one member representing each council district, would be a better model. Further, I respectfully recommend that no new appointments should be made to the Commission until the Council has considered this issue.
 - b. **Appointment Process:** Currently, new Neighborhoods Commissioners are selected by a neighborhood caucus process, subject to final approval by the City Council. Holding a caucus requires organizing a meeting where representatives from neighborhood associations in a given council district can attend and cast votes for candidates who would like to be appointed to the Commission. This appointment process was intended to increase neighborhood engagement, but can also be labor intensive. Now that it has been operating for a number of years it may be worth considering whether we should retain or consider another model.
 - c. **Commission Scope:** Staff should consider whether the Commission scope needs to be revised or clarified to (1) ensure that the Commission can

pursue productive and meaningful work that takes full advantage of the experience and skills of its members and (2) ensure that the scope and volume of that work is such that staff has the capacity to support it in an effective and timely fashion.

- d. **Commission Staffing:** Consider whether any adjustments to Commission staffing are appropriate at this time.
2. Direct staff to invite the Neighborhoods Commission to a retreat to discuss the above issues or other issues of concern. A retreat would be an opportunity for commissioners to discuss these issues amongst themselves and with staff, and potentially make recommendations to the City Council. Given their personal experience serving on the Commission, feedback from commissioners would be very valuable to the Council in its deliberations on this issue.

ANALYSIS

In my capacity as Council Liaison to the Neighborhoods Commission, I have heard comments, input and concerns over the past year from members of the Neighborhoods Commission about the Commission's ability to pursue meaningful work. In response to these concerns I began an internal conversation with the City Manager about what our options are for helping to make the Commission successful. There are a number of ideas that have come out of that conversation, and I think the time has come to ask staff to prepare formal recommendations for Council consideration.

The Neighborhoods Commission was established for the purpose of engaging San Jose's neighborhoods in City policymaking. While that is a worthy goal, in practice there has been a tension between the Commission's understandable desire to work on issues that it finds meaningful and staff's ability to adequately staff that work. The ideas that I put forward in Recommendation 1 above are intended to both streamline staff's work to support the Commission and to ensure that the Commission's scope is set such that the Commission can make a meaningful contribution and be adequately supported.

Before we consider any changes to the Commission, it's very important that we give the Commission an opportunity to discuss these issues amongst themselves and to provide feedback to the Council. Recommendation 2 suggests that we invite the Commission to hold a retreat to discuss these issues. If the Commission does not wish to hold a retreat on this topic it certainly is not obligated to, but I think all of us on the Council would benefit greatly from feedback from commissioners in our effort to better support them in their work.

Since part of the role of the Commission is to interface with the public, I would also suggest that staff may want to consider soliciting feedback from members of the public who may have an interest in the Commission, such as neighborhood leaders or participants in neighborhood associations. I'd leave it up to staff as to how best to solicit this feedback, but I think it would be a fairly simple matter to alert residents to this effort through relevant email lists maintained by staff, councilmembers, or the commissioners themselves.