The Davenport city leadership is receiving strong objections from the community regarding the elimination of regular standing-committee meetings by folding them into the bi-weekly Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting. How responsive it will be to the collective opposition to this serious degradation of the public process remains to be seen, especially since it tends to conduct far more business behind closed doors these days.

Recall that this issue, which City Administrator Craig Malin claims has been in review by council members and staff ever since a meeting with Lyle Sumek (the city's strategic planning facilitator), was introduced to the Finance Committee's February 1 meeting agenda mere hours before it was presented by Mayor Ed Winborn at the same. Also recall that virtually no discussion was had before Alderman Jamie Howard rushed it onto the consent agenda for the following Monday's Committee of the Whole.

Thankfully, during the COW, several citizens raised critical concerns over the language of the resolution and what appears to be the city's attempt to further distance the public from participation in city governance. Alderman Keith Meyer directed City Administrator Malin to address questions posed by citizens. Administrator Malin gave cursory responses to what amounted to glaring inadequacies in the resolution and amended *Rules of Order for the City Council of Davenport.*
Alderman Ray Ambrose saw fit to table the matter, and all but Alderman Brian Dumas voted in favor of the motion.

This means the public gets a chance to right what could very well be an immobilizing wrong. The resolution specifically states that the elimination by consolidation of meetings "supports the mission of the city to be a responsible fiscal steward and engage citizens in the development of policy." It further claims it will "create opportunities for more council and citizen participation earlier in the review and deliberation of issues ... ."

I challenge the council to demonstrate how this procedural change would achieve those stated goals. These rules of order are antithetical to the above goals and, in fact, accomplish the opposite, practically eliminating council accountability.

Consider the following:

(1) No opportunity exists for the public to be heard on issues/items that are automatically placed on the consent agenda of the COW beforehand, other than contacting each alderman individually and making his or her case in the two days before the agenda is posted (48 hours before the meeting) and the meeting itself. This rule assumes aldermen will be available for all calls; that the public will be given the necessary time with each alderman to make his/her case; and once contacted, that aldermen will always relay citizens' positions/information on such issues during COWs. If aldermen fail in any one or all of these scenarios, accountability will have disappeared altogether.

(2) Committees are divided into four areas: Finance, Community Development, Public Safety, and Public Works. Currently, five individual meetings are held to deal with items that fall into one of these four categories. As a result, focused, detailed attention can be given to agenda items in an informative environment, where all parties involved can dialogue with the aldermen assigned to those committees for at least an hour's time. These committee aldermen are able to do due diligence on taxpayers' behalf, as well as act as advocates for citizens' city business. The new rules would eliminate those four-plus hours of direct two-way discussion, and four-plus days before it is dealt with at the COW (at a minimum) where no two-way dialogue is permitted unless a committee chair allows it.

(3) All items on the consent agenda will vie for council attention in one large cattle call. The four dedicated hours to specific items will no longer be available. My prediction is that agendas will include highly controversial items in the same agendas or close to one another. This will automatically marginalize the issues and water them down in such an environment, especially because time will interfere with due process.

(4) A far smaller number of aldermen will be responsible for allowing items to be included on an agenda, and even discussed at all during either the COW or regular council meetings. The filtering process becomes controlled by a few, according to how each mayor chooses committee chairs. Whether an issue even makes an agenda comes under the purview of a far smaller number of councilmen. And when an issue is introduced via agenda, it is automatically placed upon the consent agenda, and the public is dependent on the council to bring it forward for any sort of discussion at all.

(5) Finally, how are the committee chairs devising the consent agenda to begin with, without any public process whatsoever? *Committees will still exist behind closed doors.* But whether citizens have had input regarding the week's agenda is anybody's guess. How agenda items

are influenced becomes a serious matter when most of it remains hidden from public scrutiny. This is certainly one of the most egregious of the new rules of order.

These concerns are no small matter. We are at greater risk than ever for specious local legislation to prevail if this resolution is passed. And there are plenty of issues championed by special interests on the not-so-distant horizon that would have clear advantage under these new rules. Citizens' involvement has never been more necessary to safeguard the public due process in civic governance. Make yourself heard.