

Support Councilmember McLewis, we need more in the city like her.

Councilmember McLewis deserves our support. Illness is something we all have suffered or can expect. Modern medicine has helped to ensure that even after a serious illness we can return to our lives and continue to contribute to our jobs, families and communities. Jill McLewis has done much for the city over the years and deserves support.

One public comment is trying to make this about meeting attendance. Over four years there will be something like 200 meetings. It is expected council members are going to miss some meetings. During a discussion about cancelling August meetings, Councilmember Hinton objected to cancelling meetings to accommodate vacations, and stated that council members could choose not to attend if they were on vacation.

The issue is not how many meetings were missed over two and half years but simply the meetings on July 15 and August 5 and how that is affected by the California ordinance stating:

If a city council member is absent without permission from all regular city council meetings for 60 days consecutively from the last regular meeting he or she attended, his or her office becomes vacant and shall be filled as any other vacancy.

This ordinance exists in other states and is known as the **abandonment ordinance**. It is used primarily if a council member decides to walk away. Occasionally, it is used to threaten or eliminate someone you disagree with politically.

The California lawmakers that wrote this law failed to address what constitutes permission, who gives it, and how it is to be documented. The California Attorney General is on record saying the law is ambiguous and needs to be litigated in the courts to address the limitations.

The approach chosen by our prior city attorney years ago, is to give the city council the responsibility for “granting permission”. For a compassionate city known as Peace town the vote should be unanimous and without drama. Support for colleagues should be the highest priority. There should be no politics involved.

The city should revisit how this will be handled in the future. The process being used is open for abuse. One would not expect in a small town like this politics would take precedence over the wellbeing of colleagues, but it can. In this situation two members of the council have the ability to overturn the will of the entire electorate. It may work better if permission is defined as keeping the mayor and city manager informed about an absence. If absences are excessive then the council member should be informed that further absences are not approved and that after 60 days, the council will vote on whether one should continue with the council. That vote should be unanimous for elimination. This eliminates the potential for only two members to control the fate of any elected official.