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To: Executive Board

From: Sarah Reeves

Date: August 13, 2019

RE: Consent Agenda Process

Michelle DaVia and I have been discussing ways to streamline Board processes and provide more time during meetings for policy and planning discussions. The consent agenda is a tool the Board can use to free up more meeting time for in-depth discussions on strategic business components, such as policies, planning, and our capital projects. Michelle wants the Board to be able to have meetings that are as informative on these upcoming issues as possible, while keeping the meetings to a normal length.

To achieve the goal of streamlining Executive Board and full Board business, I am recommending that CSWD adopt the use of a Consent Agenda format. The following description has been adapted from an article appearing on Boardeffect.com, written by Jeremy Barlow.

What is a Consent Agenda?

A consent agenda (also known as a consent calendar) is a Board meeting practice that groups routine business and reports into one agenda item. The consent agenda can be approved in one action, rather than filing multiple separate motions. A consent agenda moves routine items along quickly so that the Board has time for discussing more important issues and can save Boards up to 30 minutes per meeting. A consent agenda is an effective and efficient tool when used appropriately. Transparency and accountability are key parts of using a consent agenda. Commissioners and staff have a responsibility for making sure that consent agenda items are distributed in enough time to review them prior to the meeting. Each Commissioner also has a responsibility to read and review consent agenda items and address any concerns prior to the meeting.

What Kinds of Items Appear on a Consent Agenda?

Items that appear on a consent agenda are non-controversial items or routine items that are discussed at every meeting. They can also be items that have been previously discussed at length where there is group consensus. Examples are:

- Previous meeting minutes
- Financial reports, or other information-only reports that don't require debate
- Senior management reports

- Program or committee reports
- Staff, volunteer, or committee appointments
- Correspondence that requires no action
- Perfunctory items-formal approval of items that had much past discussion

How the Consent Agenda Works

The chair takes the lead role in utilizing a consent agenda. The chair approves an agenda packet that includes all the items on the consent agenda. It is part of the overall Board materials that are distributed pre-meeting. Typical steps for using a consent agenda include:

1. The chair decides which items will be placed on the consent agenda. The consent agenda can appear as part of the normal meeting agenda or it can be attached separately to the meeting agenda.
2. The consent agenda and associated documents are included in the regular Exec Board or full Board packet, providing time for Commissioners to read and review.
3. At the beginning of the meeting, the chair asks Commissioners if any of the consent agenda items should be moved to regular discussion items.
4. If a Commissioner requests that an item be moved, it must be moved. A Commissioner can move an item to debate the item, to query the item, or to vote against it. To have an item moved, the Commissioner can simply call out “Number 4”, and the chair would respond, “Number 4 is removed”.
5. Once the item has been moved, the chair may decide to take up the matter immediately or move it to a discussion item on the main agenda.
6. The chair would then ask, “Are there any other items to be removed?” If there are no items to be moved or if all requested items have been moved, the chair or secretary reads out loud the remaining consent items:

“Items numbered 1, 2, 3, and 6 are before you. If there is no objection, these items will be adopted. (Chair pauses for objections) There being no objection, these items are adopted.”

The chair can move to adopt the consent agenda as a whole. Hearing no objections, they can announce that the items on the consent agenda have been adopted. It’s not necessary to take a vote on the consent agenda or of consent agenda items.

7. The secretary should include the full text of the resolutions, reports, and recommendations that were adopted as part of the consent agenda.

Steps to Take When a Commissioner Needs Clarification on a Consent Agenda Item

If a Commissioner needs clarification on a consent agenda item or has a simple question, they should ask the chair or the Executive Director prior to the meeting. The Executive Director will prepare an answer and distribute it to all Commissioners prior to the meeting. Simple questions, clarifications, or short amounts of dialogue relative to a consent item may be discussed after the motion to accept the consent agenda, but before approval. Consent agenda items shouldn't be pulled from the agenda for the sole purpose of having a simple question answered.

Steps to Take When a Commissioner Disagrees or Suggests Discussion

If a Commissioner disagrees with the consent agenda item or wants to move it to the regular agenda, the Commissioner would request that the item be pulled from the consent agenda. The chair would ask if the Commissioners are in favor of approving the consent agenda minus the pulled item, pause for objections, and then adopt the consent agenda as noted in step #6, above.

Sample Agenda incorporating a Consent Agenda

1. Agenda
2. Public Comment Period
3. Consent Agenda
 1. Minutes of June 14, 2019
 2. Executive Director report
 3. Finance Director report
 4. Monthly Cash Flow Statement
 5. FY20 hauler license approvals
 6. Program Updates
4. MRF Siting Presentation
5. Personnel Policy approval
6. New Business

Misuse of Consent Agenda

Problems in using a consent agenda occur when Commissioners approve consent agendas without first reviewing documents. For example, if Commissioners are not reviewing financial items, overspending or wrong spending can occur without appropriate oversight. Another problem can occur when members regularly pull items off the consent agenda for clarifying questions. Items should be removed only for debate or vote. Remember that consent agenda items are routine and non-controversial, but even routine items should be reviewed by the entire Board.

Adoption of a Rule of Order

In order to use a consent agenda, the Board will need to adopt a rule of order that will allow the use of the consent agenda process. Suggested language to consider:

“A consent agenda may be presented by the chair at the beginning of a meeting. Items may be removed from the consent agenda on the request of any one Commissioner. Items not removed may be adopted by general consent without debate. Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the consent agenda or placed later on the agenda at the discretion of the Board of Commissioners.”