



REPORT/RECOMMENDATION

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| To: MAYOR AND COUNCIL | Agenda Item <u>Item No. VII.D.</u> |
| From: Karen Kurt Assistant City Manager | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Information |
| Date: March 20, 2012 | |
| Subject: Public Meetings and Religious Observances Policy | |

ACTION REQUESTED:

Adopt the proposed Public Meetings and Religious Observances Policy and indicate which days of religious observance should be included.

INFORMATION/BACKGROUND:

The League of Women Voters approached the City administration department regarding developing a policy restricting public meetings on days of religious observance. In response to this request, a policy was drafted and feedback was solicited from the Human Rights and Relations Commission (HRRC). The HRRC recommended that the policy be modified to better reflect Jewish days of observance, as well as significant Muslim and Hindu days of observance.

Staff encountered three challenges with respect to policy development:

- It is very difficult to obtain demographic data with respect to religious groups within the community,
- Individual practices within a religious community can vary, and
- There is no definitive resource that identifies “significant days of religious observance with work restrictions” across religions.

For these reasons, drawing the line with respect to which days should or should not be included is difficult. Highlighted in the table below are options regarding which days of religious observance could be included in the policy:

| Current holidays that are also days of religious observance | Column A – other significant Christian and Jewish days of religious observance | Column B – other significant days of religious observance for some Edina residents |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas (Christian) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Friday (Christian) • Christmas Eve (Christian) • Evening before and day of Yom Kippur (Jewish) • Evening before and two days of Rosh Hashanah • Evening before and first two days of Passover | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eid al Fitr (Muslim) • Eid al Adha (Muslim) • Diwali (Hindu) |

A survey of the practices of neighboring cities yielded the following results:

| City | Religious holidays recognized other than Christmas (federal holiday) for the purpose of public meetings | Is this a formal policy? | Does this apply to Boards and Commissions? |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------|--|
| Apple Valley | Christmas Eve | No | Yes |
| Blaine | None | - | - |
| Bloomington | None | - | - |
| Brooklyn Center | None | - | - |
| Eden Prairie | Christmas Eve | No | Yes |
| Fridley | None | - | - |
| Hopkins | None | - | - |
| Lakeville | None | - | - |
| Maple Grove | None | - | - |
| Minneapolis | Reschedule at a member's request | No | Yes |
| Minnetonka | Try to avoid Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Chanukah | No | Yes |
| St. Louis Park | Rosh Hashanah, Passover and Yom Kippur | Yes | No |
| St. Paul | None | - | - |
| Woodbury | Christmas eve | No | Yes |

ATTACHMENTS:

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES POLICY



CITY OF EDINA PUBLIC MEETINGS AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES POLICY

Purpose

It is the policy of the City of Edina to encourage public engagement during decision-making processes. This includes attending or participating in City Council and board/commission meetings. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for avoiding significant days of religious observance that may preclude participation. At the same time, the City acknowledges that it is not possible to recognize all days of religious observance without significantly impacting the City's ability to conduct business or restricting participation by holding multiple public meetings at the same time.

Restrictions for Public Meetings Due to Religious Observances

In addition to the holidays on which city offices are closed, City Council and board/commission meetings will not be scheduled on the following days of religious observance that include significant work restrictions:

(Insert list approved by the Council)

Special meetings called for emergency purposes would be exempt from this restriction. City staff and committee /working group chairs are also encouraged to avoid scheduling public meetings or other forums on these dates.

Setting Meeting Schedules

Prior to the start of a new year, the City Clerk will develop a calendar with the restricted dates noted above and identify any conflicts with regularly-scheduled meetings. When a conflict exists, the City Council and boards/commissions will be asked to identify an alternative date prior to the calendar being published at the beginning of the year. When setting the calendar, boards and commissions have the option of rescheduling additional meetings at the request of individual members due to conflicts with days of religious observance not included in the list above.