



**City of Gainesville
Clerk of the Commission
Office of the City Commission**

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Commissioners
FROM: Lindsay Hoffman, Policy Oversight Coordinator
via Marie Kessler, Deputy/Acting Clerk of the Commission
CC: Deborah Bowie, Interim City Manager
DATE: October 31, 2019
RE: #190337: Process for Responding to Official Letters from
Governmental Entities to the City Commission

On September 5, 2019, the City Commission directed the Clerk's staff to develop a process for timely responding to official correspondence directed to the body. This office has examined procedures used presently by the Commission and those employed by other jurisdictions.¹

A primary question in establishing a workflow is: Who should oversee this process? There should be one person or entity tasked with shepherding correspondence from receipt to response transmission. In the jurisdictions studied, this was generally the Mayor, the Council President (where applicable), or the City Manager. Once this point-person is identified, the following procedure is recommended:

1. Upon receipt of official correspondence addressed to the City Commission which requires a response, the point-person for the process shall:
 - a. Ensure that copies of the correspondence are distributed immediately to all Commission members;
 - b. Request that a discussion item be placed on the next available City Commission meeting agenda, noting any deadline for response; and
 - c. Determine whether research or additional substantive information from staff would be required to formulate a complete and educated response. Such research/information should be requested expediently in order to be available for a Commission discussion.

- d. If appropriate, a draft response may be crafted as a starting place for Commission discussion.
2. At the time of Commission discussion during a public meeting, the Commission shall:
 - a. Craft the substance of their response;
 - b. Designate the party responsible for drafting this response, if it is determined to be appropriately someone other than the point-person of the process;
 - c. Determine whether further discussion is required before the response is transmitted;
 - d. Establish, if appropriate, a deadline for the final response to be transmitted. The point-person is responsible for ensuring that this occurs timely and that copies are distributed to all Commissioners.
 3. This procedure may be modified in the event of an exigent circumstance.
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¹Research was limited as few jurisdictions have reduced policies like these to writing. Many jurisdictions contacted, including Venice and Branford, FL, simply noted that the Mayor takes the lead in these situations. Other jurisdictions include processes in their rules:

[Colorado Springs \(CO\)](#): “10-1. COMMUNICATIONS ADDRESSED TO CITY COUNCIL CONCERNING ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS City communications addressed to the City Council that require administrative action shall be referred to the Mayor for response. Communication matters regarding Colorado Springs Utilities are directed by Utilities Board policies.”

[Menlo Park \(NJ\)](#): “Members of the City Council may occasionally be called upon to write letters to citizens, businesses or other public agencies. Typically, the Mayor will be charged with transmitting the City’s position on policy matters to outside agencies on behalf of the City Council. Correspondence sent on behalf of the City Council is placed on official City letterhead and is signed by the Mayor or City Manager.... After the City Council has taken a position on an issue, official correspondence should reflect this position. While members who may disagree with a position are free to prepare correspondence on such issues as private citizens, City letterhead, official City Council title, and staff support should not be utilized in order to avoid confusion. In addition, City letterhead and staff support cannot be utilized for personal or political purposes.”

[Rifle \(CO\)](#): “Council members do not need to acknowledge the receipt of correspondence, or copies of correspondence, during Council meetings. City staff will prepare official letters in response to public inquiries and concerns. These letters will carry the signature of the Mayor or the appropriate City staff. If correspondence is addressed only to one Council member, that correspondence will be shared with the rest of the Council.... It is best that City letterhead not be used for correspondence of Council members representing a personal point of view, or a dissenting point of view from an official Council position.”