

**Bellevue City Council Retreat Report**  
**Special Meeting**  
**March 17, 2023**  
**Washington State History Museum, Tacoma**

**Participants:**

Councilmembers: Jeremy Barksdale, Conrad Lee, Jared Nieuwenhuis, Jennifer Robertson, Lynne Robinson, John Stokes, Janice Zahn

Staff: Brad Miyake and Charmaine Arredondo

Consultants: Kara Laverde, Laverde Consulting, LLC & Carrie Heron, Unstruck LLC

**Friday, March 17, 2023 9:00-4:30**

**Welcome**

- Review Agenda
- Review Outcomes:
  - Resolve open questions from the January retreat around council expectations and agreements.
  - Continue to practice leadership behaviors that support the effectiveness of the council in working with each other.
- Review Agreements
- Reminder of leadership concepts: finding workability, balancing people/content/process, getting on the balcony/techniques to stay present/engaged in difficult conversations

**Tackling Complex Problems Using a Polarity-Thinking Approach – An Introduction**

- Recognizing that many of the challenges that you face are hard to define and require curiosity, risk-taking, and tolerance for ambiguity, Polarity Thinking is an approach that helps groups see multiple perspectives that can lead to both/and solutions. The goal is to see beyond our own positions to understand more of the complexities of a given issue. The opportunity is to apply this approach throughout the day as we explore the open issues.
- Councilmembers engaged in activity to demonstrate the tensions often found between polarized values and the benefits of exploring the upsides and downsides of each value before attempting to create agreements or solutions that maximize the upside of each.

- Council reviewed proposed changes to board/commission application and agreed to the following:
  - Add questions to the application regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, sustainability, and whether the applicant has family members currently serving on another council-appointed boards or commissions.
  - Add a link to the Council Vision in the introductory section of the application.
- Council agreed to the following modifications of the board/commission criteria section of the desk manual:
  - Change “Cultural Competence” to “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” and include explanatory statement.
  - Remove “Knowledge of municipal government and public process” as a separate bullet and include the text within the “Contributive Potential” section.
  - Add “professionalism” and “ability to collaborate and work with others effectively” to “Contributive Potential” section.
  - Remove “Leadership Potential” section.
  - Remove “All things being equal” in “Geographic Distribution” section.
  - Modify the introductory statement to highlight the goal of balance and add statement that the criteria are in no particular order.

### **Zing Rounds – Exploring Underlying Values to Reach Agreement on Open Issues**

- Councilmembers worked in rotating small group configurations to surface underlying values, concerns, and tensions on open issues from January’s retreat:
  - How council appointments are made
  - Rule that limits remote participation to no more than four times
  - Endorsing the opponent of an incumbent
  - Rule that allows no more than three council members on trips
  - Norms around talking with audience members during council meeting breaks

### **Agreements Processes**

- Councilmembers worked in small groups to synthesize the input from the Zing Rounds and propose a workable, both/and approach to reaching agreement on each issue.

### **The council clarified and agreed to the following:**

#### How Council Appointments are Made

#### Principles:

- Each councilmember will get at least one city board/commission appointment (with appointment authority).
- Each councilmember gets at least one regional appointment, when feasible.

- Any assignment is subject to change every two years.

Process:

- Acknowledge that the appointment process has started.
- Staff sends council a list of all available city and regional assignments, including who the appointing authority is and who is currently holding the role.
- Councilmembers send assignment requests to the mayor.
- Mayor schedules time to review requests with each councilmember, sharing feedback as necessary, and criteria for appointments (e.g. equity)
- Mayor sends final list of assignments to council (assignments are published for community via council bios within one week of appointment).

Rule on Number of Remote Participations Per Year

To ensure engagement, equitable access and accountability, councilmembers can notify the clerk by noon on the day of the council meeting to participate remotely for up to four council meetings per year.\*

However, with advance notification to the clerk by 12 noon the day of the council meeting, any councilmember who is out of town on approved City of Bellevue business can participate remotely irrespective of the four-meeting limit. For all remote meetings, the expectation is that the participating councilmembers will remain on camera as much as possible.

\*as currently defined

Talking to the Audience During Breaks in Council Meetings

Guiding Principle- be circumspect in how we each conduct ourselves, particularly in council meetings.

Be wary of appearance of unfairness created if taking breaks in audience, especially if communicating with people making public comments when a decision pending.

Don't discuss agenda items with audience members during breaks.

Endorsing the Opponent of an Incumbent

Individuals can choose to endorse other candidates for office or abstain from endorsing anyone. Councilmembers discussed that starting fresh after each election cycle was important.

**Open Topics**

- Responding to constituents as individual councilmembers vs. representing the council – clarifying a consistent process
- External perception of agreement vs. internal alignment/ understanding
- Bring feedback directly to a councilmember
- How do we create a council culture where people feel valued, heard, listened to, appreciated, and acknowledged – to support our effectiveness?

- Accountability regarding the clarified expectations for group behaviors

### **Next Steps**

- City Manager's Office and City Clerk's Office will:
  - follow up to propose criteria for issue of allowing no more than 3 councilmembers on a trip.
  - review timeline for including PowerPoint presentations for agenda items.
  - consider adjustment to public testimony rules - pros/cons of adjusting the 3-minute max (i.e. if there are many people wanting to testify).
  - follow up with council on amendments to council rules and desk manual.
  - work with staff to revisit term limits on boards & commissions, to be brought forward at a future council meeting.