



# City of Sunnyvale

## Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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### REPORT TO COUNCIL

#### SUBJECT

Consider Creation of a Youth Commission - Study Issue

#### BACKGROUND

At its February 7, 2014 workshop, Council approved Study Issue LCS 14-04: *Consider Creation of a Youth Commission* to explore the benefits of establishing a Youth Commission to act in an advisory capacity to the City Council (Attachment 1). Council thought was that Sunnyvale teens may wish to be more actively engaged in City government than allowed by the current function of the Teen Advisory Council, which primarily serves to plan social and recreational events. Council directed staff to gauge the interest of local youth in taking a broader role in civic affairs and to explore what form that role might take based on youth engagement models in other cities, including formation of a Youth Commission. In addition, Council asked staff to evaluate the potential for Sunnyvale youth to participate in policy decisions on a national level.

For over twenty years the City of Sunnyvale has actively encouraged local teenagers to participate in city activities through its Teen Advisory Committee (TAC). Initially, the TAC mainly served to allow teens to assist staff in the former Department of Parks and Recreation in planning social events. However, with the recent transition of recreational programming to the new Department of Library and Community Services, the TAC has taken a more active role in both developing and implementing youth-oriented recreational activities. In addition, the TAC has also begun to participate in educational workshops and volunteer opportunities. For example, during the past year TAC members not only planned movie nights and concerts, they also organized park clean-up days and planned activities at the Senior Center. In recognition of their expanded role, a number of TAC members attended a local conference for city-sponsored youth advisory groups at which they shared their experiences as youth representatives in local government.

TAC membership currently consists of 15 high school and 2 middle school students selected by staff and by TAC members. The TAC meets twice a month during the school year, and they hold a strategic planning session in July to prepare for the coming year. TAC activities are currently facilitated by a Youth Coordinator in the Department of Library and Community Services. Staff estimates the current cost to support the TAC is \$30,000. This includes both staff time to coordinate and supplies.

#### EXISTING POLICY

**Sunnyvale City Charter, Article X Appointive Boards and Commissions**, Section 1000, In General: In addition, the City Council may create by ordinance or resolution such boards or commissions as in its judgment are required and may grant to them such powers and duties as are consistent with the provisions of this Charter.

## **Sunnyvale General Plan**

### **Chapter 2, Community Vision:**

**Goal CV-1, Community Participation and Engagement,** Achieve a community in which all community members are well informed about local issues, City programs and services are actively involved in shaping the quality of life and participate in local community and government activities.

**Policy CV-1.3** Encourage community involvement in the development and implementation of City and community activities, programs and services.

### **Chapter 4, Community Character:**

**Policy CC-10.2** Provide school-aged youth-oriented recreation and enrichment programs and services during non-school hours

**Policy CC-10.5** Develop and implement programs in order to meet the developmental and social needs of specific targeted populations (e.g., youth, teens, seniors, disabled).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

N/A

## **DISCUSSION**

In addition to identifying the benefits of engaging youth in policy matters, this report outlines the steps and resources necessary to create and maintain a Youth Commission. This report also compares the function of a Youth Commission to the City's existing Teen Advisory Committee and considers participation in two youth-related programs sponsored by the National League of Cities (NLC).

### **Benefits of Engaging Youth in Policy Matters**

Active engagement of young adults in local government provides a range of benefits to participating teens as well as to the community as a whole. According to the National League of Cities, when youth are provided access to decision makers and given the opportunity to offer input on policy there is an "increased support for City initiatives, improved programs and policies for youth, identification as a youth-friendly community, and improved indicators of well-being among youth." Sunnyvale teens on the TAC have already demonstrated a growing sense of community engagement as they continue to develop an increasing number of outwardly-focused programs such as inter-generational functions with seniors and environment-related activities. For example, TAC organized the first annual Senior Ball to bridge the generational gap between teens and senior citizens, teaching each other dances from their generation. TAC partnered with other agencies and City departments on events such as the Cesar Chavez Youth Action and Park Clean Up Day where teens facilitated discussions with their peers about civil rights leadership and how to promote civic engagement in their community. They also worked together on trail restoration at Baylands Park. TAC held several canned food drives for needy families in Sunnyvale.

The benefit of youth engagement was also supported by the results of an informal online survey of Sunnyvale high school students to learn their preferences for engagement in local government. In total, 132 students responded, expressing strong support for a broad spectrum of opportunities. These included socializing, and working together with other teens on events, as well as interacting with decision makers on policy. Staff also received feedback from 49 students at Columbia and Sunnyvale Middle Schools through a paper survey. Over half the students indicated that they were

interested in planning and attending events with fewer interested in working on policy.

#### Youth Commissions in Other Communities

In general, the cities that responded to staff indicated that they were primarily focused on developing events for teens, but were available to council to provide feedback on specific issues. Mountain View's Youth Advisory Committee provided feedback to staff and Council on the creation of a new teen center, executed a Teen Friendly Business program where local businesses are recognized for being teen friendly, and gave input on the General Plan. Santa Clara's Youth Commission provided their Council with input on the development of a teen center and skate park in the early 2000s and more recently gathered teen input on the single bag ordinance which was incorporated in the recommendations to council.

Online and telephone surveys with 15 California agencies indicated that, in addition to having teens assist with event planning, most cities also involve youth in providing input to Council or Commissions (Attachment 2, Agency Survey and Responses). Also, while the majority of cities used the terms "commission" and "committee" interchangeably, none operated these groups in a formal manner consistent with Sunnyvale's rules for the conduct of boards and commissions such as noticing meetings in accordance with Brown Act requirements, limiting discussion to items on the agenda or restricting communication between commission members outside of meetings. As a result, it became clear that the benefits associated with "youth engagement" could not readily be attributed to the existence of a youth commission as opposed to any other specific type of advisory body. Rather it seems that the focus of the committee or commission is a more important indicator of its value than its name. Also, in those few instances where youth commissions were operated on a semi-formal basis (less rigorous than adult commissions but more formal than committees or councils) the sponsoring cities provided additional training to members due to their age, lack of experience, and the higher rate of turnover. Training included education on public speaking, decision-making and problem-solving.

#### Establishing a Youth Commission

If the City Council decides to establish a formal Youth Commission in a manner equivalent to other existing boards and commissions, it would operate in a manner very different from the existing Teen Advisory Committee, and could be formed in addition to TAC, to augment youth engagement opportunities in the City. Youth Commission members would be appointed by Council to specific terms through a public nomination process. As an advisory body, the Youth Commission would not only recommend specific policy-related issues to Council, it would also provide a forum for the public to provide input to the Youth Commission as they identified and prioritized those issues in formal meetings. These meetings would in turn be noticed following Brown Act requirements, and discussion would be governed (and sometimes limited) by the published agenda. The Brown Act applies to any board, commission or committee that is created at the direction of the City Council. Also, Sunnyvale commissions are not usually involved in administrative or operational matters so programs or activities that might result from policies recommended by the Youth Commission would be implemented by staff as directed by the Council through the City Manager. Finally, as noted above, in addition to the training the City Clerk provides, additional training should be provided to teen members of a Youth Commission to ensure their appropriate conduct with respect to the rules governing commissions.

While a Youth Commission would be ideally situated to provide input to Council and staff on youth-related policy issues, and to provide a standing forum for the community to bring issues to them, a

Youth Commission would not be well-positioned to engage in planning and implementing special events. For example, a Youth Commission might suggest that staff consider implementing a particular event or might also request a Study Issue on the feasibility of such an activity for council's action and direction. However, a Youth Commission would be limited by the Brown Act in how they could recruit teens to run the event because of the Brown Act requiring: a formal process to appoint teens to committees, public noticing of all committee meetings, and the inability to use social media.

#### Expanding the Policy Role of the Teen Committee

In the course of strategic planning with the current TAC, members have expressed an interest in learning more about local government. This year, TAC made presentations to the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Board of Library Trustees, while also being presented with a Special Order of the Day at the April 29, 2014 Council meeting. They have also begun preliminary discussions about hosting a youth summit, in which youth identify teen-related issues and recommend solutions to City staff and decision makers.

Based on the information gathered in responding to this Study Issue staff considered whether an alternative to establishing a Youth Commission might be to have the existing TAC play a larger role in the civic life of our community by becoming more engaged in policy matters, in addition to their current role of planning, promoting and conducting special events. For example, using the existing study issues process, staff could help TAC members identify potential study issue topics and guide them in presenting the issues to a commission or to the Council, as appropriate. Additionally, the TAC could take part in the annual Council Study and Budget Issues Workshop. Another idea would be for Council to conduct a simulated council meeting with the TAC so they can learn more about how local government works.

#### City participation in NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) and its Council on Youth, Education and Families (YEF Council)

Under the auspices of the National League of Cities, the YEF Institute and YEF Council help municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. The YEF Institute is a resource to local governments, providing research, best practices, extensive online resources, and peer networks, as well as leadership academies, webinars, and meetings.

The YEF Council guides and oversees the YEF Institute's work. The membership of this Council, unlike any other NLC committee or council, is composed of not only locally elected officials (approximately 50 representatives), but also 3 to 5 youth members nationwide and 4 representatives from major national organizations concerned with children, youth and families. The Council meets three times per year at varying sites throughout the nation. Appointment to the Council is for one year and is based on a competitive application process.

Membership of council members and youth on the YEF Council requires appointment by the NLC president, and would likely require ongoing involvement in the YEF Institute and YEF Council programs and activities at a national level. This would require Council direction to participate at this level and additional resources, including out of state travel for the participating youth (and chaperone) and/or Councilmembers.

In addition, there are free on-line resources available through the YEF Institute, available to city staff, including research reports on youth engagement. Staff already has begun to access these "toolkits" and strategy guides, and has participated in online training opportunities and networking with peers.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Should Council direct staff to establish a Youth Commission, the following staff activities would be required: communication with Commissioners, scheduling and participation in meetings, development and posting of meeting agendas and minutes and compliance with Brown Act requirements. The cost per meeting is projected to be \$1,500 based on estimated staff time required, equating to annual costs of approximately \$9,000 assuming bi-monthly meetings. In addition, if a Commission is established, ongoing funding of \$2,800 would be needed for supplies, materials and additional board training.

Staff time to support a new Commission could be absorbed in the operating budget with existing staffing, but would require reallocating and reprioritizing some of the staff's current duties. For example, time would need to be allocated to the Manager of Youth and Teens to serve as liaison to the Youth Commission. This will compete with her current duties and her assignments would then need to be adjusted.

For a Councilmember or Sunnyvale youth appointed to the YEF Council, an estimated \$4,615 annually per person would be required so that the individual could attend three annual meetings. The City is already a member of the NLC, so there would be no additional membership costs.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

In addition, surveys were distributed online to 700 middle school and high school students via the Library's teen newsletter and by e-mail through the City's Volgistics system. Staff also surveyed students at Columbia Middle School and Sunnyvale Middle School and the TAC sent surveys to their peers.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Direct staff to work with the current Teen Advisory Committee to identify issues of interest to youth for consideration by Boards and Commissions and, as appropriate, advise Council on these issues.
2. Direct staff to prepare a resolution for Council adoption for the formation of a new Council-appointed Commission on Youth, advisory to Council and in addition to the TAC; and authorize a budget modification to appropriate funding in the amount of \$2,800 for supplies and training.
3. Authorize Councilmember and/or teen and chaperone representation at the National League of Cities' Youth, Education and Family Council meeting and two annual conferences, and prepare a budget modification to appropriate funding in the amount of \$4,615 per person for attendance.
4. Provide other direction to staff as appropriate.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Alternative 1: Direct staff to work with the current Teen Advisory Committee to identify issues of interest to youth for consideration by Boards and Commissions and, as appropriate, advise Council on these issues.

Staff supports the concept that youth should be proactively engaged with raising and reviewing policy issues impacting teens and in having ways to interact with decision makers. While this could be achieved through the formation of a youth commission, in addition to the TAC, staff believes that this policy role and interaction with Council can easily be incorporated into the existing TAC and is the most efficient way to do so. This would negate the need for an additional body or for coordination between the two related bodies and would require no additional resources to implement. The TAC has, in fact, expressed a desire to do so. As an established group, with a good reputation within the teen community and experience working within City government, the TAC is well positioned to expand its role to include providing a forum for raising policy concerns and to provide advice to Council on policy matters.

Prepared by: Silvia Martin, Community Services Manager

Reviewed by: Daniel Wax, Superintendent of Community Services

Reviewed by: Lisa G. Rosenblum, Director, Library and Community Services

Reviewed by: Grace K. Leung, Director, Finance Department

Approved by: Robert Walker, Assistant City Manager

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Study Issue, LCS 14-04
2. Agency Survey and Responses