



City of Sebastopol

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: September 16, 2025

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers

From: Councilmember Hinton

Subject: Establishing Closed Session Start Times at 6:00 PM with Exceptions as Needed

Recommendation: That the City Council consider the request for establishing protocols to approve establishing 6:00 PM as the standard start time for Closed Session meetings, with exceptions if needed.

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RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider the request for establishing protocols to approve establishing 6:00 PM as the standard start time for Closed Session meetings, with exceptions if needed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This item proposes establishing a standard start time of 6:00 PM for Closed Session meetings to provide consistency and predictability for Councilmembers, staff, and the public, while maintaining flexibility for exceptions.

PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM:

- a. Presentation of agenda item by Councilmember Hinton
- b. Questions and discussion from Councilmembers
- c. Public comment period
- d. Council deliberation and motion

BACKGROUND:

The City Council of the City of Sebastopol shall hold regular meetings on the first and third Tuesday of each and every month, commencing at 6:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month and at 6:00 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month. In the event the regular meeting of the Council falls upon a day designated by law as a legal holiday, such meeting shall be held on such other date as the Council may designate, or shall be scheduled for cancellation upon approval of a majority of the City Council at a regularly noticed City Council Meeting. The City does not have an established start time for Closed Sessions or Special Meetings. Examples of special meetings include: Early start times of Council meetings for interviews for various Commission, Board or Committee interviews; study sessions; or town halls as examples.

For closed sessions, if a closed session meeting is not held within the regular City Council Meeting agenda, it is considered a special meeting. Closed Session meetings are closed to the public, other than at the beginning of meeting for public comments for items on a closed session meeting agenda. After public comment, the Council then adjourns into the closed session meeting.

City Council protocols state that a special meeting of the Council may be called by the Mayor, City Attorney or City Manager in consultation with the City Attorney. A special meeting may be called by providing notice (by personal delivery or by written notice) 24 hours in advance of the meeting to the Mayor, to all Councilmembers, and to all media outlets and persons having requested in writing notification of such meetings pursuant to State law. The call and notice shall specify the time and place of the special meeting and the business to be transacted. No other business shall be considered at such meetings. No ordinances, other than urgency ordinances, may be adopted, nor may resolutions or orders for payment of money be made.



City of Sebastopol

The call and notice shall specify the time and place of the special meeting and the business to be transacted. No other business shall be considered at the meeting.

DISCUSSION:

City staff has encountered challenges scheduling Closed Sessions due to lack of consensus on start times among Councilmembers. Prior to 2024, closed sessions were conducted on a separate date/time from a regular City Council Meeting; or held prior to or after the Regular City Council meeting. Since 2024, the Agenda Review Committee requested Councilmembers to reserve Monday evenings at either 5:00 PM or 6:00 pm for potential Closed Sessions. In 2025 the Agenda Review Committee requested a 5:00 pm start time. While this arrangement worked in the past, recent schedule changes have made it less effective. Staff attempted to determine preferred start times through a survey, but no consensus was reached.

Councilmember Hinton has requested establishing a protocol for a 6:00 PM standard start time for Closed Sessions with exceptions if needed.

Benefits of this approach include:

- Consistency and predictability for Councilmembers, staff, the public, outside legal counsel, bargaining unit negotiators, or other key members required for a Closed Session Meeting.
- Clear alignment with regular Council meeting schedules.

Exceptions may be required in specific situations, such as:

- Scheduling conflicts with the City Attorney, labor negotiators, outside legal counsel, or other key members required for a Closed Session Meeting.
- Complex or multiple Closed Session items requiring additional preparation or extended time.
- Urgent matters, coordination with outside agencies, or alignment with other public meetings.

It is recommended that the policy allow the Mayor, City Manager, and City Attorney to adjust the start time in consultation with the Council when necessary due to exceptions as noted above.

Interim City Manager:

City staff requests that, consistent with past practice, Mondays be designated as the standard day for Closed Session meetings, with the understanding that exceptions may occur and some Closed Sessions may not be held at 6:00 p.m. (or may need to be scheduled for a different date/time.)

This approach will reduce staff time spent sending out scheduling surveys for each potential Closed Session and streamline coordination with the City Attorney, labor negotiators, outside legal counsel, and other key participants.

Staff further recommends that, in cases where the Closed Session date or time must be adjusted due to scheduling conflicts, the Council authorize the change to be made based on the consensus of Councilmembers' responses to a scheduling survey.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES; AND/OR GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:

This agenda item represents the City Council goals/priorities as follows:

Goal 4: HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATION



City of Sebastopol

*Restoring public trust
Improve Public Communications*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to schedule meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items.

As of the writing of this agenda item report, the City has not received public comment. If staff receives public comments following the publication and distribution of this agenda item report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting and will be posted to the city website.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact with approval of this item.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider the request for establishing protocols to approve establishing 6:00 PM as the standard start time for Closed Session meetings, with exceptions if needed; and

- Consider approval of Mondays as the preferred day for Closed Session Meetings; and
- In cases where the Closed Session date or time must be adjusted due to scheduling conflicts, the Council authorize the change to be made based on the consensus of Councilmembers' responses to a scheduling survey.

OPTIONS:

1. Deny the request for establishing set meeting times for Closed Session Meetings and provide direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

APPROVALS:

Department Head Approval:

Approval Date:

CEQA Determination (Planning):

Approval Date:

The proposed action is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Administrative Services (Financial):

Approval Date:

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: ☐ Yes ☐ No N/A

Account Code (if applicable) _____

City Attorney Approval:

Approval Date:

City Manager Approval:

Approval Date: