



MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Council Staff
DATE: September 15, 2025
RE: Discussion items on the day of Introduction

The standard process for ordinances has been for the item to be scheduled for Council introduction and two weeks later (at the next meeting) it is scheduled for discussion in committee and action in the evening meeting. When an item is controversial or the agenda preparer believes there may be edits needed prior to introduction, a discussion item will be scheduled that day in committee allowing for edits to be made prior to introduction that evening.

During the April 1, 2025 Council Special Committee of the Whole (see [AB2025-277](#)), Council passed a motion to change the process. Staff was directed to schedule items for discussion in committee on the day of introduction in the evening meeting, and at the next regular council meeting the item would be discussed in committee and acted on in the evening meeting. This new process has been most appreciated as it relates to discussing budget ordinances prior to introduction.

The following highlights some of the challenges found during the new process:

- Some committees were scheduled solely for items on introduction at the evening meeting that day with limited discussion time used. Each agenda has many related staff tasks including generating an approved agenda, scheduling timing during the regular council day for the meeting, preparing an action taken document, drafting meeting minutes and processing for approval, and including all documents in the state-required archived meeting packet.
 - o The [May 27th Planning and Development Committee meeting](#) included one agenda item, scheduled because it was on for introduction that evening
 - o The [July 8th Public Works and Health Committee meeting](#) included one agenda item, scheduled because it was on for introduction that evening
- Some meeting agendas have many items for discussion simply because they are on for introduction that evening, and significant time is allocated to discussing them even though a request to discuss them was not specifically made by any one councilmember or staff. This impacts the ability of the chair to properly estimate needed time for the committee and requires staff to be present to answer any potential questions.
 - o The [April 15th Finance and Administrative Services Committee meeting](#) includes 5 items
 - o The [May 27th Finance and Administrative Services Committee meeting](#) includes 2 items
 - o The [July 8th Finance and Administrative Services Committee meeting](#) includes 5 items
 - o The [September 9th Finance and Administrative Services Committee meeting](#) includes 4 items
- Items are discussed twice, once on the day of introduction and again on the day of action. Repeated discussion items take up limited committee time.

In an effort to be most efficient with Council's limited meeting time, **the Council could consider a motion to revert back to the original process whereby**

- Items are introduced and two weeks later discussed in committee and acted on in the evening meeting,

- Agenda preparers at their discretion may request discussion in committee on the day of introduction for items that may be controversial or require council feedback and edits prior to introduction that evening.
- All budget ordinances are to be discussed on the day of introduction, as this has been of interest to Council

With the aforementioned proposed motion and reverting back to the original process, there are still options to efficiently address changes to items even if they are not scheduled for discussion in committee on the day of introduction, such as:

- Submit a substitute item on the day of introduction (Council votes to introduce either the proposed ordinance or the substitute ordinance)
- Submit a separate agenda bill as an alternative option (Council introduces two versions of the same ordinance separately, each are discussed in committee at the following meeting and acted on in the evening meeting with either one or the other passing)
- A motion to introduce an item fails, and a revised item is introduced at a subsequent meeting
- After introduction and at a subsequent meeting, the item is edited in committee and if substantively changed it is introduced again at the evening meeting
- After introduction and at a subsequent meeting, the item can be held in committee for multiple meetings until ripe for reintroduction.

For more information, please contact Cathy Halka at ext. 5019.