



RESOLUTION TO INCREASE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN AUSTIN BY IMPROVING THE AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL'S TRANSPARENCY AND FAIRNESS

Whereas, Austinites support city transparency, fairness, and public engagement;

Whereas, the city has developed troubling, anti-democratic practices that undermine public participation and trust;

Whereas the council purposely conducts its public hearings, including the time and order of testimony, in violation of the [city code](#) and its own adopted [procedures](#).

Whereas the council allows the applicant and the city staff in a zoning case to testify at the time the Council discusses and votes on the case while requiring members of the public to testify hours before in a cattle-call fashion thereby marginalizing their voices and thwarting effective public participation.

Whereas, the council's hearings are not conducted by standard rules, such as Robert's Rules of Order, making some procedural rulings appear arbitrary;

Whereas, parliamentary rulings, particularly on important matters, sometimes appear one-sided and unfair;

Whereas, council often schedules agenda items with large public interest at hearing times inconvenient for the public;

Whereas, council frequently provides lobbyists and influential speakers greater speaking time than the general public;

Whereas, council often release proposed resolutions, ordinances, and amendments at or right before voting, preventing meaningful public input;

Whereas, council members vote and staff participate on items involving their close personal friends, although there is no financial conflict of interest;

Whereas, there is no civil or criminal penalty for violating city conflict of interest and ethics laws, making the city's laws essentially voluntary;

Whereas, the city's conflicts of interest laws are out-of-date and loophole-ridden; .

Whereas, wealthy council, board, and commission members with extensive ownership in local property and businesses appear to have a generalized conflict of interest when voting on major zoning, tax subsidy, and economic development matters; and

Whereas, the Austin Ethics Review Commission has no enforcement powers and its members are appointed by council and lack ethics expertise, and as a result it has never made a referral to authorities for a campaign finance or ethics violation.

Therefore, Be It Resolved, that the Austin City Council adopt the following ten recommendations to strengthen democracy and improve governance in Austin:

1. Conduct public hearings as required by the city code in [§ 25-1-151 - Conduct of Public Hearings](#) and require the mayor and council, board and commission members to adopt and abide by Robert's Rules of Order;
2. Require meetings to be run in a fair and neutral manner, and challenges to the chair's rulings to be resolved by a parliamentarian;
3. Require all proposed ordinances for which there is substantial public interest to be heard at a publicly convenient time in order to to maximize public participation;
4. Require equal and fair allocation of time among speakers before council, commissions, and boards;
5. Require all substantive proposed ordinances and amendments to be in writing and released sufficiently in advance of council hearings to allow public input;
6. Require council members and participating staff to recuse themselves when close personal friends have major items on the agenda, even if they do not have a financial conflict of interest;
7. Require penalties for violations of ethics and conflicts of interest laws;
8. Update and close loopholes in the city's conflicts of interest laws;
9. Require blind trusts for wealthy council members; and
10. Establish an Independent Ethics Commission and Inspector General with real power to fairly enforce the city's ethics and campaign finance laws.

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ANC Membership Approved:

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