

Study Issue Process

Planning and Management Prioritization Tool for Council and Staff

Overview

Since the late 1970s, the City's study issues process has provided both City Council and City staff with a valuable planning and management tool. Through this process, Council sets priorities for studying policy issues. The process also allows staff to balance the work required to thoroughly "study" an issue with the work required to deliver ongoing City services.

What is a Study Issue?

A study issue is a topic of concern that may result in a new or revised City policy. Potential study issue topics can include proposed ordinances, new programs, amendments to the General Plan and the examination of potential new policies or revisions to existing policies that have been established by City Council.

The primary purpose of the study issues process is to provide a method for identifying, prioritizing and analyzing policy issues in an efficient and effective way. It provides a structured approach for addressing the large number of policy issues that are raised each year. With exceptions as noted below (e.g. emergency issues, safety issues, etc.) Council reviews all study issues once a year at the Study/Budget Issues Workshop. The process allows Council to rank the issues, separating those issues that may have seemed important when they were first raised from the truly critical issues. It also allows the City Manager and department directors to set and schedule the examination of issues so the workload does not interfere with the day to day delivery of City services at levels set by Council.

Can I Propose a Study Issue?

As noted below in Study Issues Process Summary Timeline, the study issues process is ongoing. Study Issue topics can be proposed by members of the public, councilmembers, boards/commissions, or the City Manager. Ideas proposed by the public must, however, be sponsored by Council, the City Manager, or a majority of a board and commission to advance.

Roles in the Study Issues Process

The study issues process includes participation by Councilmembers, City staff, board and commission members, and the public. A brief explanation of each of their roles follows:

Council - Council's role is to set policy. Regarding the study issues process, policy-related responsibilities include generating (or sponsoring) study issue topics; taking public input; prioritizing or "ranking" issues at the Council Study Issues Workshop; and approving target completion dates for each study.

City Staff - City staff manage the annual study issues administrative process; generate study issue topics; prepare the study issue papers; following Council ranking of issues, determine how many issues available operating resources will support (issues are begun, and studied, in priority order); and propose target completion dates for studies able to be completed.

Boards and Commissions - In their advisory capacity to Council, boards and commissions generate study issue papers for Council's consideration, and provide a recommended ranking of the issues relevant to their areas of authority. Boards and commissions also provide a forum for public input and, with majority support, can sponsor issues brought to them by members of the public.

Members of the Public - Members of the public may suggest study issue topics to staff, boards and commissions, or directly to Council. In order for a study issue topic to get to the Council Study Issues Workshop it must be “sponsored” by staff, Council or a board or commission. Members of the public also provide input to Council on the relative importance or priorities of individual studies at the annual Study Issues Public Hearing, which is held a week or two prior to Council’s Study Issues Workshop.

Study Issues Process Summary Timeline

- Staff publishes all City Manager approved study issues papers and additional workshop materials to the City website.
- Boards and commissions rank any proposed study issue that falls under their purview for next calendar year.
- Council holds a public hearing on study issues proposed for current calendar year where members of the public comment on proposed study issues.
- Council holds Study/Budget Issues Workshop where Council assigns priority ranking to proposed study issues.
- Council holds a public hearing to approve study issue presentation dates for studies recommended for study.

Although study issue topics can be submitted at any time, for an issue to potentially receive consideration during the next workshop, it should be submitted before October to allow time for staff to prepare materials ahead of the upcoming annual prioritizing process

Step-By-Step, Internal Study Issues Process

1. Idea generated.
2. Issue sponsorship:
 - Board/Commission
 - Must be part of a noticed meeting
 - Must receive majority vote to refer to City Manager/Council
 - City Manager
 - Councilmembers (2 minimum)
3. Study Issue Paper (SIP) developed by staff, including the following data:
 - Number
 - Title
 - Lead Department
 - Support Departments
 - Sponsor(s)
 - History
 - Scope of the Study
 - What Precipitated this Study?
 - What Are the Key Elements of The Study?
 - Estimated Years to Complete Study
 - Fiscal Impact
 - Level of Staff Effort Required (Opportunity Cost)
 - Funding Required for Non-Budgeted Costs
 - Funding Source
 - Cost to Implement Study Results
 - Expected City Council, Board or Commission Participation
 - Council-Approved Work Plan

- Council Study Session
 - Reviewed by Boards/Commissions
 - Staff Recommendation
4. SIP routed in Legistar.
 5. City Manager reviews/approves paper.
 6. Copy of approved paper is posted online.
 7. All SIPs generated by a B/C or by staff are due to the City Manager by December 3, 2018.
 8. [Boards/Commissions rank](#) proposed SIPs that are under their purview.
 9. B/C rank data due to the City Manager by January 31, 2019.
 10. Materials for Public Hearing posted on web page (which includes signed study issue papers, department worksheets [noting all pending study issues and dept. recommendations]).
 11. Public Hearing held in January.
 12. New ideas from the public hearing that are sponsored go through steps 3 through 6.
 13. Three weeks in advance of the workshop is the last day for Council sponsored SIPs.
 14. A workshop packet is prepared for Council, including department rankings, B/C rankings, and a memo from the City Manager that describes the process for the workshop. This is also posted to the web.
 15. Study/Budget Issue Workshop held.
 - Council reviews the SIPs by department; initial Council action can include:
 - Motion to DROP (issue must be sponsored to come back for consideration the following year)
 - Motion to DEFER (issue will automatically be brought back the following year for consideration).
 - Motion to COMBINE (multiple SIPs often cover similar topics and can be combined to maximize resources in completing the study).
 - Issues remaining are then priority ranked by Council; two ranking processes are utilized:
 - For ten or fewer issues, the Council prioritizes ALL issues starting with 1 for their highest priority.
 - For items with eleven or more issues, the number left to rank is divided by three and rounded up, totaling the number of votes each councilmember receives towards those remaining issues.
 - Staff calculates the final ranking and distributes a results sheet for each department by the end of the workshop.
 - Two-way ties are broken by a hand vote; three-way (or more) ties are broken using additional ranking sheets provided to Council.
 16. Departments review the priority list and *draw-the-line* to distinguish items that can and cannot be completed given current resources. Items to be completed are identified as *above-the-line*; items which cannot be completed are identified as *below-the-line* and will automatically return for Council consideration at the next year's workshop.
 17. Departments identify a study start date, workplan review date, study session date, final presentation date to Council and a staff contact for each *above-the-line* issue.
 - Workplans and/or Study Sessions are only requested by Council for complex studies and assist staff in keeping Council apprised of the study progress and potential results.
 - Council approves the proposed dates at the same time they approve the Council Meeting calendar for the year.
 18. Studies which would require a one-time appropriation to conduct/complete the study are presented to Council for action. The council can either:
 - Adopt a budget modification for the amount necessary; or

- Defer the study to be considered as part of the City's next budget. The study is not started until it is funded; if the Council does not fund the study, it is treated as a *deferred* study and brought back for Council consideration at the following year's workshop.
19. The studies are started in the priority order established by Council, however, as some studies take less time to conduct, may be completed in a different order.
 20. The results of the study are presented to Council via a Report to Council (RTC) at a publicly noticed Council meeting.
 21. At the following year's workshop, status updates are provided to Council on studies which were ranked and *above-the-line* the previous year and any studies which are not completed by the time of the workshop.

Resources

[Key Dates](#)

[2019 Study Issue Staff Instructions](#)

[Drafting Study Issues Using Legistar](#)

[Board/Commission Process for Ranking Study Issues](#)

[Signed Study Issue Papers for 2019 Workshop](#)

Council Policies

[7.2.19 Boards and Commissions](#)

[7.3.26 Study Issues Process](#)

Administrative Policy

[Chapter 1, Article 15 Boards and Commissions.](#)