

From: Chris Leman [<mailto:cleman@oo.net>]

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Subject: City Council should adopt nine amendments to Res. 31718 and C.B 118834; and should focus on creating a Community Involvement Commission, not decertify the District Councils and CNC before it has a chance to engage with and make recommendations about t

Dear Councilmember:

On Monday, Nov. 21 in your 10:30 a.m. Budget Committee meeting and in the Full Council meeting that afternoon, please shorten Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 to focus on two important things: create a Community Involvement Commission and increase language access services citywide. And please remove the parts that defund and decertify the District Councils and City Neighborhood Council before the Commission even has the chance to engage with and make recommendations about these official City advisory bodies.

It is truly unprecedented in Seattle history for the City Council to decertify and defund 14 official advisory bodies without even consulting them about their continuation, without trying to save what is best, without providing help and guidance (as called for by the 2009 audit--click [here](#)), without allowing a meaningful opportunity for a public hearing, and with only polemical and unsupported analysis. The City Council must not validate the disinformation and polarization in the Executive's "whereas" statements and the fiscal notes for these two bills. Please pass the good parts of Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 and drop the destructive ones.

On Nov. 9, just two days after Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 were introduced, the Lake Union District Council sent each City Councilmember the attached 7-page letter (also available by clicking [here](#)) of suggested amendments. To make things easier for you, below is a capsulized summary of nine needed changes. But first, please note that LUDC's letter fully supports creating a Community Involvement Commission, while urging that the City Council not deny the Commission the opportunity to engage with and come to its own conclusions about the future of the District Councils and CNC. The LUDC letter also supports C.B 118834's increase in language access services for all City bodies, including the District Councils and CNC in their efforts to reach out to diverse language groups. The needed changes are as follows:

- (1) Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 would move Seattle away from public meetings and into primary reliance on digital participation, even though the City's own research shows that one fifth of the population lacks web access. Contrary a Mayor who doesn't particularly like public meetings, they are fundamental to the American tradition, and are a time-tested technology for inclusion. To attend or speak, one doesn't need web access, a computer, or even to be able to read. The district councils are the only City advisory bodies that hold monthly public meetings throughout Seattle, close to where people live or work. These public meetings number well over 100 per year (thirteen different District Councils, each with about nine meetings a year). These meetings are major opportunities for members of the public to engage with City officials and with one another. The City Council should help the District Councils get word out the public about these public meetings, not kill the meetings along with the advisory bodies that make them possible.
- (2) As dramatized by our recent national election, digital media encourage misunderstanding and anonymous invective. Participation by e-mail, web surveys, and social media can be isolating, harsh, and rife with the potential for misunderstanding. Public meetings encourage civility and compromise among people with diverse backgrounds. As you have heard from the Southeast District Council, "when we may be dealing with class or ethnic divides, in the final analysis there is no good substitute for in-person, face-to-face communication and dialogue. ... Even where consensus is not easy to come by, understanding and respect can make a big difference." The Mayor's crusade against the District Councils is a disservice to them and to the City Council, obscuring how much the District Councils do to bridge gaps between races, ethnic groups, and economic classes; between homeowners and renters; and between residents and businesses. With help from City government to improve their equity and effectiveness, they can and will do this task better than ever.
- (3) The Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 "whereas" clauses and fiscal notes falsely state that the District Councils and the City Neighborhood Council receive unique and undue staff resources. The portion of the District Coordinators' time occupied by District Council chores has been wildly exaggerated. And there is nothing unique about a

department spending some staff resources for the official City advisory bodies it administers; every official City advisory body receives staff assistance. The only thing unique about the District Councils and the CNC is that they receive FAR LESS staff assistance than any of the other official City advisory bodies.

- (4) Res. 31718 and C.B 118834 would warp the official mission of the Department of Neighborhoods. The proposed new mission lacks any sense of enhancing neighborhoods, such as through mutual aid, empowerment of people, and ensuring the responsiveness of government. In fact, almost all references to “neighborhoods” would disappear—certainly odd for a Department of Neighborhoods! The focus becomes “dividing up the pie” of City resources rather than on community-building that can “grow the pie” of community resources through physical improvements and social bonds which the City could never afford to fund on its own.
- (5) Section 5 of Res. 31718 would erase the charter and guidance for the district councils and the City Neighborhood Council as official advisory bodies, including regarding the Neighborhood Matching Fund by repealing Resolution 27709 (1987), Res. 28115 (1989), and Res. 28948 (1994),. The LUDC letter identifies language from these resolutions that should be retained while strengthening the equity of these advisory bodies’ civic engagement.
- (6) Res. 31718 would lead astray the Department of Neighborhoods and other agencies with a poorly drafted “Glossary of Terms” that “shall guide ongoing efforts by City of Seattle departments to develop, implement and periodically update community involvement plans and practices that prioritize equity.” It would place the Department of Neighborhoods at the center in controlling various demographic groups, destroying its longtime role of empowering these groups to interact and cooperate on their own. Res. 31718 should be amended to include the current purposes to “foster cooperation and consensus among diverse interest within neighborhoods and to encourage the constructive settlement of disputes.” The glossary should be deferred so that the Community Involvement Commission can help shape it.
- (7) C.B 118834 would centralize the Department of Neighborhoods and make it permanently an arm of the Mayor, jettisoning its longtime role as honest broker by repealing its function to “mediate disputes between City departments and affected communities.” [p. 4] One reason the City has not needed an ombudsman is that the Department of Neighborhoods has taken this assignment seriously; do not repeal it.
- (8) C.B 118834 would move the Department of Neighborhoods away from community empowerment by replacing its current assignment to “facilitate community meetings on City issues and actions” with new language to “convene public meetings on City issues and actions”. The Department’s long-celebrated effort to help communities organize themselves is replaced by heavy-handed control.
- (9) The City Council will not benefit if all advisory bodies are people it and the Mayor have appointed. The District Councils and CNC are the only advisory bodies that are selected at the grassroots, with viewpoints that the City Council inadvertently edits out in its appointments. A decision against grassroots selection of District Council members will also deny to the communities themselves the advantages of grassroots ideas and involvement. As demographic groups meet face-to-face, the experience promotes civility, mutual understanding, cooperation, compromise, and team building, benefitting the entire City.

Conclusion. Creating a Community Involvement Commission and increasing funds for language access surveys are worthy purposes of Res. 31718 and C.B 118834. But please amend these bills so they are no longer vehicles for defunding and decertifying fourteen City advisory bodies that are equally worthy instruments of civic engagement and inclusiveness and are already in place and deserving to be helped, not harmed.

Sincerely,
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