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Long Beach, California

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Date: November 27, 2012
To: Derek Burnham, Planning Administrator
From:  Larry Herrera, City Clerk
Subject: Digital Minutes

The aim of this memo is to summarize the City's historical rationale for the use of digital minutes for the City Council (and its standing committees), as well as citizen advisory groups that utilize the City's legislative management information system.

Prior to 2003, minutes of the City Council and citizen advisory groups were prepared in a synopsis format which required City Clerk staff to use meeting notes and cassette recordings in order to: [1] ensure that motions and votes were accurately recorded into the minutes; and [2] prepare summaries of comments made by Council and advisory group members.

In 2003, I estimated that preparation of synopsis minutes required 3.5 to 5.15 staff hours for every one hour of meeting time. Once drafted, the minutes were then presented for adoption at a City Council meeting weeks or even a month later. As a result of this finding, the City staff undertook evaluation of the City's legislative process with the goal of eliminating redundancy, rework and delay.

As a result of staff's evaluation, the City Council adopted the practice of "digital minutes" wherein the motion, the second and the vote on an agenda item were time-stamped to a digital video file. As envisioned, the major benefits of the digital minutes model included: consistency with Robert's Rules of Order (R'sRO); significant labor cost savings; next day availability of draft meeting minutes; 100 percent accuracy in the capture of City Council motions; and internet access to live and archived meeting videos.

Digital minutes are consistent with R'sRO wherein it is ruled that meeting minutes are deemed to be a record of all actions and proceedings, but not a record of discussion. Pursuant to R'sRO, meeting minutes should never include interpretations, opinions, comments, or judgmental phrases. While the name of a speaker may be given, R'sRO emphasizes that there should be no effort to summarize his or her remarks.

Since the implementation of digital minutes in January 2004, the City Clerk Department has avoided costs of more than \$1 million and has simultaneously applied labor efficiency savings towards other important City priorities.

With the use of digital minutes at the Council level, it is my conclusion that the benefits of digital minutes far outweigh the unnecessary and costly practice of synopsis minutes. With the ongoing budget constraints faced by many City departments, digital minutes help meet the challenge of doing more with less.

For the foregoing reasons, I have always recommended that all City boards and commissions adopt digital minutes as a cost-effective meeting practice. Should your staff require additional legislative system training for the implementation of digital minutes, please contact me at extension 6489.