

City of Sunnyvale About the Study Issues Process

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 process includes several key features:

- It allows members of the public, Council, boards or commissions and City staff to identify issues of concern or importance at any point during the calendar year. These study issues are considered by Council as a package at the Annual Study/Budget Issues Workshop in February.
- It allows Council to select and prioritize all the study issues at an annual study issues workshop, providing a method for Council to separate those issues that may have seemed important when they were first raised from the truly critical issues that require detailed examination.
- It allows the city manager and department directors to schedule the examination of high-priority study issues so the workload does not interfere with the delivery of City services at service levels set by Council.

Process

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 policy issues annually. With exceptions as noted below (e.g. emergency issues, safety issues, etc.) Council reviews all study issues once a year at the Council Study 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.

As noted below in Study Issues Process Summary Timeline, the study issues process is ongoing. Currently, study issues can be proposed at any time for the upcoming calendar year by staff, Council, board and commission members, and members of the public.

Roles

The study issues process includes participation by Councilmembers, City staff, boards and commissions, 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 in February; and approving target completion dates for each study.

City staff – City staff manage the annual study issues administrative process; generate study issue topics; and 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, may 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.

Summary Timeline

Month	Activity	Result
Day after January Public Hearing through the following year's Public Hearing	Study Issue topics are proposed/generated for next calendar year by Council, the city manager, or boards and commissions.	Study issue papers sponsored by Council, boards and commissions, or staff are prepared by staff.
Ongoing	Staff posts sponsored study issue papers to the City's Web site following approval by the City Manager.	Public notice and viewing of study issues proposed for upcoming calendar year.
October - November	Boards and commissions rank relevant study issues proposed for next calendar year.	Board and commission priority rankings are forwarded to Council.
Early January	Council holds Public Hearing on study issues proposed for current calendar year.	Members of the public comment on study issues.
Mid - Late January	Council held Study Issues Workshop.	Council assigns priority ranking to study issues; rankings are posted to City's Website
Late January - mid February	Staff "Draws the Line": the City Manager considers staff resources by department to determine how many issues can be studied during the calendar year (studies are always initiated in priority order), noting start and complete dates for each issue.	Staff presents Council a list of the study issues that will be undertaken during the current calendar year, given currently budgeted resources.
Cycle repeats.		

Boards/Commissions Rankings

Before a study issue paper can be presented to a board/commission for ranking, it must be approved by the City Manager. Boards/Commissions review and rank study issues in October/November -- prior to the annual study issues workshop. The board or commission will consider only those study issues that fall within its area of responsibility. B/C staff liaisons ensure the board/commission completes the study issue ranking by the OCM-established deadline. Each B/C workplan includes appropriate time for consideration of study issues.

Preparing for a Study Session or Report to Council (RTC)

Some study issues are so complex, or generate such a high level of public interest, that a study session is used to present data and information, and is followed by an RTC to provide alternative options and staff recommendations.

At the Council meeting, Council will provide policy direction regarding the study issue. This direction may be to discontinue any further work on the issue, to implement the staff recommendation, to complete additional research or analysis on the issue, or to make no change to current policy. City staff then implements the policy direction provided.

To implement the policy direction, staff may need to change a current practice, amend an existing approach for providing a service, amend an ordinance or create a new ordinance, modify the adopted budget through a budget modification or a budget supplement, develop a new policy, or revise an existing policy. The approach and the steps involved in implementing Council policy direction for a study issue will vary, depending on the subject matter and complexity of the study issue.

Resources and Forms

- **Signed Study Issue Papers:** All original signed study issue papers will be kept in the Office of the City Manager and posted to the City's external web site at StudyIssues.InSunnyvale.com.
- **Key Dates:** Detailed deadlines for the annual study issues process will be developed by the Office of the City Manager and posted at the City's intranet site.