

To: Sandy City Council Members  
Fr: Monica Zoltanski, Sandy City Council District 4 Representative  
Re: Public Comment 7 PM Time-Certain Amendment  
Da: January 2, 2020

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In order to promote civic engagement and encourage public dialog on the decisions impacting the day-to-day lives of Sandy residents, I propose amending the time-certain start for public comment at weekly city council meetings from 5:15 PM to 7:00 PM.

I believe a later time-certain start is needed to empower residents who wish to personally engage with the city council, and this will remove a significant barrier to public participation in Sandy government. I have considered the following in recommending this amendment to the council's procedure:

1) Personal attendance at city council is among the most effective and impactful way for residents to voice concerns about city matters. While other means of communication are available (letters, email, phone calls) when a constituent makes the time and effort to personally appear to address the city council, administration, and department heads, the impact of that face-to-face interaction cannot be overstated. The right to address our government officials is fundamental to our democracy and personal participation should be encouraged by this body whenever possible. Moving to a more convenient start time will signal the council's support for a culture of civic engagement.

2) More time is needed to arrive at city council meetings after a typical work commute. Presently, the comment time of 5:15 does not allow community members who work a traditional 9-5 work schedule adequate time to travel to city hall. More and more, people are working 9-6. Residents who work downtown or across the valley easily have a 30-45 minute commute just to get to Sandy. It is too burdensome on residents to expect them to take off work early to rush to a council meeting. Making local government easily accessible for our residents is our paramount duty.

3) Most other cities, public boards, and community councils that elicit public comment start between 6:30 and 7 PM (see attached Council Meeting Schedules Comparison).

4) Sandy City Council had an established practice for years where public comment was taken at 7 PM. Many longtime residents still think the start time is 7 PM. While the council meeting itself has always begun at 5:15 PM, for many years public comments were not taken until after 7 PM. Changing back to 7 PM will alleviate the confusion.

5) Residents have complained on the record over the past year that the 5:15 PM start time causes the public comment portion to arrive too early in the evening, sometimes before 6 PM. Without a time-certain for public comment, the public comment item floats between the 5-7 pm hour causing confusion and some residents have missed their opportunity to speak. Even though the voting items allow for public comment under our rules, those times are not fixed and it becomes a moving target causing frustration and confusion

about the council calendar. Without a reasonable, fixed start time when residents who work a full day can attend, the council risks amplifying the voice of those who can attend (retirees, unemployed, wealthier individuals who don't work) to the exclusion of working adults whose schedule follows a more traditional workday. Casting a broader net can elicit a more representative range of public views on decisions that will impact all city residents.

6) Cons: While no start time will meet the needs of all, a later start time could discourage participation from those with responsibilities later in the evening, such as parents with young children who might need child care in order to attend council meetings and tend to young children on a bedtime schedule. Also, a later start time could add pressure on staff who will be attending later meetings. On short agenda weeks, a later start time could cause a gap in the meeting where a break would be required only to return for public comment, which may or may not occur depending on participation. These potential conflicts should be weighed and considered against the benefits of any change. Your thoughts on how to minimize these conflicts are welcome.

Summary: In order to solve problems and enhance the quality of life in our community, people need to not only have the ability to access their public officials but also feel that the elected representatives are reaching them in a time and manner that makes sense for their busy lives. We want citizens engaged in the progress of our city to feel we as a body are here to serve their needs first. There is no substitute for personal engagement with local government and we only stand to strengthen our city when we engage a broader community in our decisions of the council.

Finally, hearing a wide range of voices is essential not just when making decisions on impactful projects but also promotes civic leadership. By creating opportunities for citizens to listen and be heard, we create an educated, informed, and invested population of residents, taxpayers and voters.

I believe the benefits of moving to a more citizen-service meeting time outweighs the burden on staff. A later start time for public comment is a simple and effective means to amplify the voice of a broader cross-section of our community and cultivate civic leadership. I welcome your discussion and urge you to vote to approve restoring 7 PM as the time-certain for public comment at Sandy City Council meetings. Thank you.