

VILLAGE OF DOWNERS GROVE
Report for the Village Council Meeting
7/15/2025

SUBJECT:	SUBMITTED BY:
Council Governanace Discussion	Dave Fieldman Village Manager

SYNOPSIS

Council Governance Discussion.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

The Strategic Goals include *Exceptional Municipal Services*.

FISCAL IMPACT

N/A

RECOMMENDATION

Discussion at the July 15th Village Council meeting.

BACKGROUND

The July 15, 2025 Village Council meeting includes a discussion of **roles and responsibilities** of Council members and staff, the **structure of meetings and interactions** and **expectations** (knowledge of what is expected of each team member and what they can expect from other team members). This type of discussion is sometimes referred to as a governance meeting. The objective of the meeting is to **establish how the Council and staff team will go about doing our jobs** and making sure that the Village has continued exceptional performance and continual improvement.

How Council members and staff go about doing their jobs varies greatly among municipalities. There is not necessarily a *right* or *wrong* way to do things. Because of this, we expect that there will be a variety of opinions on the subject discussed at the meeting. The intent is not to draft a set of rules, rather it is to listen to all Council member opinions to understand each member's individual preferences and expectations, and the rationale thereof. Understanding these preferences and expectations will assist the Mayor, Council members and staff as we go about doing our jobs for the benefit of our community.

To facilitate the discussion, this report includes a list of eight Council, community and staff interactions (see below). A separate Council meeting to discuss Boards and Commissions is scheduled for August 5, 2025.

Council, Community and Staff Interactions

1. Council Meetings
2. Other Government/Agency Meetings
3. Coffee with the Council
4. Communicating with the Public
5. Responding to Press Inquiries
6. Responding to Resident Inquiries & Requests for Service
7. Neighborhood Meetings
8. Council Directed Work by Staff

Below is a summary of the current practices for each of the topics. The plan is to discuss roles & responsibilities, structure and expectations as they are applied to each of the items on the list.

Council Meetings

The discussion of Council Meetings has been separated into nine topics summarized in the paragraphs below. [Section 2.5 of the Municipal Code](#) establishes rules which apply to the deliberations and proceedings of Council meetings.

1. *Monday Phone Calls & Friday Mayor Meetings*
2. *Publication of Council Meeting Agenda Materials*
3. *Responses to Council Questions*
4. *Three Council Meetings Per Month at 7:00 pm*
5. *Placement of Items on Consent, Active & First Reading Agendas*
6. *Council Member New Business*
7. *Council Member Reports*
8. *Public Comment*
9. *In Depth Discussions Under the Managers Report*

Monday Phone Calls and Friday Mayor Meetings

The Manager and Attorney interact with each Village Council member prior to Village Council meetings. Council members receive a phone call on the Monday preceding the Council meeting. The Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem have traditionally met with the Manager and Attorney on Fridays. Both the Monday Calls and Friday Mayor Meetings cover the same content and help achieve the following objectives:

- Provide a regular, predictable interaction between Council members and the Manager and Attorney
- Establish and maintain a strong, effective working relationship between Council members and the Manager and Attorney
- Provide Council members with information about Council meeting agenda items
- Provide an opportunity for Council members to ask questions about the agenda materials (more information is provided below in the *Responses to Council Questions* section)
- Improve the staff presentation of information at the Council meetings and facilitate an effective Council meeting (adjustments to staff presentations are sometimes made based on the conversations with Council members).
- Identify and respond to non-agenda issues or concerns

During the past few years, the Village Manager, Deputy Manager and Village Attorney have been meeting with the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem on most Friday mornings. In prior years the meetings have taken place at different times including Monday mornings and Thursday afternoons. Per the Village Code, the Village Manager creates the Council meeting agenda. During the Friday Mayor Meeting, the Manager seeks input and opinions about the placement and order of the agenda items (Consent, First Reading, Mayor's Report). Sometimes adjustments are made to the Council meeting agenda based on the group discussion. Other items of general interest are discussed. The Manager prepares the agenda for the Friday meeting and sends it to participants on Thursday. The same agenda is used for the Monday Calls.

Publication of Council Meeting Agenda Materials

Staff publishes all Village Council meeting agenda materials on the Village website by 5pm on Fridays preceding Council meetings. This is done to increase transparency as the Council and the public receive the same information at the same time.

Responses to Council Questions

By 4pm on Council meeting Tuesdays, staff publishes written responses to Council member questions about Council meeting agenda items (also some non-agenda items) on the Village website. Typically, the Council members ask their questions during the Monday Calls and Friday Mayor Meetings. This process:

- Allows Council members to formulate questions about agenda items

- Allows the Manager & Council member to discuss the questions individually to make sure that the questions are understood
- Allows staff sufficient time to prepare responses to questions
- Enhances exchange of information among Council members and staff as questions and responses are sent to all Council members and department heads
- Enhances transparency as the questions and responses are posted publicly

Three Council Meetings Per Month

[Pursuant to a Village Council Policy](#) and Ordinance, the Village Council holds regular meetings on the first, second and third Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 pm. This schedule is to allow staff to use the time preceding the 4th and occasional 5th Tuesdays of each month to focus on completing project-oriented work instead of preparing Council agenda materials. It also allows the Council to hold topic-specific meetings on the fourth Tuesdays, if necessary or desirable.

Placement of Items on Consent, Active & First Reading Agendas

[Pursuant to a Village Council Policy](#), each Council meeting agenda item is placed on the Consent, Active or First Reading Agendas (occasionally items are placed on the Mayor's or Manager's Reports). This allows the Council to complete a variety of types of work (legislative, administrative and general discussion) in an efficient manner at each Council meeting.

The Consent Agenda contains matters, except ordinances, deemed by the Village Manager to be suitable and of a non-controversial nature. This is expected to include, but is not necessarily limited to approval of contracts, bills payable, resolutions and miscellaneous motions as well as matters on which a preliminary vote or recommendation, awaiting the drafting of final documents, has been taken by the Council. Any Council member may remove any item from the Consent Agenda for separate consideration and vote by the Council.

The Active Agenda contains items for Village Council action that are not suited for the Consent Agenda. Items placed on the Active Agenda have usually been discussed by the Council at a previous meeting under the First Reading Agenda. All Ordinances must be placed on the Active Agenda (they are not allowed to be placed on the Consent Agenda).

The First Reading Agenda contains items that are suitable for discussion by the Council, members of the public and the staff. This allows for an informal discussion of items.

Council Member New Business

The Mayor and members of the Village Council, or any of them, may direct the Village Manager to place an item on the New Business Agenda. The New Business process is subject to a [Village Council Policy \(section 2\)](#). The Council member must notify the Village Manager regarding the content of the proposed item no later than the Wednesday prior to the meeting at 9:00 a.m. A summary of the proposed item must be provided in writing by the Village Council member to the Village Manager in sufficient time to be included in the Council meeting agenda materials. The maximum amount of time that staff may work on a proposed new business item prior to obtaining direction from the Village Council is four hours.

Council Member Reports

Each Council member is offered the opportunity to inform the community about items of general interest or to report on activities of other governments or agencies. The Council Rule about these reports is as follows:

Rule 36. Personal announcements. A member shall not address the Council with regard to:

- a) his/her or another person's candidacy for election or re-election to any public office;
- b) other matters not related to the business of the Village, except as such matters may concern mayoral proclamations properly before the Council.

Public Comment

At each Council meeting, members of the public are offered the opportunity to address the Council. Currently public comment appears on Council meeting agendas prior to the Consent, Active and First Reading agendas. This practice allows members of the public to address all Council members at the same time in person without having to wait for the Council to address other agenda items.

In-Depth Council Discussions Under the Managers Report

The Council frequently meets to discuss certain agenda items which may benefit from an in-depth discussion in an informal environment. The discussions generally take place under the Managers Report. Examples of this include Long Range Planning, priority action items, and Guiding DG. Sometimes the Council meets in a “dinner table” set up in the east end of the Cheever Council Chambers. In some cases, staff uses a white board to capture Village Council member comments. Staff usually plays a larger role in facilitating these discussions compared to other types of Council discussions. This practice allows all stakeholders (Council members, staff and the public) to engage in a meaningful in-depth discussion at the same time.

No Surprises

The governance items related to the preparation for and conduct during Council meetings are intended to support the informal “No Surprises” concept. Communication among Council members and staff is intended to make sure that everyone is aware of the key concepts, topics and comments to be addressed during a Council meeting.

Other Government / Agency Meetings

There are many other government organizations and agencies which the Village works with in varying capacities from time to time including but not limited to:

- Downers Grove Economic Development Corporation (DGEDC)
- Downtown Management Corporation (DMC)
- DuPage Mayors & Managers Conference (DMMC)
- Downers Grove Park District
- School District 99
- School District 58
- Downers Grove Sanitary District
- Downers Grove Library (Component Unit of the Village)
- DuPage Water Commission
- DuPage County
- Chamber 630
- Illinois Municipal League
- National League of Cities
- US Conference of Mayors
- Metropolitan Mayors Caucus

DGEDC

The Village’s agreement with the DGEDC states that the Mayor and one additional Council member appointed by the Mayor serve on the Executive Board. Although not required, in the past the appointment of the Council member has been made by the Mayor, subject to the consent of the Village Council by Resolution.

Downtown Management

The Village’s agreement with the DMC states that the Village shall have up to three ex-officio members on the Board of Directors. The organization’s by-laws call for the Village ex-officio members to include the Village Manager, the Public Works Director and the Council’s liaison, or their respective designees. The last time a Village Council member was appointed as a liaison to DMC occurred in 2015. Although not required, in the past the appointment of the Council member has been made by the Mayor, subject to the consent of the Village Council by Resolution.

DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference

Council members may participate in DMMC committees, subject to approval by the Mayor, per the DMMC by-laws.

Council members are sometimes assigned as liaisons to or serve on committees within some of these organizations. The assignment, role and responsibilities of the Council liaison are not formally defined.

Coffee with the Council

On the second Saturday of each month, the Village hosts Coffee with the Council, an opportunity for members of the public to engage with Council members informally on topics of their choosing. Coffee with the Council meetings are scheduled as follows:

- January through April and December- Downers Grove Public Library
- May through October - Downtown Market (except for June due to Grove Fest)
- November - Cheever Council Chambers (Budget Discussion)

Communicating with the Public

The Village communicates with the Public using a variety of tools to reach various audiences, depending on content and time-sensitivity of the message, including:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • X • E-News (weekly e-newsletter) • Community-wide Notification System • Printed Notices & Brochures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Next Door • YouTube • Village Corner • Printed Newsletter |
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Responding to Inquiries from the Press

Council members will receive and respond to press inquiries from time to time verbally and in writing. After being contacted by the press, Council members are encouraged to notify the Village Manager or the Communications Director. The Communications Director handles all press inquiries directed to the attention of staff.

Responding to Resident Inquiries and Requests for Service

Council members receive resident inquiries and requests for service in a variety of ways (face to face conversations, phone calls, emails, social media, etc.). There are multiple ways in which Council members currently respond to inquiries and requests for service from residents:

1. Inquiries/requests are forwarded to staff for response to the resident
2. Inquiries/requests are forwarded to staff and responses are provided to Council members to respond directly to the resident
3. Inquiries are handled by Council members on their own

Neighborhood Meetings

Village staff conducts meetings with residents in the community, primarily in advance of public infrastructure improvements within their neighborhood. These meetings are generally held for street reconstructions, new sidewalk construction and stormwater capital projects. This step of the process comes after the Council approves the Community Investment Plan (CIP) as part of the annual budget. The scope of the project is defined in the CIP based on established Council practices and policies. The purpose of the neighborhood meetings is to make residents in the affected area aware of the project scope and planned schedule, and allow them to make staff aware of specific concerns or issues affecting aspects of the project, particularly direct impacts to their property. While minor design changes are made based on comments at neighborhood meetings, changes in the scope of the projects are not. Council members have not traditionally attended neighborhood meetings.

Council Directed Work by Staff

An individual Council may direct staff to work on any item or issue of their choice. Staff work on the item is limited to a total of four hours. Work in excess of four hours requires a majority of the Council to direct staff to continue to work on the topic. This direction must be provided at a Village Council meeting and is usually accomplished under Council Member New Business. This process allows Council members to work on items important to them while

limiting the use of limited staff resources and recognizing that a majority of the Council is required to direct significant Village efforts. This concept is covered in a [Village Council Policy \(section 3\)](#).