

THESE MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL
UNTIL APPROVED BY THE
CULVER CITY
STANDING GOVERNANCE SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE CITY COUNCIL

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
CULVER CITY STANDING GOVERNANCE
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

July 8, 2025
3:00 p.m.

Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Fish called the special meeting of the Standing Governance Subcommittee of the City Council to order at 3:10 p.m. in the Patacchia Meeting Room at City Hall.

Present: Bubba Fish, Council Member
Yasmine-Imani McMorris, Council Member

Staff Present: Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager
Shelly Wolfberg, Assistant to the City Manager
Elizabeth Shavelson, Assistant Chief Financial Officer
T'Ana Allen, Deputy City Clerk

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Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Fish led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Presentations

Item P-1

Presentation on Citizens' Assemblies by Public Democracy Los Angeles

Michelle Dennis and Wayne Leibman, Public Democracy Los Angeles, provided background on themselves and the organization; discussed civic participation; unprecedented levels of voter cynicism, apathy, and despair; efforts to involve residents in governance; civic assembly as an effective tool for redesigning the annual budget process and to increase resident participation; City processes not designed to fully empower and inform residents; current processes for resident participation; essentials of civic assemblies; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; widespread use of civic assemblies in other parts of the world; recent American civic assemblies; processes for civic assemblies; remitting a question for the civic assembly to address; the moderator; participant recruitment; the proven decision-making process; the non-political process; panel autonomy; the time-intensive empowering process; allowing all voices to be heard; recommendations provided; the goal to achieve rough consensus on every recommendation; a written report provided by the City Council regarding which recommendations are chosen; expertise vs. diversity; insiders vs. outsiders; richness of lived experience on decision-making; recommendations from the panel informed by experts; smart, fair, creative recommendations; proven processes; giving real people responsibility to act real responsible; long-term outcomes of civic assemblies; academic research about why the process works; the Oregon Citizen's Initiative Review Process; and boosting confidence in government.

A video clip of citizens who participated in the Petaluma Fairgrounds Assembly was shown at the meeting.

Michelle Dennis and Wayne Leibman, Public Democracy Los Angeles, noted that Public Democracy Los Angeles recently held a civic assembly in collaboration with Braver Angels; discussed participants; an article written by NPR (National Public Radio) through LAist on civic assemblies; and creating positive outcomes for city councils.

Peggy Flynn, City Manager of Petaluma, California, discussed the citizens' assembly they convened in 2022 at the fairgrounds with 30 residents who were paid a stipend to engage in 90 hours of deliberation on a highly visible and controversial topic; she noted that the fairgrounds had not been under public control for 80 years and the lease was coming up; discussed the robust communications process to hear from voices not typically heard from; collaboration with Healthy Democracy; the process designed to invest in resident deliberation; three different scenarios created using City Council approved guiding principles that are now used for every pilot project and pilot use for the fairground and to guide the Master Planning process; and she indicated that she recommends the process to other cities all the time as a way to strengthen decision-making and the democratic process.

Discussion ensued between Ms. Flynn, staff, and Subcommittee Members regarding clarification that the city was a stakeholder like everyone else and did not run the process; putting the process in the residents' hands; allowing for open discussion; the format of video meetings that were not Brown Act meetings; curation of the process by all stakeholders; the ultimate decision by the City Council; amount paid to residents for deliberation; cost of the process; consideration of using the process again for the Petaluma city charter; and origination of the idea.

Additional discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding appreciation to the Petaluma City Manager for taking the time to share their experiences; skepticism about doing different things; the decision-making process; building credibility; the typical process; polarizing issues; the lottery selection process; the ability to cater to all demographics; Petaluma's Fiscal and Organizational Sustainability Plan; the importance of a unified City Council to work for the good of the city; the experience of Petaluma over months to address each element of the city's financial portfolio; working to identify needs and address gaps; resident participation in the fairground deliberation; grants; and the resiliency grant Petaluma received from HCD (Housing and Community Development) through FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency).

Michelle Dennis, Public Democracy Los Angeles, discussed recommendations for the budget process and next steps.

Chair Fish invited public comment.

The following members of the public addressed the Subcommittee:

Lyn Chao received clarification that information she submitted containing more detailed written testimony for public comment with supporting documentation had been received; discussed her full support for civic assemblies; she asked that the first assembly address the six overcrowded Los Angeles animal services shelters with high kill rates, especially in dogs; cited a press release discussing animals at risk of euthanasia due to lack of space; discussed the definition of euthanasia; the killing of healthy, adoptable animals; number of dogs currently at risk of being killed due to shelters being over capacity; increases to dumped animals with the challenging economy; the long-standing crisis and dire situation; she cited an article from the Los Angeles Time noting continued underfunding of LA Animal Services by Mayor Bass; discussed attempts to eliminate shelters; continued reductions to the food budget; fundraising events; community awareness issues; and she noted that animals are sentient beings capable of love and pain.

Council Member McMorris noted that Culver City did not have any animal shelters.

Philip Lelyveld received clarification that he was able to make a comment, but not to engage in a conversation; discussed the potential lottery; the feeling that the people most interested in Culver City would apply to the lottery; and he wanted to know how the City would work to engage the vast majority of people in Culver City who do not care about politics in order to get a true representation of the City regardless of income, race, social status, etc.

Christian May-Suzuki asked about the lottery process; discussed tools to create the demographic representation for a civic assembly; ensuring diversity while keeping the process random; and requested more information regarding the reference made by the Mayor of Petaluma to K-12.

George Rawls indicated being involved in Public Democracy LA; discussed a book called *Democracy When the People Are Thinking* by James Fishkin; ensuring a deliberative process is

continuously available; tough decisions that will have to be made by the City Council; understanding public sentiment to decisions made before making those decisions; and public reactions to priorities set.

Jeanne Black expressed excitement about the process; enjoyed participating in the mock civic assembly; discussed issues that command a great amount of public interest vs. the budget; pre-work to get people interested in wanting to participate; how to encourage interest; and she asked for information on how to get to the representative people.

Daniel Selz provided background on himself; thanked Council Members for their service and for their consideration of the item; noted the need for hard tradeoffs as a community; he offered to help find dollars to leverage; noted conservatives who have provided positive feedback about citizens' assemblies; people's opinions that change in going through the process; and the ability to break out of how people identify politically.

Mona Lee provided background on herself; expressed support for the idea of civic assemblies and for having a pre-warmup process before the lottery begins; discussed making the budget more appealing and manageable for everyday people; multi-generational representation; and she proposed household mailers to provide awareness.

Christina Ku expressed support for the assembly concept; proposed topics for consideration including environmental issues; discussed threats to the Ballona Wetlands; bringing people together on a non-confrontational issue; information available at defendballonawetlands.org; consideration of air, soil, and water pollution as a result of factory farming; and providing mechanisms to enforce policies.

Michelle Dennis and Wayne Leibman, Public Democracy Los Angeles, discussed the lottery process; demographic factors; ensuring a representative sample; use of a stratified sample; computer analysis of responses to constitute demographically representative panels; pie charts with demographics of the city vs. the final panel; permanent civic assemblies used in other countries; creation of expertise among staff to support a citizens assembly to craft a permanent structure; the budget as the most important policy document in the city; the budget process; the existing structure that has caused a decline of

trust; soliciting a suggestion in a few minutes; the need to provide a process to have a conversation; understanding issues in the budget; work plans presented in the last budget process; a suggestion to have department heads make themselves available for conversations with the public; current basic structure; difficulty reading the budget; lack of viable, meaningful conversation other than 1-3 minute presentations on one evening; important decisions that affect everyday lives with little public input; providing opportunities for meaningful involvement throughout the process; and the ability to increase interest.

Discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding appreciation for the presentation and for the public comment received; the model event held a few weeks ago; support for more meaningful engagement; other cities in the US and abroad using the process in new and innovative ways; area of opportunity; outlining what the process would look like; support for a pilot program with clear goals for the process; providing transparency so that people can learn about the process with a landing page for civic assemblies and an email; feasibility for the time period; surveying; trying a pilot process within the context of the budget and offering a dual process for people who are not participating in the civic assembly; providing a full understanding of the process; the good opportunity to provide accountability; potential timeline; and interest in Petaluma's Fiscal and Organizational Sustainability Plan.

Additional discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding appreciation to Public Democracy LA and to staff for coming to the civic assembly; incorporating civic assemblies into deliberative processes; Commissions, Boards, and Committees (CBCs) as political bodies; getting real buy-in from residents; appreciation to Council Member McMorris for the work with budget workshops to educate people; ways to make the process more participatory; providing insights to the current process and how it can be improved upon; determining what engagement and education look like; having staff available to explain the budget process; the small budget team; informing people about what is in the budget and how to read it; the timeline for the next budget cycle; understanding how the process could be different before the budget begins; and feasibility.

Responding to inquiry, Michelle Dennis, Public Democracy Los Angeles, discussed the timeline and funding estimate.

Further discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding the need for City Council approval and a full year to do things right; the General Plan Update timeline and process as a good model for how to do things right; working to have things in place for the 2027-2028 budget; the public input process; determining whether additional staff would have to be hired; three full-time staffers working on the General Plan process; staff workload; prioritization; consultation with the CFO (Chief Financial Officer); and using the civic assembly to enhance the process, handled by another organization.

Michelle Dennis, Public Democracy Los Angeles, clarified that the budget process would remain the same; noted the proposed change is public participation in the steps of process; discussed allowing for meaningful public participation and understanding of the budget; finding out what people want to hear; access; moving the focus off of the technical aspects; and the impacts of the budget on every person in Culver City.

Further discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding time to gather public input before the process starts in January; the need for several months of public outreach in the fall; the rushed arts plan that took about a year; Council consideration of approval to move forward in August; length of time to execute a contract; and going out to bid for a provider.

Discussion ensued between Public Democracy Los Angeles representatives, staff, and Council Members regarding process design; the moderating organization; engaging in a realistic timeline; lack of public engagement after Thanksgiving; allowing access; the meaningful departure from regular government; urgency of addressing fiscal challenges; important decisions to make as a City; growing the City; creating a process; being realistic; and engaging in an iterative process.

Additional discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding appreciation for the availability of the Finance team; barriers to getting people to engage; value of providing a tool to educate and hear from a representative Culver City constituency; barriers in terms of scope and

timeline; engaging in a scaled down process; support for maintaining the RFP process; accountability and transparency; looking at ways to focus more on engagement; gaps in opportunities in the General Plan process; looking at who had the opportunity to participate in the non-representative process for the General Plan; majority input from white men who were 65 years and older; typical participation in local government processes; barriers that many cities face; working on the item; short-term opportunities to address the engagement piece separate and apart from the civic assembly process; ensuring against short-changing civic assemblies; the importance of following proper processes; best practices of other cities; rolling out engagement in December; attendance of public workshops; people feeling that they cannot participate; pressure on the City and the School District; people who feel like their issues will not be addressed; other time-sensitive items; and continuing to see the item through while engaging in a strategy to compliment the current timeline.

Further discussion ensued between Public Democracy Los Angeles representatives, staff, and Subcommittee Members regarding agendizing short-term recommendations; money allocated by the City Council; having separate more user-friendly access to materials; money allocated for engagement rather than specifically for an assembly; having an assembly to influence the following year; returning with a proposal for Council consideration of spending the money in fiscal year 2027-2028; and potential involvement of the Finance Budget and Audit Committee.

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Public Comment – Items NOT On The Agenda

Chair Fish invited public comment.

The following members of the public addressed the Subcommittee:

Philip Lelyveld suggested adding a slide indicating goals and specific metrics because some questions were out of line with what needs to be done.

Jeff Schwartz expressed appreciation for the presentation; indicated being sold on civic assembly; noted that the process

was a slow and expensive way of resolving a focused question; stated that a beneficial side effect is activating people not already in the process; proposed relatively low cost, quick items that would benefit Council Members and people who have chosen to engage in the process; discussed release of all agendas three full working days when City Hall is open in advance of meetings; requiring agenda items to include when agenda items were proposed, who proposed them, and who nodding heads were; enforcement of conflict of interest rules and clear ethical guidelines with regard to nodding heads; ensuring that all agenda materials are formatted to be legible when viewed as a full page on a standard laptop screen; including links to current litigation discussed in Closed Session; he noted that City Council conversations with the City Attorney are protected, but the public records of the cases are not; he felt that the City Attorney should submit a regular report on the status of all litigation in the City; discussed publishing public comments submitted via email or e-comment with the minutes of each meeting; ensuring that agendas and minutes are full-text searchable; including a menu of options rather than a single recommendation in all staff reports with evidence and arguments for each with external documentation relevant to the various options; regular consultation with subject experts by staff and Council Members with their work incorporated in staff reports, and invitations for them to present; regular inclusion of surveys of how other Westside Independent Cities address comparable situations as well as relevant examples from elsewhere in staff reports; and he indicated that he would send the budget ones by email.

Monica Richardson was called to speak but was not present.

Christina Ku was called to speak but had already spoken.

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Receipt of Correspondence

None.

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Consent Calendar Items

Item C-1

Approval of Minutes of the Special Standing Governance Subcommittee meeting held on April 30, 2025

MOVED BY COUNCIL MEMBER FISH, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER MCMORRIN AND UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED, THAT THE STANDING GOVERNANCE SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL STANDING GOVERNANCE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON APRIL 30, 2025.

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Order of the Agenda

No changes were made.

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Public Comment - Items NOT on the Agenda (Continued)

No requests to speak were received.

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Items from Members/Staff

Discussion ensued between staff and Subcommittee Members regarding items for the next meeting; short-term changes to the budget process; discussion of the work plan in April; changing the schedule of City Council meetings with regard to Council Member and Mayoral appointment in December; election transparency and financing; the hard deadline with election items including election reform, disclosures, and transparency; ensuring there is a meeting in December to take substantive action on things; democracy vouchers; transparency laws and disclosures; agreement to cover transparency and the Council schedule in August along with near-term items to influence the budget process; presentations vs. action items; agreement that Public Democracy Los Angeles would handle near-term items to influence the budget process; items that pass out of the Subcommittee; and the fact that consolidating public comment

and the new Council Member business item keep getting bumped from the City Council agenda.

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Adjournment

There being no further business, at 5:16 p.m., the Special Governance Subcommittee of the City Council adjourned to August 6, 2025.

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Shelly Wolfberg
SECRETARY of the Culver City Standing Governance
Subcommittee of the City Council, Culver City, California

APPROVED

Bubba Fish
COUNCIL MEMBER, Standing Governance Subcommittee of the
City Council, Culver City, California