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Action

Executive Committee

Consideration of Format Change in Meeting Minutes

Executive Summary: This item discusses the possibility of changing the manner in which the minutes of the Commission meetings are prepared. With the advent of including digital recordings of the meetings on the Commission's website, the Commission will consider whether to move to a less detailed format for its written minutes.

Recommended Action: Commission staff recommends reducing the level of detail included in the Commission meeting minutes, given the availability of the audio recordings of the Commission meetings on the Commission's website.

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Strategic Plan Goal: 2

Continue to refine the coordination between Commissioners and staff in carrying out the Commission's duties, roles and responsibilities.

- ◆ Continuously improve the development, distribution and dissemination of agenda and information to the Commission.

April 2007

Consideration of Format Change in Meeting Minutes

Introduction

In 2006, the Executive Committee considered changing the manner in which the minutes of its meetings are recorded in written form. At that time, the Executive Committee decided not to change the form or substance of the minutes. This item brings back for further consideration this issue in light of the availability of audio recordings of all Commission meetings, beginning with the February 2007 meeting, on the Commission's website.

Background

In May 2006, Commission staff requested direction from the members of the Executive Committee on whether to change the manner in which the minutes of Commission meetings were recorded in written form. To date, the Commission has documented its proceedings in writing using a detailed format, recording not only the actions taken by the Commission, but also capturing the salient points of the discussions and deliberations.

At the time that the Commission considered a proposal to change the format of the minutes, Commission staff discussed the resources necessary to contract with a recording secretary, or, alternatively, the time commitment of staff assigned to preparing the minutes in their current form. The question was posed to the Commission whether those resources would be better spent on other priorities of the Commission or whether the Commission felt the detailed manner in which the minutes were prepared was valuable and should be continued.

Numerous members of the Commission at that time commented that the minutes served as an important resource for them in recalling particular details of the deliberations and assisted them in their decision-making process. Members of the Commission noted that given the complexities of the issues addressed by the Commission, the detailed format was helpful to them in their roles as Commissioners. The direction from the Executive Committee at that time was to continue the detailed format of the minutes.

After the Commission directed the staff to continue the manner in which its meeting minutes were documented in written form, staff determined that it would cease contracting with an outside source to produce the minutes, and instead, utilize existing staff.

Current Resources Devoted to Preparing Minutes

Commission staff, usually a Staff Services Analyst or Office Technician, prepares the first draft of the Commission meeting minutes. This first draft can take from 3 to 7 days to prepare depending on other competing priorities and responsibilities, the complexity of the issues that came before the Commission, length of meeting, and number of speakers, among other factors.

The minutes are then edited by a staff consultant and subsequently forwarded to the senior management of the department for review. Except in rare circumstances, Commissioners are then afforded the opportunity to review the minutes prior to publication to ensure that their comments were recorded accurately. The minutes are then properly formatted, attachments included, and printed with the rest of the agenda materials. The process, while routine, can be time consuming.

In February 2007, the Commission began to digitally record the Commission meetings and make those recordings available to the general public within approximately a week of the meeting on the Commission's website. This new feature is consistent with the Commission's effort to allow widespread public access to its proceedings and to conduct its business in an open and transparent manner. The availability of the digital recordings of the Commission meeting, however, puts into question the need to continue detailed written meeting minutes. The digital recordings of all meetings and each agenda item are available to members of the Commission as a resource and can be used in a similar manner by members of the Commission as well as the public to serve the same purpose as the detailed minutes.

Given the new practice of posting digital transcripts of each Commission meeting on an item by item basis, it raises question as to the efficiency of staff time to continue to prepare detailed minutes of the Commission meeting.

Recommendation

Commission staff recommends that the Executive Committee recommend to the full Commission to move to a simplified version of its written meeting minutes beginning with the current meeting, and continue the practice of posting the digital audio recording on the Commission website. The simplified version of the meeting minutes would contain all actions taken by the Commission and a brief (1-2 paragraph) summary of the discussion.