

HABITAT COMMITTEE REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETING AND PROCESS EFFICIENCIES

The Habitat Committee (HC) reviewed the Council Efficiencies and Effectiveness White Paper (C.3, Attachment 1). In general, the Habitat Committee believes that evaluating Council processes to improve efficiencies and effectiveness is warranted given the implementation of alternative measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With regards to meeting operations, the HC recognizes the value of in-person meetings for addressing difficult topics, member participation, and improved communication. We do however believe other options could be explored such as hybrid meetings and a mix of in-person and virtual meetings. Benefits to virtual or hybrid meetings include increased participation from those otherwise not likely to attend. Some participants may attend certain advisory body meetings spread throughout the Council meeting period but might not be able to travel and stay for the entire meeting. Travel is limited for some people due to work or family obligations, and others are still unable to travel or attend group meetings due to health considerations. Over the past two years the Council has conducted virtual meetings; it would be worth evaluating data on attendance and participation over the past two years versus data from prior to the pandemic period to see if there were changes in the number and diversity of people participating.

Virtual or hybrid meetings include challenges that would need to be resolved. Virtual meetings require all participants to have a certain degree of technical hardware available to them that may limit public participation. Hybrid meetings require specialized technical infrastructure to be effective, and the Council would need to make sure that technical hardware and support is provided for all advisory committees. Finally, the benefits of personal interactions from in-person meetings should not be understated. Some combination of in-person, remote, and hybrid meetings may be a viable option. Regardless of the meeting format, availability of committee members to participate or contribute to Council processes, and how this affects quality of work and Council decision-making should be considered in this analysis.

The concept of reducing the requirement of reading reports completely into the record could free up time on the Council floor and is not always necessary. However, report presentations would need to still contain enough information to provide the appropriate rationale for recommendations to allow meaningful deliberation by the Council.

Although the HC believes this exercise could improve Council effectiveness, it may also increase the time pressure at Council meetings and workload for meeting participants. The HC recommends that the Council consider hiring an independent consultant to lead the effort that could gather much of the information while the Council is not in session.