



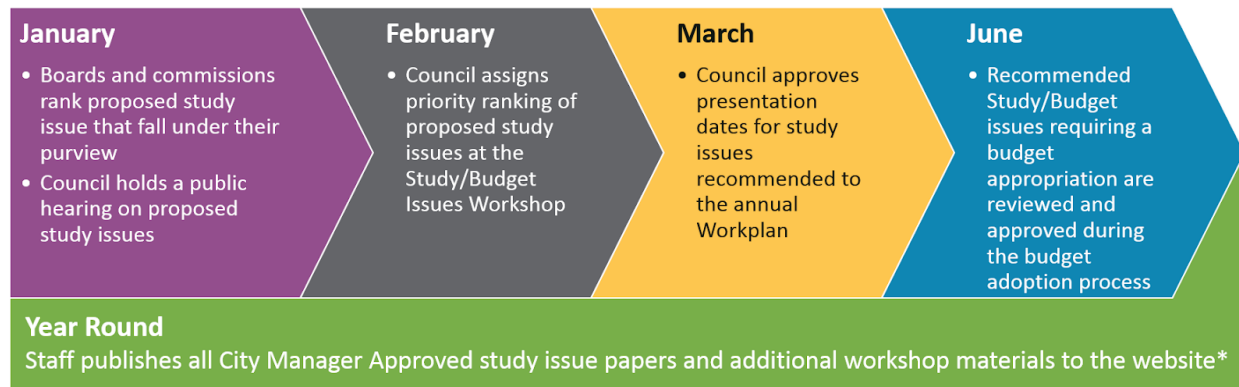
From: Livable Sunnyvale Board and Sunnyvale Democratic Club Study Issue Task Force
To: Mayor Klein, Vice-Mayor Hendricks, City Council Members and City Manager Steffens

In recent years, we have noticed the length of time it takes to review and implement an idea using the Sunnyvale Study Issue process is extremely lengthy. A clear example is the three year delay in completing the Housing Strategy Study. During this three year period, the City Council took little or no action on most housing issues, which negatively impacted our community.

Many of the same concerns were raised at a recent meeting with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of City commissions.

The Sunnyvale Democratic Club formed a Task Force to collect recommendations for improving the Study Issue process. Livable Sunnyvale has voted to support their recommendations.

Current Study Issue process (for reference):



*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.

[Board/Commission study issue procedure](#)

Issues:

1. **It takes too long to get a study issue implemented.** Commissions need to submit proposed study issues in September or October. After several steps, the issues that survive are approved in June. If it is a larger issue, staff prepares an RFP, accepts bids and awards the project, so it could easily be a year after its proposal before the study issue begins.
2. **Many ways to block or delay a study issue.** In addition to the length of time to complete the study issue process, there are many opportunities to block or delay a study issue such as; not 'sponsored' by a commission, 'deferred' by a commission, 'deferred' by council, 'rejected' by council, or prioritized but not funded. Note that It could take up to two years (or more) after a study is sponsored by a commission before work begins if, for example, a study issue is proposed in November or December (missing the deadline for ranking in January) or if it is deferred by the Council to the next year, or if it is prioritized by Council, but not funded (also delaying it for a year).
As an example, ESD 17-01 was sponsored by the Sustainability Commission in September 2016 and it is still 'live' and will be ranked by the commission (for the fifth time) in January 2021. It was ranked highly by Council 3 times in 2017, 2018 and 2020 (but not funded), and deferred by council once in 2019.
3. **Omnibus issues.** Combining issues into a large "omnibus" study issue, seems to confuse the study issue process because decisions on all issues are delayed until every issue is fully studied.

Proposed changes:

Note: These proposals are not listed in order of priority. They also are not proposed as a "package", each suggestion stands on its own.

To look at these changes we ask for a joint subcommittee between councils and boards and commissions to look at the Study Issue process and boards and commissions generally.

1. Reduce the cycle time for approval. For example, if staff can prepare a budget estimate by the February meeting, the prioritization could take into account the relative cost of alternative study issues. If needed, hire outside consultants to estimate the time and costs. This could shorten the process by months.
2. Add a "fast track" process for urgent issues. Also for low cost issues.

3. Implement a semi-annual review instead of a yearly review to consider new issues and get status on ongoing study issues.
4. Avoid omnibus study issues. It is better to address different issues separately in a timely manner.
5. The entire study issue process should be made transparent. Most of the study issues result in hiring consultants at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. There should be feedback from the commission for the vetting and hiring of consultants (if needed). Some of the commissioners are really experts (an example is the Sustainability Commission) and their expertise is not leveraged with the current process. The city can save resources (staff time, consultants) by leveraging commissioners and other “experts” within the city.
6. The entire process is a blackbox. Some issues go in and no one knows what or when anything comes out of the blackbox. Another way to say this is that the ‘Study Issue Process’ as shown above, essentially ends at approval and funding. After that, it is a ‘black box’.
7. We should have a “dashboard” or metric for measuring the study issues that have been implemented over time and the cost incurred by the city. The dashboard could include the full history of study issues proposed but not studied and those that were studied including the costs of each and the total cycle times (proposal to funding and funding to completion) should be available for viewing (including the proposal for those not studied and the final reports for those studied). There is a list of recent study issues over the last couple of years, but no visibility on older issues proposed, money spent on consultants, staff time spent, and cycle time of issues studied and completed. Over time have the cycle times increased?
8. The current study issue process is a linear process. Study issues are proposed, then later some are rejected. Still later they are prioritized and finally, after 5 months, staff estimates the resources needed and some fall below the line. A more effective process would be iterative. A rough estimate of staff/consultant time and cost should be done early, so that this can be considered when setting priorities. It might make sense to reduce the scope of a particular study issue or break it into parts with interim deliverables. Some smaller, or more urgent issues could be initiated early on, instead of waiting five months until every single proposed study issue is addressed.
9. Perhaps there is just not enough staff (or budget) to handle all the good ideas to be studied.... Suggest to build in more staff time and/or budget for the study issues each year.

10. Facilitate more collaboration between staff and the proposer in the initial formation of the study issue (scope, costs, etc). Leverage the expertise of commissioners as noted in #5 above.

We encourage the Council and Staff to consider some or all of these recommendations. In the private sector, there is no company that could survive with a once-a-year, six month process just to decide which issues to study for possible future action.

Respectfully,

Livable Sunnyvale Board

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