Orlando Florida June 5th Civic Meeting

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Abstract

Local civic meetings give the community an opportunity to learn about new ordinances going into effect. During the June 5th, 2017 City of Orlando Council meeting, Mayor Buddy Dyer spent the first several minutes discussing the one year anniversary of the Pulse shooting. In addition to making June 12th Orlando United Day, the consent agenda was addressed for the remaining hour of the council meeting. Locally, during the council meetings, city council chambers members review a consent agenda which could have a variety of subjects which could affect businesses, economic development, families, police, housing, venues, transportation and healthcare. The consent agenda allows each council member to vote and comment on the items that are presented. As mentioned prior, there are numerus items that are addressed on the consent agenda. However, the main focus of the consent agenda will be directed towards ordinance number 2017-25. Ordinance 2017-25 discusses adding medical cannabis dispensary location criteria and performance standards to chapter 58 of the land development code. Adding new ordinance criteria to medical cannabis could have an impact on the health of some of the members of the Orlando community.

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 **Background**

 Do civic meetings, or in this case city council meetings, play a role in allowing the public to have a voice on policies? The answer to this question varies. While the goal of most civic meetings is to give the community an opportunity to influence decisions, directly, this does not always occur (Adams, 2004). However, during local governments regularly scheduled meetings, citizens are given the opportunity to actively engage, by voicing their opinions on public issues. Input can come in two forms, the first being comments on specific issues presented or general comments about concerns (Adams, 2004). Either way, the community has a time specifically set aside to engage local officials about issues presented during meetings. This can give the community a voice. Except, if the community is unaware about the importance of attending to let their voices be heard, they are also unaware about the impact council meetings can on the community. To gain more insight into what city council meeting are about and the structural components, this paper is going to reflect on one council meeting held in Orlando, Florida.

**Council Members**

In the afternoon hours of June 5th, 2017, the City of Orlando held the city council meeting in the Council Chambers on the 2nd floor of City Hall at 400 South Orange Avenue. The meeting came to order through the direction of Mayor Buddy Dyer. Depending on size, population and politics a mayor can play an important or a minor role in a city’s development and future. Mayors are often elected directly by voters, after campaigning against other candidates (Neigers, 2010). Mayor Buddy Dyer’s vision for Orlando is to generate jobs, become the most sustainable city in the nation, keep the community safe, provide transportation options, increase the quality of life and end homelessness (City of Orlando, 2017a). As the Mayor of Orlando since 2003, Dyer’s vision must still address key components that concerns the community.

As side from the Mayor presiding at the council meetings, there are 6 other council chambers members, which each represents a district. It may not be well known, by the community, what each district’s goals are and who each civic group caters to serve. Currently, Jim Gray is the commissioner from district 1. District 1 is one of the fastest growing regions within the City of Orlando, it consists of the southeast area of Orlando. As one of the fastest growing regions, there are many new residents and entrepreneurs in this region. Thus, district 1 focuses on guiding new residents through newsletters of events and attend 4-5 homeowner’s association meetings, monthly. This allows the district to stay in touch with concerns, ideas and suggestions (City of Orlando, 2017b). District 2 is represented by commissioner Tony Ortiz. District 2’s current new initiative is directed towards unifying various ages and cultures which will improve the district (City of Orlando, 2017c).

Moving on to district 3, which covers the north area of State Road 50, is commissioned by Robert F. Stuart. District 3 advertises that this district is a great place to live, work and raise a family (City of Orlando, 2017d). While district 4 is directed towards building a stronger sense of community, with commissioner Patty Sheehan (City of Orlando, 2017e). Regina I. Hill is the commissioner of district 5, with encompasses 41,000 residents of downtown Orlando to Hiawassee Road. The key focus in district 5 is connecting youth to jobs, end the juvenile violence, keeping youth safe and making it easier the youth to have a fighting chance (City of Orlando, 2017f). Finally, district 6, which is commissioned by Samuel B. Ings, primarily serves our community’s veterans (City of Orlando, 2017g). Each district specifically focuses on a certain population of the community. However, several districts direct their efforts towards making the community a united one. Main focus of each district could easily impact the policies they vote yes or no, on.

**Meeting Proceedings**

Now with some knowledge gained about our council members, how are meetings usually structured? For the June 5th, 2017 council meeting, Mayor Buddy Dyer began with the introduction of Michael Dippy, who has been a resident of Orlando for his entire life. Michael Dippy is currently the created of Idignity, which is an organization that gives the homeless community an opportunity to obtain birth certificates, drivers licenses and identification cards. After the introduction of Michael Dippy, Mr. Dippy preceded to give the invocation. An invocation is defined as a form of prayer at the beginning of a public ceremony or religious service. The main focus of the invocation was on the upcoming year anniversary of the Pulse incident. This prayer for the Pulse tragedy later led into the declaration of June 12th becoming Orlando United Day. However, before proclaiming June 12th as Orlando United Day, the meeting followed a carefully laid out agenda. The opening consisted of the invocation, pledge of allegiance, call to order, determination of quorum, consideration of minutes, recognitions and proclaiming (City of Orlando, 2017h). Once the opening was wrapped up, which took about 20 minutes, the remaining time, of the hour and fifteen-minute meeting focused on the consent agenda and ended with a very minimal closing statement.

**Consent Agenda**

Most of the city council meetings are concentrated on consent agenda. Consent agenda gives each city council member an opportunity to cast a single vote on the item presented. An item can be reviewed upon request of a council member and a confirming majority of the city council (City of Orlando, 2017h). On the June 5th consent agenda, a variety of items were presented for voting such as leasing retail space, renewal of employment agreement for plans examiner and funding agreements (City of Orlando, 2017h). The passing or rejecting items from the consent agenda can affect the community. However, while viewing the meeting it is apparent that attendance from members of the community were lacking. Without a full view of the room it is unclear how many people attended this particular meeting. Except, by the numerous empty seats seen when the camera is directed towards the speaking podium, utilized by the community, it is clear the meeting was not packed.

This such a shame that not more of our community attends the council meetings. The consent agenda allows for the community time to speak their minds on the items presented, prior to voting. On the community stand point, there is a lack of active engagement with the Council Chambers, which could directly impact the community. While about 48 items were listened on the consent agenda, a variety of them could have a negative or positive impact on the community. However, one consent agenda that will be discussed in further detail in the next portion, is ordinance number 2017-25. This ordinance could have a possible impact on the health of the community.

**Ordinance No. 2017-25**

Ordinance number 2017-25 addresses adding medical cannabis dispensary locations criteria and performance stands to the land development code of chapter 58 (City of Orlando, 2017i). With nearly 71.3% of votes, on November 8th, 2016, Florida voted to legalize medical marijuana (Goldenberg, 2017). The use of medical marijuana is supposed to be by individuals who suffer from debilitating conditions, which is determined by a licensed state physician. According to Goldenberg (2017), the Department of Health is supposed to regulate distribution centers and marijuana production. However, the City of Orlando has stepped in to regulate distribution centers around the city. As part of ordinance number 2017-25, distribution centers have to be at least one mile away from sensitive lands, which include schools, child care, residential uses, parks and places of worship (City of Orlando, 2017i). This proposed ordinance that was passed could have a positive impact on the health of the community, at least for our youth.

 According to the ordinance the proposal was drafted to help negate potential negative secondary effects caused by marijuana use (City of Orlando, 2017i). Marijuana use can have acute and chronic effects on the brain, however a raise in use has occurred among the middle and high school student population (Goldenberg, 2017). Potential negative side effects among the adolescent population, caused by marijuana use include risk of fatal motor vehicle crashes, accidental injury, respiratory illness, psychotic disorders, impaired cognitive function and brain development, greater risk of drug dependence and low educational attainment (Paschall, Grube & Biglan, 2017). In an effort to continue to try and combat potential negative effects caused by dispensaries, it was voted that the number of total dispensaries in the city of Orlando can only be seven (City of Orlando, 2017i). However, hospitals, with over a 100-bed capacity, is exempted from location criteria, if they are dispensing such products. This is also a benefit to the health of the community. Hospitals can possibly be seen as a more controlled environment for dispensing marijuana in a variety of forms.

**Summary**

Researching and viewing a council meeting has brought new profound insight into opportunities, we have as citizens to influence policies. Personally, little was known about the structure of civic meetings and what material is usually discussed. It was interesting to learn more about each district the is represented during the city council meetings and who is the head figure. It is worrisome to see, though, that not that many citizens attend these meetings, including myself. City council meetings can have a major impact on the community, especially when unwanted policies are passed, or ones that should be, are not. While it may not be possible to attended every meeting, it is good to know that each City of Orlando council meetings are streamed live through YouTube and the link is placed on the city’s webpage. If interest arises to watch the June 5th, 2017 council meeting, it can be virtually viewed at the following URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWu49yNflsw.

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