

Memorandum 14-002 Citizen's Academy

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TO: Honorable Mayor Wythe and Homer City Council

THROUGH: Walt Wrede, City Manager

FROM: Katie Koester, Community and Economic Development Coordinator

DATE: December 27, 2013

SUBJECT: Citizen's Academy

The purpose of the memo is to explore some for the questions surrounding the concept of the Citizen's Academy that was included in the 2014 budget (\$4,000).

If the Council would like to host an academy before summer 2014, planning and preparation needs to take place soon. There are many elements to consider such as how to structure an academy, scheduling, depth of instruction, etc. Coordinating, scheduling, developing a curriculum and preparing the first Academy will take staff time. I suggest a minimum of 6 weeks lead time before the first class.

I have researched citizen academies in other states and they vary in the formality of the instruction, length of the course work, and cost. Some things they have in common are an attendance requirement, residency requirement, certification and ceremony at the end of the course, and food served at evening classes.

Things to consider:

Goal of the City of Homer Citizen's Academy: Provide an opportunity for residents to increase their knowledge about the workings of local government and have a desire to become involved in the shaping and development of their community.

Question - Council direction on the goal of the Citizen's academy will help staff produce a work product that is meaningful to the community and the Council.

Scheduling: In order to give all departments at least one hour to share with the public, I recommend a minimum of 6 2-3 hour sessions. Scheduling options include: one class every night over the course of a week, a class one evening a week for 6 weeks, or 2 classes a month for 12 weeks. Dates must also take into consideration staff will need 6 weeks to prepare curriculum and advertise before the start of the course.

Question -Should the course run one week straight, one day a week, or two days a month? Should the City try and host the Academy on an accelerated schedule this winter/early spring?

Advertising: Community participation in the Academy is crucial and may be difficult. I would suggest an advertising campaign to include the traditional advertising through newspapers, brochures, radio and postings in addition to individual outreach to citizens by Council members and staff. The initial class will be able to provide important feedback on the course and generate interest for subsequent courses if the Academy becomes an annual event. Your participation in spreading the word will be crucial.

Question - Are Council members willing to make an effort to reach out to friends, colleagues and community members and recruit for the Academy?

Attendance Requirements: All of the examples of citizen academies I researched included a minimum attendance

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requirement for participants and a maximum class size. The amount of effort involved in hosting the academy and expectation that citizens will be well versed in local government require that people show up. A class size maximum, 20 for example, will allow for better instruction, predictability for catering snacks and meals, and ability to bring the group to locations outside of City Hall for meetings. In the examples I researched citizens had to apply and be selected to participate, however these were for cities with greater populations. All required participants own a business or live in City limits.

Question – What are the residency requirements? What is the minimum attendance requirement to certificate? What is the maximum class size?

Preparing a Curriculum: Though there are many great examples of Citizen Academies across the nation, I did not find an example for a City in Alaska (with the exception of citizen police/trooper academies) or for a town of Homer's small size. The departments will have to spend some time preparing a curriculum that is meaningful and succinct for the Academy. Departments should have 4-6 weeks to prepare.

Question - Council could provide some valuable direction on the Academy and any particular goals they want to see accomplished or focus of the Academy.

Budget: I would strongly recommend feeding participants for long evening meetings. I believe this can be done for less than \$15 a participant (including staff) with simple fare like sandwiches and pizza. Many examples I researched included take homes from different departments or from the City.

Question – Can we feed participants? Do we have an interesting or meaningful take home?

Graduation: A ceremony at a City Council meeting with a certificate of completion and some recognition (invitation to family members, cake, and social opportunity with Council members to share their experiences) would be an appropriate way to recognize the time commitment and accomplishment of attendees.

These are just some of the variables that will need to be considered for creating a City of Homer Citizen's Academy. I am sure more will arise as preparations begin and can be easily handled with clear direction from Council on your intentions and goals for the Academy.

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