



Michael J. Garcia, Mayor

Memorandum

DATE: June 5, 2026

TO: Governing Body Members

VIA: Brian Moya, Interim City Manager

FROM: Andrea Phillips, Deputy City Manager/Acting Finance Director *AKP*

SUBJECT: Council Staffing Assessment-Report and Presentation

REQUESTED ACTION

Presentation and discussion.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

This project was directed by Governing Body through the passage of Resolution 2025-28, which the City Manager's Office engaged a consultant to assess the staffing support of city councilors. Baker Tilly was selected through a competitive RFP process (they were one of three proposals) to conduct the study.

The goal of the assessment is to understand Council's staffing support needs and provide recommendations for staffing models that reflect the needs of City Council, city administration and management, and the community. Interviews were conducted with outgoing and current governing body members and staff.

Findings and recommendations, along with peer benchmarking information, were shared with city staff this week. Following the presentation by the Baker Tilly team, Governing Body may wish to discuss this further in a study session.

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution 2025-28
Council Staffing Assessment Report
Presentation Slides for June 10, 2026 Governing Body Meeting

City Council

Alma G. Castro, District 1

Patricia Feghali, District 1

Elizabeth "Liz" Barrett, District 2

Paul C. Bustamante, District 2

Lee Garcia, Mayor Pro Tem, District 3

Pilar F.H. Faulkner, District 3

Jamie Cassutt, District 4

Amanda Chavez, District 4

1 **CITY OF SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO**

2 **RESOLUTION NO. 2025-28**

3 **INTRODUCED BY:**

4
5 Councilor Carol Romero-Wirth

6 Councilor Signe Lindell

7 Councilor Jamie Cassutt

8 Councilor Alma Castro

9
10 **A RESOLUTION**

11 **ESTABLISHING A PLAN FOR USE OF BUDGETED FUNDS TO STUDY HIRING**
12 **COUNCIL STAFF.**

13 **WHEREAS**, the City of Santa Fe (City) Fiscal Year 2025 Budget included funding in its
14 General Government budget that the City's budget book, page 63, described as "a study to make
15 recommendations on staff support for City Councilors"; and

16 **WHEREAS**, the General Government budget also includes funding for personnel that can
17 be used to hire staff to support City Councilors; and

18 **WHEREAS**, the City's Governing Body would like to utilize no more than \$60,000 of
19 these funds for the following work, to be completed by a Contactor within 60 days of the initiation
20 of the Contract or as soon as is possible:

- 21 a. Interview City Councilors to elicit their staffing needs and interests;
- 22 b. Explore staffing models of other City Councils to inform City Councilors on
- 23 potential models;
- 24 c. Summarize the staffing model for Santa Fe County Commissioners and the
- 25 new policy positions being implemented for State Legislators including

1 salaries and relevant job descriptions;

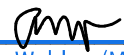
2 d. Provide a proposed staffing model that reflects the needs and interests of City
3 Councilors, including a budget and position descriptions vetted with the
4 Human Resources Department to confirm that the descriptions conform to City
5 standards; and

6 e. Compile the above information in a report to be presented to the Governing
7 Body in a study session.

8 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE**
9 **CITY OF SANTA FE** that the City Manager shall direct procurement of an appropriate contractor
10 to conduct the scope of work described above.

11 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that, once the contractor has completed the scope of
12 work outlined in this resolution, the City Manager shall present the report to the Governing Body
13 in a study session.

14 PASSED, APPROVED, and ADOPTED this 30th day of April, 2025.

15
16 
17 Alan Webber (May 1, 2025 15:14 MDT)
ALAN WEBBER, MAYOR

18 ATTEST:

19 
20 ANDRÉA SALAZAR (May 1, 2025 15:44 MDT)

21 ANDRÉA SALAZAR, CITY CLERK

22 APPROVED AS TO FORM:

23 
24 Erin McSherry (May 1, 2025 15:05 MDT)
ERIN K. McSHERRY, CITY ATTORNEY

25 *Legislation/2025/Resolutions/2025-28(R)/Resolution to Study Hiring Council Staff*



As of June 3, 2025, Moss Adams LLP has merged with Baker Tilly.

Proprietary & Confidential

FINAL REPORT

City of Santa Fe
COUNCIL STAFFING ASSESSMENT

June 4, 2026

Baker Tilly Advisory Group, LP
999 Third Ave, Suite 2800
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 302-6500

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I. Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The City of Santa Fe (the City) engaged Baker Tilly to conduct a Council staffing study to assess Councilors' staffing needs, evaluate current staffing structures, and identify potential staffing models. We conducted this assessment between October 2025 and May 2026, using a four-phased approach consisting of project planning and management, fact-finding, analysis, and reporting.

B. Summary of Observations and Recommendations

Detailed observations and recommendations are provided in [section V](#) of this report.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
Approach to Council Support		
1.	Observation	The City currently operates a decentralized support model for Council staffing, relying on a distributed group of staff across departments to provide administrative, legislative, and constituent services. In practice, this approach has led to heavy workloads for staff, ambiguity for both Councilors and staff regarding the scope of available support, and constrained capacity for Councilors to effectively manage workload demands at their desired level.
	Recommendation	The City should retain its current decentralized Council support structure while adding a centralized Council Program Manager position within the City Manager's Office to improve coordination, consistency, workload management, and administrative support across Council operations without consolidating existing departmental support functions.
2.	Observation	Roles and responsibilities between Councilors and City staff are not always clearly defined, resulting in confusion, inconsistent expectations, and uneven support.
	Recommendation	Establish and document a formal Council support framework that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of Councilors and City staff and standardizes how work flows between them. This documentation will improve consistency, efficiency, and equity for Council support.
Other Considerations		
3.	Observation	The City's legislative research and drafting process is critical to effective governance. However, the process lacks transparency, clear prioritization criteria, and shared visibility, which has created frustration for Councilors and City staff.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS		
	Recommendation	Formalize a legislative research and drafting process that establishes clear prioritization criteria, shared visibility across Councilors, and consistent communication on the status of legislative requests.
4.	Observation	The current committee process requires legislation to move through multiple sequential reviews, contributing to redundant discussions, longer timelines, and increased workload for both Councilors and staff.
	Recommendation	Evaluate the committee review process to identify opportunities to streamline legislative workflows, reduce redundancy, and improve efficiency for Councilors and staff.

II. Introduction

A. Background

At the request of the City of Santa Fe's Council, Baker Tilly conducted a Council staffing study to assess City Councilors' support needs, evaluate current staffing structures, and identify potential alternative models.

Together with the Mayor, Councilors form the City's governing body and act as primary policy makers. They review legislative agenda items, propose amendments, and introduce new policies. The City has eight part-time paid Councilors (two for each City district), and a full-time paid Mayor. Councilors bring diverse backgrounds and varying levels of municipal experience, along with differing capacities to balance their Council responsibilities with full-time work and personal obligations.

In recent years, Councilors report experiencing increased workload demands related to legislative activity, constituent engagement, and administrative coordination. As community expectations grow and City issues become more complex, Councilors are spending more time responding to constituent inquiries, developing policy initiatives, preparing for committee meetings, and navigating internal City processes. Some of these responsibilities extend beyond what can reasonably be managed by part-time elected officials without structured and reliable support.

These conditions prompted City leadership to initiate this assessment, to better understand current Council support challenges, evaluate peer city practices, and identify staffing models and governance improvements that align with Santa Fe's structure as a part-time Council. This assessment analyzed ways to improve Councilor capacity, enhance efficiency and equity in support delivery, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure that Councilors are effectively supported in carrying out their governance and representative duties to provide the best service possible to constituents.

B. Scope and Methodology

We conducted this assessment between October 2025 and June 2026. The project consisted of four phases that are detailed below.

PROJECT PHASES		
Phase		Description
1	Startup and Project Management	This phase included a kickoff meeting with City leadership to confirm expectations and discuss overall project scope, logistics, deliverables, timing, and progress reporting requirements. Planning also served to clarify responsibilities between Baker Tilly and City staff, timing of project activities, and format of deliverables. We conducted project management throughout the engagement and ensured all deliverables received a quality assurance review.

PROJECT PHASES		
Phase		Description
2	Fieldwork	Fieldwork consisted of activities designed to help Baker Tilly gain an understanding of the City's current Council structure and needs. Fieldwork activities were designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative information to form the foundation for observations. For this engagement, fieldwork activities included: • Interviews: We interviewed seven Councilors and ten members of City management and staff. • Document and Data Review: We gathered relevant documentation for review, including organizational charts, budgets, and governance procedural documents. • Peer Benchmarking: We conducted peer benchmarking with peer cities to assess how the City's Council structure and needs compare to similarly situated cities. Peers were selected in partnership with City leadership for their similar size or structure to the City, while ensuring a mix of Council support structures. We reached out to 19 peer cities and the following ten responded to our survey: ○ City of Austin, TX ○ City of Boulder, CO ○ City of Hartford, CT ○ City of Lansing, MI ○ City of Odessa, TX ○ City of Provo, UT ○ City of Reno, NV ○ City of Rio Rancho, NM ○ City of Salem, OR ○ City of Topeka, KS Full peer survey results are included in Appendix A. • Industry Best Practices: We conducted research into industry best practices for related topics, such as Council staffing support models. • Preliminary Observations: We summarized the results of fieldwork in the preliminary observations presentation. This document informed the direction of analysis.
3	Analysis	Based on our initial observations, we evaluated Council staffing models that the City may consider to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the City Council.
4	Reporting	Based on our analysis, we prepared the draft report, which was reviewed by City leadership. We integrated feedback into an updated report before finalization.

C. Statement of Compliance with Standards

This engagement was performed in accordance with Standards for Consulting Services established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA). Accordingly, we provide no opinion, attestation, or other form of assurance with respect to our work or the information upon which our work is based.

III. Commendations

Although the focus of this assessment was to conduct a Council staffing study, we noted the following areas of strength and existing good practices that can be leveraged for further improvement:

- **Constituent Commitment:** Councilors are committed to supporting their constituents' needs and concerns. Councilors have a strong willingness to champion constituent issues, facilitate community events, and ensure that constituent voices are heard in Council deliberations, despite resource constraints.
- **Staff Commitment:** City staff members are generally eager to support Councilors with their needs, helping with tasks, such as answering questions, coordinating logistics, preparing reports, and offering information, to help Councilors make informed policy decisions. While the level and type of support may vary depending on the Councilor's style and the specific request, staff typically strive to be responsive and helpful, working collaboratively to address both administrative and community engagement needs.

We would like to thank City leadership for their willingness to assist us in this assessment process. These commendations, coupled with our observations and recommendations, provide an overview of areas of strengths and weaknesses that can help improve governance and operations.

IV. Council Support Model Options

There are three primary staffing support models with different levels of support, resource investment, and operational structure. We will refer to these options throughout the report. These models are not mutually exclusive; rather, they represent a spectrum of potential approaches. Each model carries different implications for cost, governance alignment, administrative efficiency, and Councilor workload. Generally, each of these models is aimed at providing a mix of support to Councilors in the following areas:

- **Legislative Planning Support:** Tracking requests, developing early-stage policy concepts, performing preliminary research, and preparing materials for committee meetings and Council deliberations.
- **Constituent Services:** Managing district inboxes, triaging constituent issues, preparing communications, coordinating follow-up with departments, and supporting Councilor-led community meetings and events.
- **Administrative and Operational Support:** Scheduling, calendar management, travel coordination, event logistics, and managing routine procedural tasks currently handled inconsistently by various City offices.

MODEL A: ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

Each City Councilor is assigned a dedicated full-time or part-time staff member who is responsible for supporting that Councilor's priorities, constituent services, policy development, and scheduling or other day-to-day operations. This model provides highly personalized support and allows staff to develop deep familiarity with the Councilor's district, policy focus areas, and community needs. While this approach can enhance responsiveness and relationship-building, it also requires a significant level of staffing resources and FTEs.

MODEL B: SHARED AND CENTRALIZED SUPPORT

Staff are organized in a centralized structure and assigned to support multiple Councilors, typically through a small, shared team. Their primary responsibility is supporting Councilors and Council functions, though staff may also maintain select broader organizational responsibilities. Support may be structured across the whole Council or aligned to Councilors within specific districts. This model promotes collaboration, resource flexibility, and consistency in service delivery while maintaining dedicated support for Council operations and Councilor needs.

MODEL C: DECENTRALIZED SUPPORT

Councilors rely on staff embedded across broader City departments and administrative functions, where Council support represents only one portion of staff responsibilities. In this model, staff primarily focus on operational or departmental priorities and assist with Council functions on an as-needed basis. While this approach can promote organizational efficiency and flexible use of resources, it may limit dedicated support capacity, individualized attention, and responsiveness to Councilor-specific needs and priorities.

V. Observations and Recommendations

A. Approach to Council Support

ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

1. Observation	The City currently operates a decentralized support model for Council staffing, relying on a distributed group of staff across departments to provide administrative, legislative, and constituent services. In practice, this approach has led to heavy workloads for staff, ambiguity for both Councilors and staff regarding the scope of available support, and constrained capacity for Councilors to effectively manage workload demands at their desired level.
Recommendation	The City should retain its current decentralized Council support structure while adding a centralized Council Program Manager position within the City Manager's Office to improve coordination, consistency, workload management, and administrative support across Council operations without consolidating existing departmental support functions.

Current Model

The City currently operates under [Model C: Decentralized Support](#), with no team or staff positions dedicated exclusively or centrally to supporting Councilors. Instead, support is provided by staff across multiple departments. This staffing structure results in limited dedicated capacity for Councilors, contributing to workload challenges and ambiguity regarding available support.

DISTRIBUTION OF CURRENT COUNCIL SUPPORT

City Staff	FTE	Level of Staff Support for Councilors	Support Provided to Councilors
Constituent Services Manager and Specialists	4 FTE	Medium	Respond to constituent complaints and coordinate events
Marketing and Communications Manager	1 FTE	Low	Market events and send out certain communications for Councilors
Mayor and City Manager Executive Assistants	2 FTE	Low	Provide ad hoc onboarding, travel, scheduling, and purchasing support
Legislation and Policy Innovation Manager and Staff	3 FTE	High	Research policy issues and develop resolutions and legislation

Issues with Current Model

- **Limited Councilor Capacity:** As noted previously, the City Councilor role is a part-time position. Most Councilors reported limited ability to manage their full scope of responsibilities due, in part, to the absence of dedicated staff support. Specifically, Councilors requested additional support with the following activities:
 - Legislative planning (tracking requests, organizing policy ideas, undertaking research, developing drafts)
 - Constituent support (responding to inquiries, preparing constituent meeting materials, engaging constituents at meetings and events, managing email lists)
 - Administrative support (scheduling meetings, event planning)
- **Limited Staff Capacity:** City employees responsible for supporting Councilors reportedly lack sufficient bandwidth to fulfill all support requests while also managing other job responsibilities. For instance, the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation can address each Councilor's top legislative research priorities but is unable to respond to every request made. This issue is further complicated by the absence of a shared understanding of what constitutes adequate support for Councilors.
- **Role Ambiguity in Staff Support:** There is reported confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of City staff in supporting and prioritizing Councilor requests (see [Roles and Responsibilities](#)). As a result, staff are sometimes unsure which requests they can reasonably decline, and Councilors may have unclear expectations about what constitutes a reasonable request. This ambiguity becomes particularly challenging when Councilor requests bypass established protocols and staff are contacted directly.

Peer Approaches: By Model

- **Model A: One-on-One Support:** Only two peer cities surveyed use a one-on-one support model for Councilor support. This model is generally most effective in larger cities where Councilors manage substantial constituent populations and require dedicated staff capacity to address constituent services, legislative development, communications, and administrative coordination. Austin, the largest peer included in this analysis, employs a one-on-one support model for its full-time Councilors, with teams of three to seven positions to support each Councilor per District. Support roles include positions, such as Chief of Staff, Policy Analyst, Legislative Analyst, communications staff, and clerical or administrative support. Austin staff rated the model as functioning moderately well and reported varying perceptions of Councilor workload. Hartford also uses a one-on-one support model, though within a smaller organizational context and with part-time Councilors. Hartford reported eight dedicated support staff for seven Council members, a nearly 1:1 ratio, and staff rated the model as functioning extremely well with generally light Councilor workloads. These examples demonstrate that, while the one-on-one support model can provide high levels of individualized assistance and responsiveness, it typically requires substantial staffing resources and is most feasible in jurisdictions with larger operational capacity or greater Council workload demands.
- **Model B: Shared and Centralized Support:** Many surveyed peer cities (40%) use this model. Under this model, a small, centralized team of dedicated positions provide support services to all Councilors collectively rather than assigning staff to individual Council members. Most peers using this model reported having one to two centralized support staff dedicated to Council operations, though one peer city uses a larger structure that includes a director overseeing analyst staff who collectively support Councilors.

Peer cities using this model organize reporting relationships differently. In one city, the centralized support team reports directly to Council, while in others the positions are housed within the City Manager's Office or under the Deputy Mayor. Staffing structures also vary. One peer city employs a Council Program Manager positions to coordinate support functions, while the remaining peers rely on analysts, executive assistants, or similar administrative roles to support Councilors.

Survey responses suggest generally positive perceptions of the model. All peers surveyed rated the model as functioning very well. One peer did not provide a survey response regarding model effectiveness. However, peers also reported perceiving that Councilors spend more time on legislative development, constituent engagement, and administrative coordination activities in this model than in other staffing models. Two peer cities reported perceptions of heavy Councilor workloads. Staff indicated these workload pressures were influenced in part by decentralized organizational processes and shifting priorities from the supervisors overseeing the centralized support staff, both of which can limit responsiveness and create competing demands on staff time. In addition, workload challenges may result because the shared and centralized support model typically relies on a relatively small number of centralized staff who provide broad support across multiple functional areas, rather than having dedicated legislative, constituent service, communications, or administrative staff assigned to specific functions or Councilors. As a result, Councilors may need to perform more activities directly when centralized staff capacity is limited or when competing priorities reduce staff availability.

The City of Boulder provides a notable example of this model. Boulder initially established a shared assistant role that later evolved into a City Council Program Manager position reporting to the Assistant City Manager. According to Boulder staff, the Program Manager dedicates most of their time to Council support functions while also assisting with special projects assigned through the City Manager's Office. Councilor-related responsibilities undertaken by this role include:

- Handling Council-wide administrative tasks (travel, scheduling, meeting prep)
- Managing shared initiatives under the Assistant City Manager and cross-organizational coordination
- Triaging requests and ensuring consistent information flows to all Councilors
- Maintaining neutrality by pushing consistent information to all nine Councilors and escalating advocacy-leaning requests to the City Manager

Boulder also emphasized the importance of maintaining neutrality by providing consistent information to all Councilors and escalating advocacy-oriented requests to executive leadership, when appropriate.

Peers also identified several implementation challenges associated with the shared and centralized support model. Because a small, centralized team may serve a relatively large group of Councilors, maintaining confidentiality and balancing competing priorities can be difficult without clearly established processes and protocols. Some peers also noted that inconsistent direction from multiple Councilors or supervisors can create operational challenges and affect workload distribution if governance structures and expectations are not clearly defined.

- **Model C: Decentralized Support:** The same number of surveyed peer cities (40%) use this model. Under this model, Councilor support responsibilities are distributed across multiple departments or staff positions rather than being centralized within a single office or team. Compared to the shared and centralized support model, peers using a decentralized structure generally reported having more city staff available to support Councilors across various functional areas. Peer cities reported a range of staffing approaches depending on Council size, workload, and governance arrangements. Staffing levels among peers surveyed ranged from no dedicated support staff to five staff positions supporting Councilors. Most support positions in this model are

tied to specific functional responsibilities, such as legislative research and coordination, constituent communications, administrative support, or operational assistance.

Peer cities using the decentralized support model generally reported lighter or more manageable Councilor workloads compared to peers using centralized support structures. This may be because decentralized models often distribute support responsibilities across multiple specialized staff and departments, allowing Councilors to receive assistance with legislative, constituent, communications, and administrative functions from staff with subject-matter expertise in those areas. This suggests that decentralized models can function under a range of staffing levels, though perceptions of effectiveness and workload may be influenced by the availability of administrative and operational support capacity.

Overall, peer feedback suggests that decentralized support structures can function effectively when Councilor support responsibilities are clearly defined and sufficient staff capacity exists across functional areas. However, decentralized models may also create challenges related to coordination, consistency of support, and clarity regarding roles and responsibilities if processes and communication channels are not well established.

PEER SURVEY RESPONSES

Peer	Staffing Model	Councilors FT or PT	No. of Council Members	No. of Council Support Staff	Councilor to Dedicated Support Staff Ratio	Model Efficacy Survey Rating	Councilor Workload	Reporting Structure	Staff Support Titles
Austin	One-on-One Support	Full-time	10	48	5:1	Moderately well	Various	TBD	These roles are present for most districts: - Chief of Staff - Policy Analyst - Legislative Analyst - Communications Clerical/Administrative
Hartford	One-on-One Support	Part-time	7	8	0.9:1	Extremely well	Light	Individual Council Members	Not reported
Boulder	Centralized Support	Part-time	8	1	8:1	Not reported	Not reported	City Manager's Office	Program Manager (1)
Provo	Centralized Support	Part-time	7	7	1:1	Very well	Adequate	Council	- Council Executive Director (1) - Analysts (5) - Executive Office Assistant (1)
Salem	Centralized Support	Part-time	9	1	9:1	Moderately well	Heavy	City Manager's Office	- Mayor and Council Support (1) - Constituent and Government Affairs Manager (0.5)
Topeka	Centralized Support	Full-time	9	2	5:1	Very well	Heavy	Deputy Mayor	Senior Executive Assistant (2)
Lansing	Decentralized Support	Part-time	8	3	2.7:1	Very well	Light	Council	- Legislative Office Manager (1) - Administrative Assistant (1) - Legislative Aid (1)
Odessa	Decentralized Support	Part-time	6	4	1.5:1	Extremely well	Light	Council	- City Secretary Office - City Manager's Office - City Attorney Office
Reno	Decentralized Support	Full-time	6	5	1.2:1	Very well	Various	City Manager's Office	- Council Operations Liaison (3) - Administrative Assistant to the Mayor and Council (1) - Mayoral Relations Administrator (1)
Rio Rancho	Decentralized Support	Part-time	6	0	0	Moderately well	Adequate	N/A	N/A

Peer Approaches: By Workstream

- **Legislative Planning Capacity:** Santa Fe Councilors reported challenges related to organizing, researching, prioritizing, and advancing legislative ideas without dedicated staff support. Several Councilors described difficulties tracking legislative requests, shaping early-stage policy concepts, and conducting the research and analysis needed to support informed decision-making. In some cases, legislative support functions including research, drafting, and coordination fall to the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation, which stakeholders reported is currently understaffed and managing a backlog of requests (see [Roles and Responsibilities](#) and [Legislative Research Process](#)). Councilors emphasized that these constraints limit their ability to proactively develop policy initiatives, collaborate effectively with colleagues, and respond to emerging community issues in a timely manner.

Peer benchmarking results indicate that Councilors in most jurisdictions regularly participate in legislative planning and policy development activities, though the frequency of these activities varies (see [Appendix B: Survey Results](#)). Peer cities operating under a decentralized support model commonly reported having dedicated legislative or policy staff available to support Councilors, often supplemented by administrative support roles. In contrast, peers under a centralized support model generally reported that Councilors spend more time directly managing legislative and policy-related activities themselves, often on a daily or weekly basis rather than intermittently throughout the year.

- **Constituent Engagement and Support:** Santa Fe Councilors across City districts described constituent engagement as one of the most time-intensive and steadily growing aspects of the role. Constituents frequently contact Councilors as a primary point of access into City government to seek assistance navigating City processes, request updates on services, report concerns, or share feedback. As a result, Councilors often spend substantial time responding to emails, phone calls, social media messages, and direct constituent outreach.

Councilors also expressed differing perspectives regarding the appropriate level of constituent engagement and responsiveness associated with the role. Some described expectations for extensive direct constituent interaction, while others described a more limited approach. These varying expectations can create challenges in establishing consistent support practices and may make it difficult for City staff to fully accommodate each Councilor's individual preferences and working style.

The volume and complexity of constituent engagement activities significantly affects Councilor capacity. Without dedicated staff support to triage inquiries, coordinate with departments, or track issue resolution, Councilors must often personally manage follow-up, gather information, and communicate updates to constituents. Councilors noted that even routine constituent issues can become time consuming when departmental workloads are high, internal processes are unclear, or resolution requires ongoing coordination across multiple parties.

Several Councilors indicated that the cumulative demands associated with constituent services reduce the time available for legislative planning, committee preparation, collaboration with colleagues, and proactive policy development. As constituent expectations continue to increase, the demands of Council duties increase as well. For Councilors serving in these part-time roles while maintaining outside employment, these demands can create significant workload pressures and challenges related to work-life balance.

Constituent engagement is a critical function of local governance. As elected representatives, Councilors serve as a direct link between constituents and City government. Timely, accurate, and responsive constituent support helps maintain community trust, promote transparency, and ensure constituents feel heard and represented in government decisions. Effective constituent

services also play an essential role in identifying emerging issues within neighborhoods, highlighting service delivery gaps, and informing policy priorities. When Councilors are not adequately supported in these activities, constituent concerns may go unanswered, service issues may persist longer, and the City may miss opportunities to address community needs proactively.

Peer city feedback suggests that staffing structures influence the amount of time Councilors spend on constituent service activities. Peer cities using the decentralized support model generally reported that Councilors spend less time directly managing constituent coordination activities than do councilors using other models, likely due to the availability of policy and constituent support positions. One of these cities has a dedicated position (i.e., Council Operations Liaison) responsible for responding to constituent messages, which is one way to improve coordination and communication. Other peers in this model have other positions, such as communication and administrative type roles, which may support Councilors with constituent communications.

Without additional staffing or structured support, City Councilors are likely to continue experiencing strain that limits their ability to balance constituent services with policy responsibilities. Ensuring adequate constituent support capacity is therefore essential not only for Councilor workload management but also for sustaining effective, responsive, community-centered governance.

- **Administrative and Operational Support:** Councilors also identified administrative and operational responsibilities as a significant component of the role that can be difficult to manage without dedicated support. Councilors reported needing assistance with scheduling; event coordination; navigation of internal processes; and ensuring that translation, IT support, and outreach are properly arranged for meetings. These tasks frequently require coordination across multiple departments and depend on staff availability, which can be challenging in a resource-constrained environment. Though executive assistants for the Mayor and City Manager provide some administrative support for Councilors, it's provided on an ad hoc basis, depending on capacity. Without dedicated staffing support, Councilors often must personally carry out many administrative functions, which strains their capacity for more strategic work.

Administrative and operational support is a necessary aspect of effective Council support. Timely scheduling, organized meeting preparation, and coordinated communication directly affect Councilors' ability to participate effectively in legislative discussions, prepare for public hearings, and engage with constituents. Inadequate administrative support can contribute to delays in legislative processes, communication inefficiencies, and operational bottlenecks that affect both Council effectiveness and service delivery.

Peer city feedback further reinforces the importance of administrative coordination functions within Council support structures. Peer cities using a centralized support model generally reported that Councilors typically spend more time than cities using other models on administrative activities, such as preparing materials, scheduling meetings, planning events, and managing logistics. Those who reported higher frequency of these activities (e.g., weekly engagement) also tend to report heavier Councilor workloads than those who reported less frequent administrative activities.

Recommendation

The City should retain its current decentralized Council support structure (Model C) while establishing a centralized Council Program Manager position within the City Manager's Office to improve coordination, consistency, and strategic administrative support across Council operations.

Maintaining the decentralized model preserves the subject-matter expertise embedded within departments and avoids the operational inefficiencies and confidentiality concerns that can arise when Council support functions are fully centralized into a standalone team. Additionally, transitioning to a shared and centralized model would likely create duplicative responsibilities or reduce operational efficiencies, as many existing staff currently support Council functions and broader City operations.

Peer cities using decentralized support structures generally reported positive outcomes, particularly when specialized staff support legislative, constituent, administrative, and operational support across the City. The City's current model also supports the multidisciplinary nature of Councilor support needs, which span legislation, constituent services, communications, administration, and operational coordination. The functions are often best supported through coordinated departmental expertise rather than a fully centralized Council office.

The addition of a Council Program Manager position would help address existing gaps in coordination, triage, administrative support, and workload management that currently contribute to inconsistent support practices, role ambiguity, and operational strain across departments. Locating this position within the City Manager's Office would support operational consistency, continuity, and equitable service delivery across the governing body, particularly given the City Manager's Office central coordinating role within the City.

Under this model, the Council Program Manager would serve as a centralized coordination and administrative resource while preserving the City's decentralized support structure. The position would not replace existing departmental responsibilities, but instead, would improve communication, streamline processes, and enhance coordination across Council-related activities.

Core responsibilities of the position may include:

- Coordinating administrative and operational support functions, such as scheduling meetings, coordinating travel and training, preparing briefing materials, and supporting Council-led events
- Supporting constituent engagement efforts through inquiry triage, coordination of departmental follow-up, issue tracking, and communication support
- Assisting with legislative coordination activities, including tracking policy initiatives and coordinating with the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation.

While the position would not serve as a policy advocate or independently draft legislation, centralizing these coordination and administrative functions would reduce fragmentation; alleviate pressure on existing departments; and allow Councilors to focus more fully on governance, constituent representation, and decision-making responsibilities. Retaining decentralized functional support while adding centralized coordination; therefore, is likely to provide the most balanced, scalable, and sustainable approach for improving Council support capacity and effectiveness.

Following implementation of the Council Program Manager position, the City should continue evaluating Councilor support needs, workload demands, and organizational capacity to determine whether additional staffing resources may be necessary to support Council operations. For example, if legislative coordination and policy development continue to represent operational bottlenecks, the City should consider adding additional staff within the Office of Legislative and Policy Innovation.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2. Observation	Roles and responsibilities between Councilors and City staff are not always clearly defined, resulting in confusion, inconsistent expectations, and uneven support.
Recommendation	Establish and document a formal Council support framework that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of Councilors and City staff and standardizes how work flows between them. This documentation will improve consistency, efficiency, and equity for Council support.

The City's current approach to Council support is characterized by significant role and responsibility confusion between Councilors and City staff, resulting in inconsistent practices, uneven support across districts, and inefficiencies across the City.

In general, core Councilor functions include fiscal governance, strategic direction and policy setting, legal authorities, and constituent representation.¹ While the City Code section 2.1 and Charter Article VI outline the powers and duties of the governing body (this includes City Council), and governing body procedural rules outline formal Council processes, they do not clearly define how Councilors are expected to carry out their legislative, oversight, administrative, and constituent-facing responsibilities in practice, nor how City staff should support those activities. Councilors reported uncertainty regarding which aspects of the role they are expected to perform directly versus those intended to be handled by City staff. This uncertainty is most evident in areas, such as constituent services, administrative coordination, and early-stage legislative development. Some Councilors view responding to constituent service requests, coordinating events, or drafting legislation as core responsibilities, while others believe these tasks should largely fall to staff. These differing interpretations have led to wide variation in Councilor workload, approaches to support, and expectations for staff responsiveness.

City staff similarly described confusion about the scope and limits of the support they are expected to provide to Councilors. Staff reported uncertainty about which requests fall within their role, when it is appropriate to redirect or decline requests, and how to prioritize Councilor work alongside core departmental responsibilities. In these situations, staff are often unclear how to respond, resulting in inconsistent practices, duplicated effort, and strained working relationships.

These role clarity challenges are further exacerbated by limited staff capacity. Departments that provide the majority of Council support reported that existing staffing levels are insufficient to meet current demands. Staff must balance Council support requests against core operational duties, which has led to backlogs, delayed responses, and variability in service levels. Without clear definitions of what constitutes "adequate" Council support, limited capacity amplifies frustration among both Councilors and staff and reinforces perceptions that districts across the City may not be served consistently.

¹ [Cities 101 — Council Powers - National League of Cities](#)

Peer Approaches

Many peers surveyed (60%) reported that defined Councilor roles and responsibilities are included in formal governance documents, including City Charters, Rules of Procedure for City Council, and supplemental Councilor handbooks or policy manuals. In many cities, Councilors' responsibilities are generally centered on policy direction, sponsorship of legislation, and constituent representation, while City staff are responsible for administrative coordination, legislative research and drafting, and process management.

- **Policy:** Many peers reported their Councilors spend a large amount of time on tracking and responding to legislative requests or issues. Some time is also spent on organizing and prioritizing policy ideas and drafting legislation or policy documents. Some peer Councilors reported they tend to spend less time on conducting research on policy matters.
- **Constituents:** Many peers reported Councilors spend a lot of time attending community events. Responding to general constituent inquiries or concerns is another activity that many Councilors spend weekly or daily time completing. Some peer reported Councilors spend less time on preparing materials for meetings with constituents and hosting community events. These activities are still important, but are generally not daily or weekly activities.
- **Administration:** Generally, peers reported Councilors spend less time, compared to other responsibilities, on administrative type activities including preparing communications, scheduling their own meetings, and planning or coordinating events. This is somewhat due to the volume of work in this category and also partially due to the additional support some peer Councilors receive from their support staff in this area.
- **Other Key Duties:** Attending briefings and meetings is an activity many peers reported is done daily or weekly as this is a significant part of a Councilors duties.

Peer respondents emphasized that this separation of roles enables more consistent workloads, clearer expectations, and more efficient use of staff capacity, particularly in cities with part-time Councils or increasing legislative complexity.

In contrast, the City lacks a consistently applied, operational framework that clearly defines how Councilors and staff share responsibility for core legislative, administrative, and constituent service activities. While high-level authority is established in the City Charter and governing body procedural rules, these documents do not translate roles into day-to-day working norms or clarify who is responsible for specific tasks.

The combination of unclear Councilor responsibilities, ambiguous staff roles, and constrained capacity creates a cycle in which Councilors modify their behavior, rely on personal interpretations and historical precedent to compensate for gaps in support. This could potentially lead to workarounds for managing requests, which further complicates expectations. Over time, this has contributed to inefficiencies, inconsistent support experiences, and ongoing tension around accountability and workload. These issues also limit the effectiveness of any staffing model, as additional resources alone will not resolve underlying confusion without clearer role definition and governance alignment.

Recommendation

The City should establish a formal Council support framework that clearly defines and differentiates the respective roles of Councilors and City staff; outlines how the two work together; and sets clear expectations for communication, prioritization, and accountability. This framework should serve as a practical guide for day-to-day operations, supplementing the City Charter and procedural rules by translating high-level authority into clearly articulated working norms. The [Institute for Local Government](#) reports creating a shared understanding of responsibilities and expectations can help optimize working relationships and set the Council up for success.

Councilors' core responsibilities should focus on policy, constituent relations, and administrative support, though additional responsibilities may be defined. In the current environment, these responsibilities include the following:

- **Policy:** Setting policy direction and prioritization, sponsoring policy initiatives, or preparing policy ideas for the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation
- **Constituents:** Understanding constituent needs, meeting with and responding to inquiries timely, reaching out to Constituent Services at the City when City staff answers or clarifications are needed
 - [Municipal Research & Services \(MRSC\) Mayor and Council member Handbook](#) recommends bringing in staff for constituent complaints, particularly as Councilors lack the authority to take action in administrative matters
- **Administration:** Coordinating with City administrative staff on scheduling internal city needs, and scheduling any meetings not related to Councilor duties, such as campaign related activities
- **Other Key Duties:** Attending briefings, committee meetings, or Council meetings; approving the budget; and representing the community

City staff responsibilities, by contrast, should focus on enabling Councilors to perform these duties efficiently and effectively. Responsibility should be defined for each staff group. The City should develop clearer documentation that defines the specific roles for each group. The following is a starting point for these defined roles:

- **Council Program Manager:** Coordinates administrative and operational support functions, such as scheduling meetings, coordinating travel and training, preparing briefing materials, and supporting Council-led events. Supports constituent engagement efforts through inquiry triage, coordination of departmental follow-up, issue tracking, and communication support. Assists with legislative coordination activities, including tracking policy initiatives and coordinating with the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation.
- **Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation:** Drafts and develops policies, including in-depth research that may crossover with other subject matter expert staff. Supports tracking of all resolutions and ordinances.
- **Constituent Services:** Coordinates constituent issues between Councilors, departments, and constituents, as needed. Supports coordinating citywide events.
- **Marketing and Communications:** Promotes City events through marketing and Citywide messages.

Equally important, the Council support framework should define how work flows between Councilors and staff. This includes establishing standardized request pathways, clear escalation protocols, and consistent prioritization criteria. Councilors should understand how to submit requests, what level of detail is needed, and what timelines to expect. Staff should have clear guidance on how to evaluate requests, balance competing priorities, and flag issues that require executive or Council-wide discussion. These processes should apply consistently across all districts to promote equity and transparency.

The framework should also establish boundaries to prevent role drift and reduce strain on staff. This includes reinforcing that Councilors cannot manage staff and may have limits in contacting staff directly, unless included in the responsibilities above. Clear boundaries help staff confidently manage requests, reduce workarounds, and protect time for core departmental responsibilities.

Finally, the Council support framework should be formally documented in Standard Operating Procedures and institutionalized. It should be incorporated into governing body administrative procedures, reinforced through structured onboarding for new Councilors, and supported through training for both Councilors and staff. As staffing models evolve, this framework will serve as the foundation for effective collaboration, consistent service delivery, and sustainable workload management.

By clearly defining who does what, how work moves through the organization, and how Councilors and staff partner to support effective governance, the City can reduce frustration, improve efficiency, and ensure that any investment in staffing yields lasting organizational benefits.

B. Other Considerations

Although this report is primarily focused on Council staffing structures and support models, our assessment found that legislative and committee processes are closely tied to Council workload, responsiveness, and perceptions of support capacity. Even where staffing levels are comparable to peer cities, inefficient or unclear legislative routing, duplicative committee review processes, and limited transparency around policy development can increase administrative burden for both Councilors and staff. The effectiveness of Council support is influenced not only by the number and assignment of staff, but also by how legislative requests and committee workflows are coordinated, prioritized, communicated, and advanced through the organization. For this reason, both the legislative research process and committee structure were examined as important operational factors affecting overall Council support and workload management.

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.	Observation	The City's legislative research and drafting process is critical to effective governance. However, the process lacks transparency, clear prioritization criteria, and shared visibility, which has created frustration for Councilors and City staff.
	Recommendation	Formalize a legislative research and drafting process that establishes clear prioritization criteria, shared visibility across Councilors, and consistent communication on the status of legislative requests.

The Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation is responsible for developing legislation and conducting policy research. Demand for this support reportedly exceeds available capacity, and the process is widely described as opaque, duplicative, and structurally inefficient.

The City's assignment of responsibility for legislative drafting is consistent with peer cities. Peer survey responses indicate that responsibility for drafting legislation at comparable cities most commonly rests with centralized legislative or policy staff, rather than with individual Councilors. Of the cities surveyed, the majority (80%) reported that legislative policy staff or the City Attorney's Office are primarily responsible for drafting ordinances and resolutions. This approach reflects a governance model in which subject matter expertise, legal coordination, and drafting capacity are institutionalized within professional staff, rather than dispersed among elected officials. The City largely aligns with this prevailing model through its policy office, which manages most legislative drafting and serves as a central coordinating body for policy development and ordinance preparation.

PEER SURVEY RESPONSES

Peer	Council members	Legislative Policy Staff / City Attorney 's Office	Administrative Assistants	Assigned Department Staff
Austin	X	X		
Hartford		X		
Lansing		X		
Odessa			X	
Provo		X		
Reno		X		
Rio Rancho		X		X
Salem		X		
Topeka		X		

While the City's overall structure and staffing model is comparable to most peers, challenges appear to arise less from who is responsible for drafting legislation and more from how legislative work moves through the system.

Councilors submit legislative ideas independently, largely due to the political dynamics and concerns about open meeting requirements. Because they generally do not share priorities with one another, the policy office frequently receives similar or overlapping requests that must be treated separately. This results in duplicative research and drafting efforts. The office also maintains a substantial backlog of requests, some of which have been pending for several years.

Additionally, the policy office internally prioritizes requests from both Councilors and City staff based on external requirements, urgency, complexity, and capacity, but there is no formal prioritization framework, transparent process communicated to Council members, or information into the status of each request. As a result, Councilors report uncertainty and concerns about fairness, particularly when similar requests move at different speeds or when they are unable to access information about the broader pipeline of legislative work. Because the specificity and volume of Councilor requests vary widely, staff frequently shift priorities in response to changing demands and needs. Staff reported Councilors may not always understand what they want or need out of policy research from a short memo to long, in-depth white paper. These factors contribute to delays and reinforce perceptions of inconsistency.

These conditions place the policy office in a reactive posture, frequently shifting workload in response to urgent or politically driven requests. Staff report limited ability to engage in proactive policy development or support early scoping discussions that could improve efficiency and legislative quality.

Interviewees emphasized that structural changes, such as formalizing prioritization, improving transparency, and creating shared legislative planning mechanisms, would provide more meaningful improvements than staffing increases alone.

Recommendation

Regardless of the staffing model the City chooses, the City should retain legislative drafting and in-depth policy analysis as a centralized function of the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation, consistent with peer practices that emphasize specialized expertise, legal coordination, and institutional consistency. To address current capacity constraints and process inefficiencies, the City should also update and formalize the broader legislative research and coordination process including the following:

- Improve visibility into the legislative pipeline across Councilors through shared tracking tools, dashboards, or periodic status reporting mechanisms. This will provide Councilors with general insight into what legislative matters are in process, current stages of review, and overall workload priorities that can improve transparency, support prioritization discussions, and reduce uncertainty regarding policy progress. For example, a centralized tracking system could include high-level information, such as the sponsoring Councilor, submission date, subject area, current status or stage of review, assigned staff lead, and anticipated next steps or timelines.
- Continue consistent intake through standardized legislative forms and prioritization criteria for legislative requests. The standardized form should feed into a clear prioritization model for both governing body members and City staff where those involved understand the process and how

prioritization decisions are made. Prioritization criteria may include legislative or external requirements, City operational updates, constituent need, Council sponsorship, legal deadlines, and alignment with Council priorities/objectives. This prioritization can be a part of Council meetings or Councilors may initiate study sessions to review legislative priorities together.

- Define roles for early coordination to reduce duplicative or overlapping work (see [Roles and Responsibilities](#)).

Under a shared dedicated support model, the Council support position(s) should assist with defined coordination and process-management functions that work in coordination with the work of the Office of Legislation and Policy Innovation. This may include supporting Councilors with consistently using standardized legislative request forms; ensuring required background information and sponsorship details are complete at intake; tracking the status of requests; and facilitating clear, timely communication between Councilors and the policy team regarding scope, prioritization, and timelines. By serving as a neutral coordination point, shared support staff can help translate Council policy direction into well-defined requests, reduce rework, and improve mutual understanding of workload and constraints. Together, these changes would strengthen the legislative process by preserving professional drafting expertise while improving efficiency, transparency, and alignment between Councilor priorities and staff capacity.

COMMITTEE PROCESS

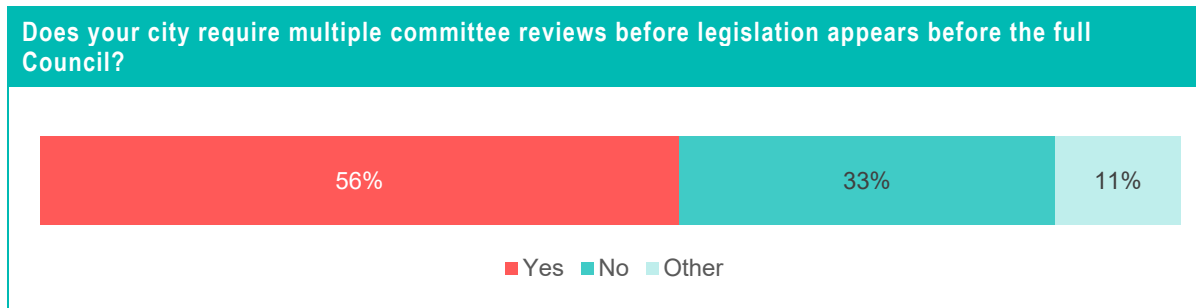
4.	Observation	The current committee process requires legislation to move through multiple sequential reviews, contributing to redundant discussions, longer timelines, and increased workload for both Councilors and staff.
	Recommendation	Evaluate the committee review process to identify opportunities to streamline legislative workflows, reduce redundancy, and improve efficiency for Councilors and staff.

The City's legislative process requires proposed legislation to advance through multiple Council committees before reaching the full governing body. Interviewees noted that legislation is typically routed through at least two committees, and often three, before final consideration. As a result, Councilors review the same legislation multiple times across different committees, creating significant redundancy and increasing the overall workload. Several Councilors indicated these dynamics contribute to a reported need for additional administrative or legislative support to manage routine responsibilities.

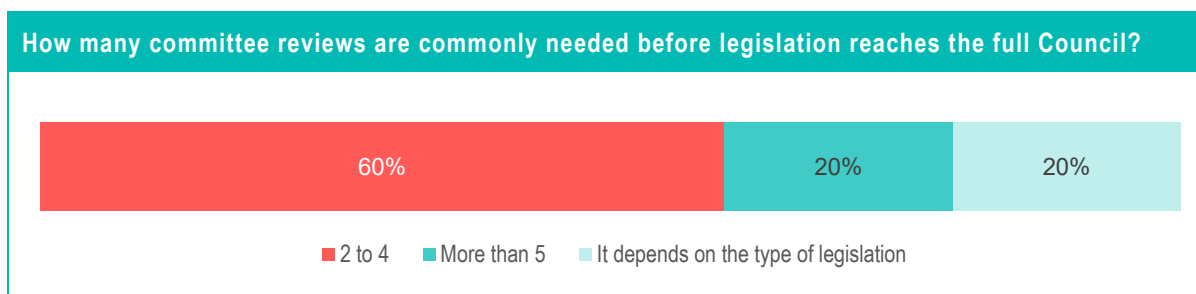
Interviewees also identified opportunities to modernize and streamline the process. Suggested approaches include reducing the number of standing committees, consolidating overlapping review responsibilities, or replacing some committee reviews with periodic work sessions that allow Councilors to discuss legislative concepts collectively before formal introduction. These changes could simplify legislative routing, reduce repetitive review, increase transparency in early policy development, and alleviate workload pressures that currently contribute to demand for additional staffing.

Peer Approaches

The City's use of committees is very similar to about half of peers surveyed that require multiple committee reviews before legislation appears before the full Council. Of those, 60% of peer respondents commonly use between two and four committee reviews before legislation reaches the full Council though the types of committees and level of reviews were not distinguished.



**Other response: "We have other processes in place that allow for legislation to appear without Committee review or staff review."*



Best Practice

According to the National League of Cities, committees are intended to provide groups of Councilors the opportunity to thoroughly consider particular items of business and recommend action on those items to the full Council. Ideally, this system reduces the amount of work that each Councilor performs and reduces the length or frequency of full Council meetings.²

Although formal standards do not specify a set number of committee reviews, widely recognized local government best practices emphasize streamlined decision-making processes, clear committee roles, and minimizing redundant deliberation. Structures that require repeated review across multiple bodies can undermine efficiency and increase workload without adding commensurate value. For example, the Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) warns that while committees can facilitate the decision-making process, they can also consume unwarranted amounts of time and effort if not properly managed.³ MRSC recommends the following best practices on the use of committees and subcommittees:

² [Cities 101 — Council Powers - National League of Cities](#)

³ [Mayor and Council member Handbook](#), MRSC

1. Clearly define the mission before creating a subcommittee
2. Set deadlines for reports
3. Monitor assignments to check on progress
4. Establish expiration provisions and enforce them
5. Rotate membership periodically
6. Keep nonmembers informed of meetings and actions
7. Monitor the amount of staff effort required
8. Review the list of subcommittees annually and delete those that are no longer necessary
9. Consider whether the subcommittee is subject to the Open Meetings Act

Overall, these considerations point to the need for a committee structure that is clearly defined and used selectively, so it supports the Council's work without adding unnecessary complexity or workload.

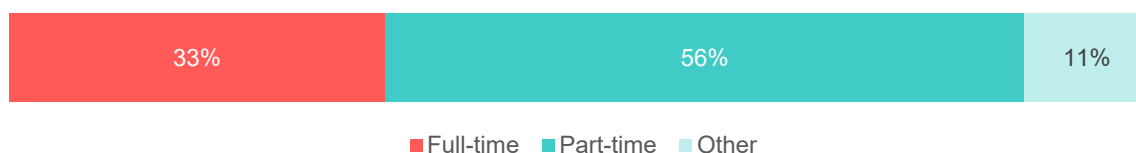
Recommendation

The City should consider conducting a future review of its committee structure and legislative routing process to assess whether the current approach appropriately balances oversight, transparency, and Council workload. As part of this evaluation, the City could explore opportunities to streamline processes and roles or evaluate redundant reviews and opportunities for improved coordination. The purpose of an evaluation is not to reduce legislative oversight, but rather to ensure that committee processes are used selectively and efficiently in a manner that supports effective governance without creating unnecessary administrative burden for Councilors and staff.

VI. Appendix B: Survey Results

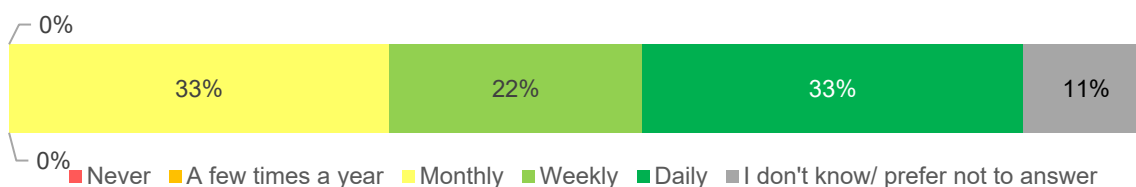
We distributed an online survey to 19 peer cities on February 23, 2026, and collected data through March 13, 2026. Out of the peers invited to take the survey, nine cities submitted responses, a participation rate of 47%. We also interviewed the City of Denver, but they did not respond to the survey.

Are the council members at your city full-time or part-time?



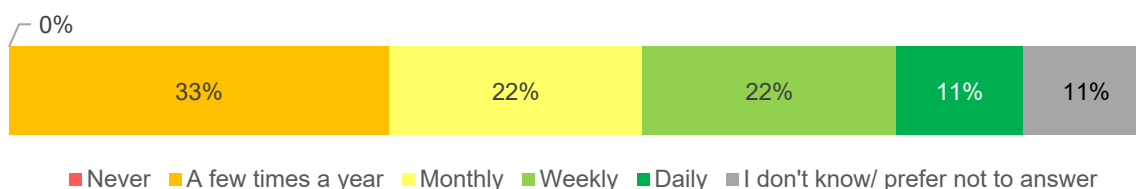
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?

Tracking and/or responding to constituent requests or issues related to legislative-related activities

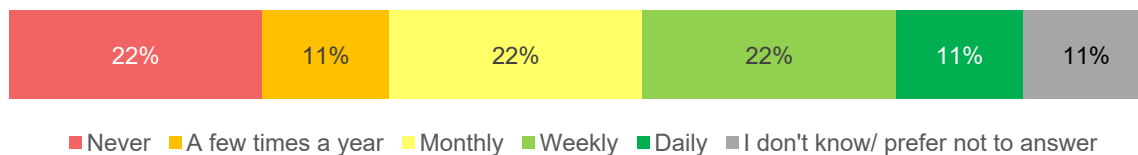


How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?

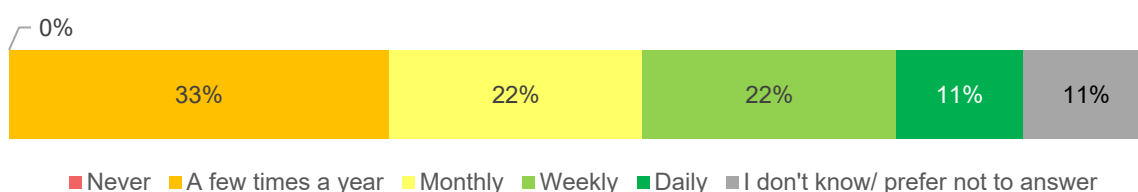
Organizing and prioritizing policy ideas



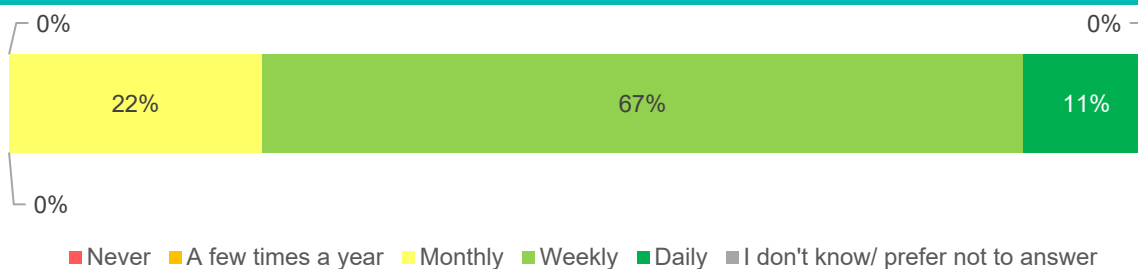
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Conducting research on policy matters



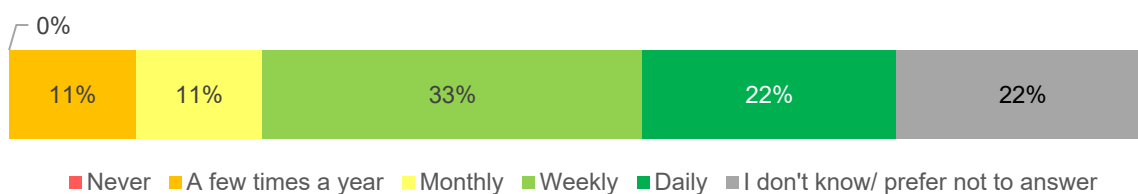
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Drafting legislation or policy documents



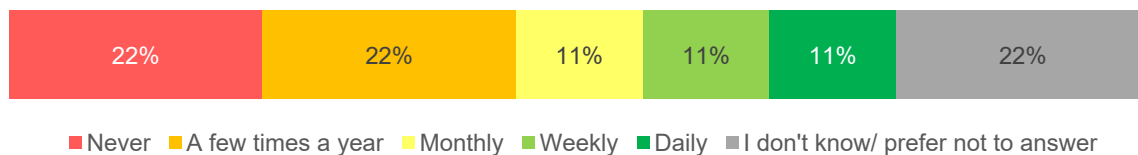
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Attending briefings, committee meetings, or council meetings



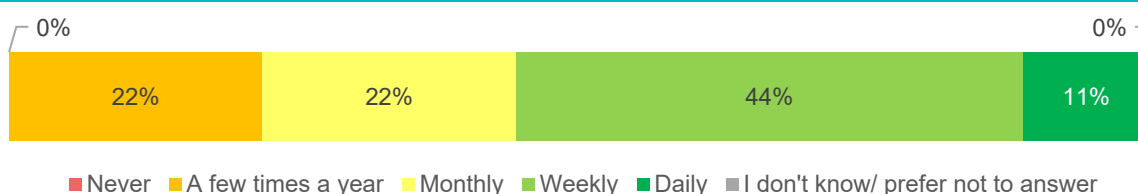
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Responding to general constituent inquiries or concerns



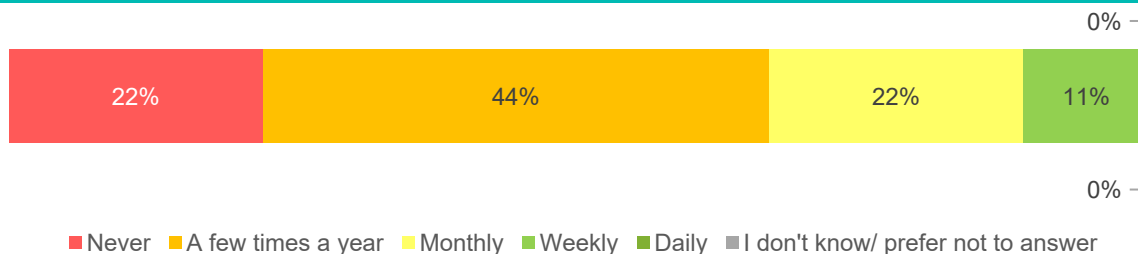
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Preparing materials for meetings with constituents



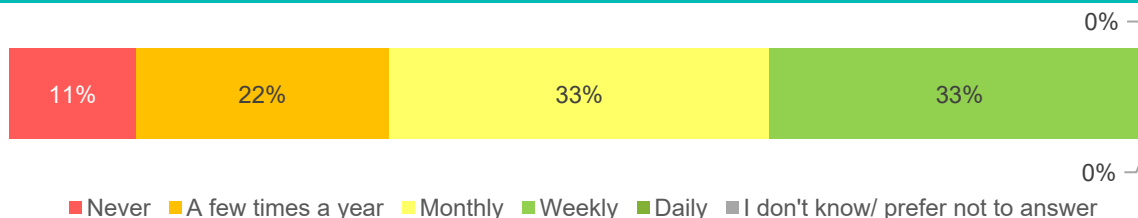
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Attending community meetings or events



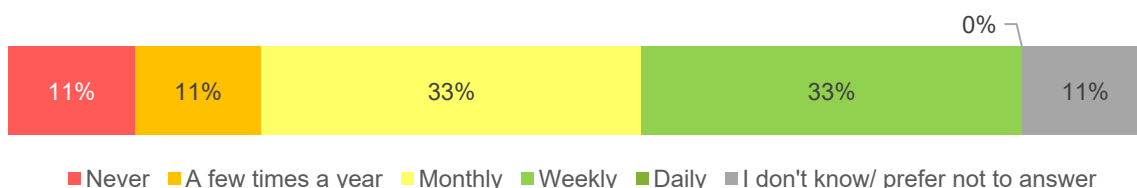
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Hosting community events, such as town halls



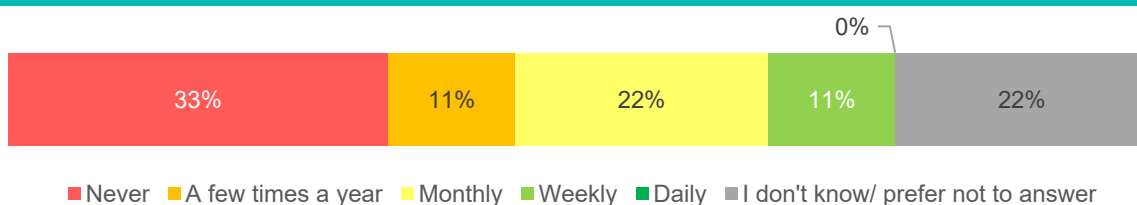
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Preparing or sending email newsletters, social media posts, or other large-scale digital communications



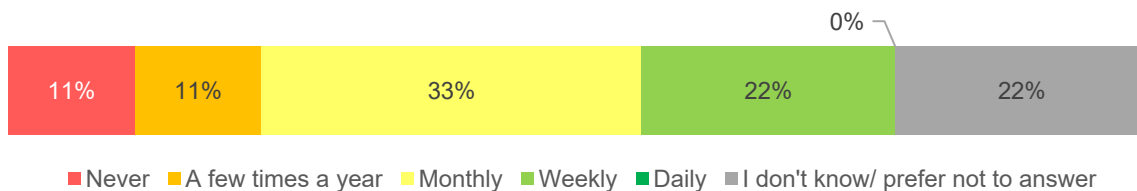
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Scheduling their own meetings and appointments related to their role as a council member



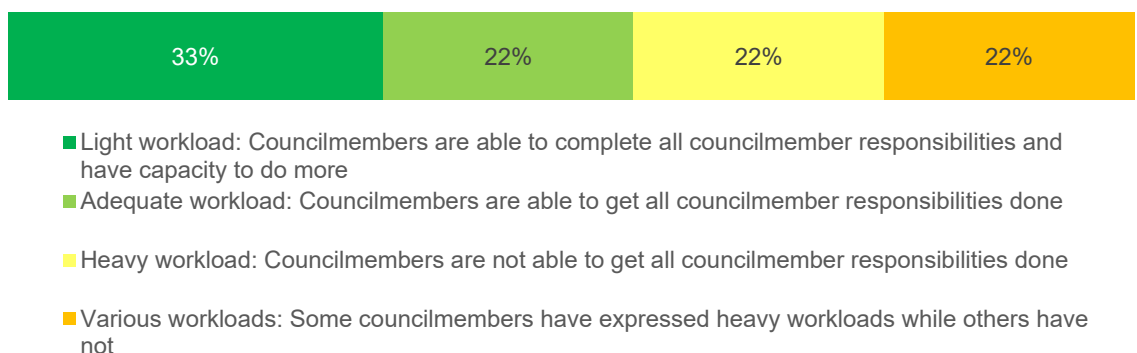
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Planning or coordinating events



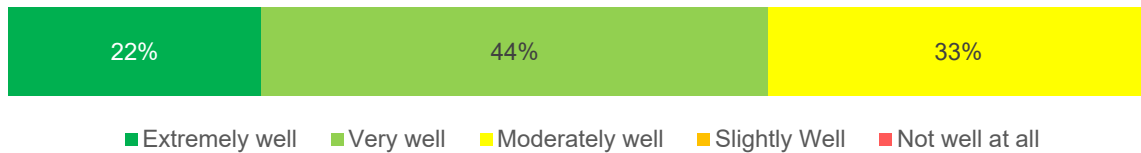
How often do the council members at your city perform the following activities?
Managing logistical correspondence or communications with other council members and the City



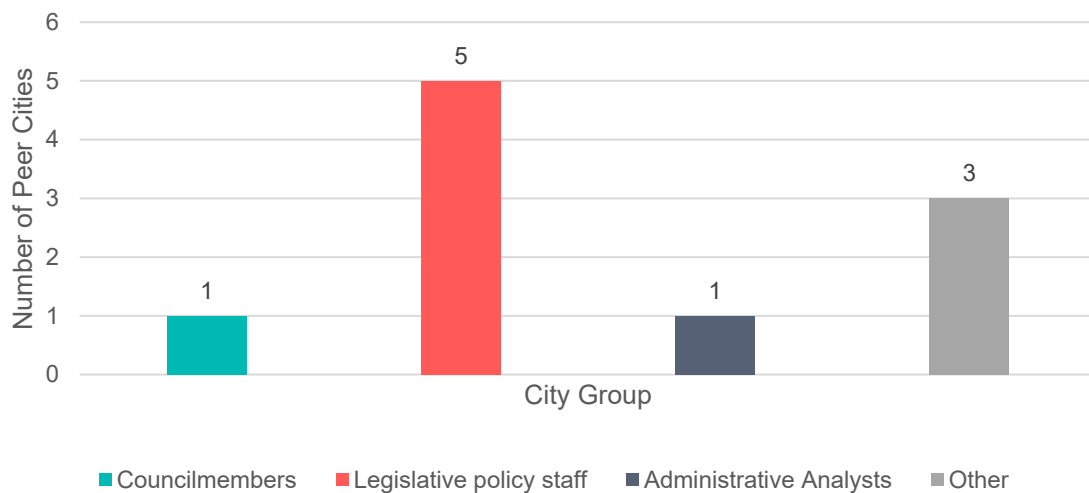
Rate the level of perceived council member workload concerns:



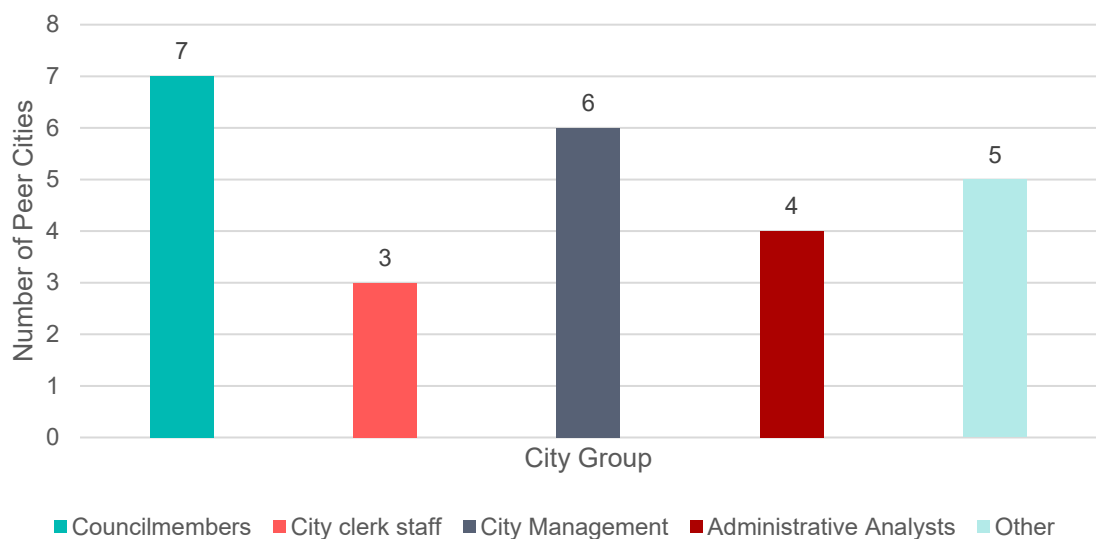
In your opinion, how well does the current staffing structure support council members at your city?



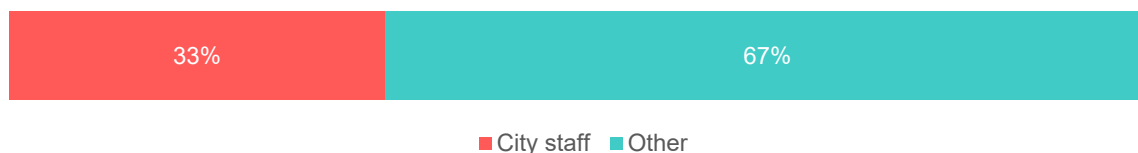
Who typically drafts legislation at your city?



Who typically responds to constituent messages at your city?

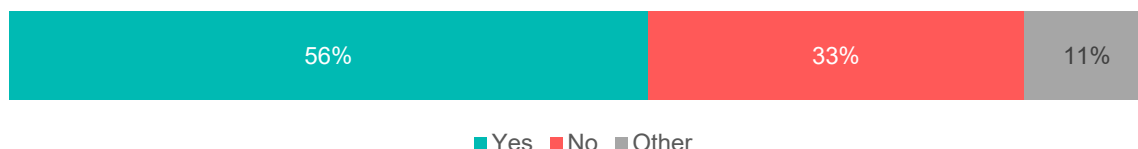


Who is primarily responsible for prioritizing legislative research requests from Council members?



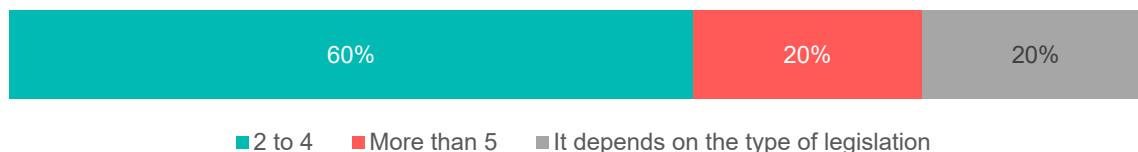
Other responses: City Manager's Office, Corporation Counsel, Council's Legislative Analyst, City Manager Staff, Council Relations Liaison, City Manager

Does your city require multiple committee reviews prior to legislative appearing before the full Council?



Note: The type of committee was not distinguished in this question.

How many committee reviews are commonly needed before legislation reaches the full Council?



What changes or improvements, if any, would you make to your city's approach to providing Council staff support?

Many peer cities identified a need for greater capacity, stronger coordination, and clearer role definition in their Council staff support models. Common suggested improvements included adding or restoring Council support positions, along with more centralized intake, tracking, and prioritization of council member requests. Respondents also noted challenges related to shared staffing models, such as confidentiality, workload balancing, and inconsistent direction, and emphasized the value of clearer procedures and governance structures. While some cities reported their current approach works well, most comments reflected growing workload pressures and an interest in more intentional, scalable Council support systems.

VII. Appendix C: Peer Benchmarking Data

Peer benchmarking, as a component of the peer survey, was conducted to compare the City’s Council structure and support environment with similarly situated cities who participated in the survey. The following table presents key governance, staffing, and budget characteristics of the peer cities used in this analysis.

A. Background Information

Entity	State	Budget Expenditures FY 2026	City Population (2023)	Number of FTEs	# of Council Members	# Council Support Staff	Ratio of Councilor to Support Staff	Council Type	Mayor Distinction	City/County Leadership
Santa Fe	NM	\$480,589,392	88,224	~1400	8	0	0	District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Manager, Strong mayor
Austin	TX	\$6,344,246,000	967,862	16,799	10	6	1.67:1	District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Manager
Boulder	CO	\$623,055,019	106,274	1,548	8	1	8:1	At Large	Part time Mayor	City Manager
Hartford	CT	\$626,320,988	119,970	1,518	7	8	0.875:1	At Large	Full time Mayor	Strong Mayor
Lansing	MI	\$307,364,767	112,546	971	8	3	2.67:1	4 At-Large, 4 Wards	Full time Mayor	Strong Mayor
Odessa	TX	\$309,370,610	114,080	1,137	6	4	1.5:1	1 At-Large, 5 District	Part time Mayor	City Manager
Provo	UT	\$319,675,508	114,303	958	7	7	1:1	2 At-Large, 5 District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Administrator
Reno	NV	\$770,040,404	268,959	1,539	6	5	1.2:1	District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Manager
Rio Rancho	NM	\$254,582,129	106,533	791	6	0	0	District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Manager
Salem	OR	\$785,062,410	176,666	1,419	9	1.5	6:1	District/ wards	Part time (volunteer) Mayor	City Manager
Topeka	KS	\$416,251,580	126,103	1,174	9	2	5:1	District/ wards	Full time Mayor	City Manager

B. Survey Results

COUNCILOR ACTIVITIES, SCOPE, AND WORKLOAD

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
Are the Council members at your city full-time or part-time?	Full-time	Full-time	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Not reported	Part-time	Full-time
How often do the Council members at your city perform the following activities?									
• Tracking and/or responding to constituent requests or issues related to legislative-related activities	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Weekly	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Daily

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
• Organizing and prioritizing policy ideas	Daily	Monthly	Weekly	I don't know / prefer not to say	A few times a year	A few times a year	Monthly	A few times a year	Weekly
• Conducting research on policy matters	Daily	Monthly	Weekly	I don't know / prefer not to say	Never	Never	Monthly	A few times a year	Weekly
• Drafting legislation or policy documents	Weekly	Never	Weekly	I don't know / prefer not to say	Never	Monthly	A few times a year	Never	Weekly
• Attending briefings, committee meetings, or Council meetings	Weekly	Weekly	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly
• Responding to general constituent inquiries or concerns	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Monthly	Daily	I don't know / prefer not to say	Daily	A few times a year	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
• Preparing materials for meetings with constituents	I don't know / prefer not to answer	A few times a year	Daily	Monthly	A few times a year	Never	Never	I don't know / prefer not to say	Weekly
• Attending community meetings or events	Weekly	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	Daily	A few times a year	A few times a year	Monthly	Weekly
• Hosting community events, such as town halls	Monthly	Never	A few times a year	Monthly	A few times a year	Never	A few times a year	A few times a year	Weekly
• Preparing or sending email newsletters, social media posts, or other large-scale digital communications	Monthly	A few times a year	Weekly	Monthly	Weekly	Never	Monthly	A few times a year	Weekly
• Scheduling their own meetings and appointments related to their role as a council member	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Never	Weekly	Weekly	A few times a year	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly
• Planning or coordinating events	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Monthly	Monthly	I don't know / prefer not to say	Never	A few times a year	Monthly	Never	Weekly
• Managing logistical correspondence or communications with other council members and the City	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Monthly	Weekly	I don't know / prefer not to say	Never	Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Monthly
• Other activities (please specify)	I don't know / prefer not to answer	Media events (monthly) Allocation of discretionary funds (A few times a year)	None reported	Some members are more active with all of the above in general. Members in leadership would do more organizing and prioritizing than a rank-and-file member.	None reported	None reported	None reported	None reported	Non reported

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
If the duties and responsibilities of your city Councilors are documented anywhere, please describe the nature of that documentation here:	This is outlined in the Rules of Procedures for City Council published on our website.	Council members receive onboarding during their first month of their appointment. In addition, City policies are documented on an intranet and Council rules are adopted by resolution.	Not reported	City Charter, and in state law (home rule cities act)	City Council Rules	Not reported	City Charter	Not reported	Each council member documents their own duties
Rate the level of perceived council member workload concerns (light, adequate, heavy, or various):	Various workloads: Some council members have expressed heavy workloads while others have not	Various workloads: Some council members have expressed heavy workloads while others have not	Adequate workload: Council members are able to get all council member responsibilities done	Light workload: Council members are able to complete all council member responsibilities and have capacity to do more	Heavy workload: Council members are not able to get all council member responsibilities done	Light workload: Council members are able to complete all council member responsibilities and have capacity to do more	Light workload: Council members are able to complete all council member responsibilities and have capacity to do more	Adequate workload: Council members are able to get all council member responsibilities done	Heavy workload: Council members are not able to get all council member responsibilities done

APPROACH TO COUNCIL SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
How many individual or shared dedicated Council staff support positions does your city have?	6	5	7	3	1.5	8	4	0	2
What are the official titles/roles and high-level responsibilities of the staff members assigned to support council members?	• Chief of Staff • Policy Analyst • Legislative Analyst • Communications • Clerical/ Administrative	• Council Operations Liaison (3) • Administrative Assistant to the Mayor and Council (1) • Mayoral Relations Administrator (1)	• Council Executive Director • Analysts • Executive Office Assistant	• Legislative office manager • Administrative assistant • Legislative analyst (added last year)	• Mayor and Council Support (1) • Constituent and Government Affairs Manager (0.5)	Not reported	• City Secretary's Office • City Manager's Office • City Attorney's Office	None	Senior Executive Assistants
How is work allocated and prioritized among staff members who support more than one council member (e.g., staff members determine what to work on, council members collectively decide, there are tracking mechanisms, staff figure it out as they go)?	Not reported	Not reported	Staff figure it out as they go	In general, the staff takes their guidance from the Council President when it comes to prioritization.	The City Manager's office staff meet once a week and we collectively determine what to work on.	Not reported	As needed or required	N/A	Staff takes into account the workload of each assist and they communicate duties. There is 1 email that is primarily used for staff, website etc. that goes to both staff members so there is cross knowledge of all communications. There are a few council members that desire to work primarily with one assistant.

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
Where are these positions structured in your city (e.g., under Council, City Management/Administration, City Clerk, various offices, other)?	Not reported	Under City Manager	Under Council	They are non union, city employees employed by the Council	City Manager's Office	Not reported	Council appointees offices	N/A	City Manager signs off on timecards and the Deputy Mayor oversees office assistants
[No Dedicated Support Only] What are the titles/functions/reporting lines of the staff who aid council members in specific ways or specific functions?	City Manager, Deputy City Manager, City Attorney, City Clerk, and City Department Directors.								
[No Dedicated Support Only] How do council members currently receive support for their duties (e.g., council members directly ask staff, requests flow through one central person or department, request log, etc.)?	A majority of the time, Council members seek support via the City Manager who addresses or delegates to other staff. On occasion, Council members directly ask specific Department Directors for support in responding to constituent inquiries.								
In your opinion, how well does the current staffing structure support council members at your city?	Moderately well	Very well	Very well	Very well	Very well	Extremely well	Extremely well	Moderately well	Very well
What changes or improvements, if any, would you make to your city's approach to providing Council staff support?	City Council utilizing their staff for the roles they are designed to perform, such as clerical or administrative as opposed to relying on Management to support that role.	Prior to financial shortfalls, there were 3 Council liaisons. One position has been unfilled/frozen for 2 fiscal years and one position is currently being held open for a staff member that is on military leave. Ideally, this position would be unfrozen and the staff member on military leave would return leaving a ratio of 2 Council members per liaison with one dedicated position to support mayoral needs.	Council Office is not encumbered by budget situations/balancing, like the rest of operations.	None come to mind. Council is very well looked after by staff and has all necessary and adequate resources to perform their duties.	We recently added a Constituent and Council Support position to increase the support for Council members.	Less staff	Council memos need improvement	Based on input received, existing processes and procedures are meeting needs; however, input on changes and/or improvements is difficult to obtain from Council members. On occasion, and randomly, some Council members do not follow existing processes and procedures or historic practice.	It is difficult to have a yearly change with Deputy Mayor as a "supervisor" and especially when that role is not in the office/building. The approach and structure varies depending on their mgt experience.

APPROACH TO LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES AND USE OF COMMITTEES

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
Who typically drafts legislation at your city?	• Council members • Legislative policy staff	Legislative policy staff	Legislative policy staff	Office of the City Attorney	Legislative policy staff	Mayor sets policy agenda, ordinances/ resolutions drafted by city attorneys	Administrative assistant	• Assigned Department staff • City Attorney's Office • Deputy City Manager	Legislative policy staff
Who typically responds to constituent messages at your city?	• Council members • Administrative assistants • Council and management staff	Council Relations liaison	• Council members • City management	• Council members • City management • Depends on who the constituent contacts	• Council members • City management • Constituent and Government Affairs Manager	Mayor's Office	• Councilmembers • City Clerk staff • City management	• Council members • City Clerk staff • City management • Administrative assistants • Department Directors and their assigned staff	• Council members • City Clerk staff • City management • Administrative assistants
Who is primarily responsible for prioritizing legislative research requests from Councilors?	City Manager's Office	Council relations liaison	City staff	Council's Legislative Analyst	Constituent and Government Affairs Manager	Corporation Counsel	City Manager staff	City Manager	City Staff
Does your city require multiple committee reviews before legislation appears before the full Council?	We have other processes in place that allow for legislation to appear without Committee review or staff review.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
How many committee reviews are commonly needed before legislation reaches the full Council?	N/A	More than 5	2-4	2-4	2-4	N/A	N/A	N/A	It depends on the type of legislation

CLOSING

Interview Question	Austin, TX	Reno, UT	Provo, UT	Lansing, MI	Salem, OR	Hartford, CT	Odessa, TX	Rio Rancho, NM	Topeka, KS
Please provide any additional comments or insights regarding staff support for council members in your city.	Our City Council has 11 members, including the Mayor and each of them have at minimum 6 dedicated and funded positions that are not Civil Service covered positions like other City employees.	None	None	None	Through the City Manager's audit, we identified that having a centralized system with one person coordinating responses to constituent requests is much more effective than how we are currently operating. We recently made these changes and processes seem to be more efficient.	We have a weak Council/strong mayor system -- Council is part-time and meets twice a month, with respective committee meetings in between.	None	Rio Rancho has a true Council-manager form of government. While the Mayor is full-time, the position has no unilateral, final authority related to personnel, policy, operations, or budgetary matters. Furthermore, neither the Mayor or Council Members have any dedicated or direct report staff beyond the City Manager. The Mayor is a member of the Governing Body (Mayor and Council Members) and only votes if there is a tie or member absence.	Confidentiality can be difficult with 9 council members since there is a lot of cross help between the two assistants. It is very difficult for the two assistants to get direction every year from different Deputy Mayors-even on the small items like asking off for time and how the Deputy wants it done. Each Deputy is going to have a different perspective on duties needed and supported but in the end it reflects on the entire 9 council members.

