



City of Long Beach

Office of Robert Garcia  
Councilmember, First District

**Date:** January 4, 2011  
**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
**From:** Councilmember Robert Garcia, First District *RG*  
Councilmember Gerrie Schipske, Fifth District *GS*  
**Subject:** Open Government Initiative

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### Background:

Openness and transparency in government are important values in a democracy. They provide a means for the public to evaluate the performance of elected and appointed officials, and ensure citizens have access to information they need to make intelligent decision about public policy. The City of Long Beach should foster openness and transparency whenever possible.

Open government initiatives, designed to implement broad and varied reforms to foster transparency and openness, are increasingly common. The cities of Pittsburgh, PA, and Salt Lake City, Utah, for example, as well as the Federal Executive branch, have introduced open government reforms.

To ensure more open government, Long Beach should implement the following:

### OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICY STATEMENT

As part of an open government initiative, many cities have adopted an open government policy. Open government policies set out clear and concrete principles, goals and benchmarks that can be applied across departments and in a variety of arenas – technology, open meetings, disclosure of information, citizen participation, contracts negotiation, and in almost any area of government. This serves several purposes:

- It provides clear direction and expectations to department and bureau chiefs
- It offers the public a means to evaluate the City's progress on opening government
- It provides a benchmark upon which officials can base our evaluations of specific policy proposals

- It ensures City policies address issues of diversity at the all levels of service

For example, Salt Lake City's 5-page policy resolution articulates five principles that support transparency and openness in government. These principles affirm that an open government:

- Provides the public and its employees easy access to information that educates and informs
- Listens to all people affected by its actions
- Sees the public and City employees as sources of creative ideas and effective solutions
- Requires public officials disclose their conflicts of interest

The City of Long Beach does not currently have an official open government policy. Although the City makes efforts to increase transparency and accountability, and although the City consistently complies with the open government requirements of the State of California, including the Brown Act, there are times when sincere disagreements may exist about how much public input or transparency in a particular policy or process is required or beneficial.

An official policy, similar to those adopted in other California cities, could provide guiding principles that would clarify these issues, and would set a high, clear standard for openness and access to which the City could consistently refer when creating new policies and executing existing ones.

## **PUBLIC VIEWING OF COMPLETED, OFFICIAL CONTRACTS ON-LINE**

City contracts should be made available to the public once they are completed and become final. Although they are matter of public record, viewing them usually requires a Public Records Act (PRA) request, and this inconvenience may dissuade interested members of the public from examining City contracts. It also adds to the time and expense required of City staff to comply with PRA requests.

Placing completed contracts on line – with all private, personal information redacted – would support and demonstrate openness and transparency in government. The Port and Airport should be included to the degree logistically feasible.

## **ONLINE PUBLIC COMMENT**

Public input is an invaluable part of the political process, particularly at the local level. Yet the public participation portion of Council meetings is limited due to time

constrains. Residents who cannot attend for whatever reason are sometimes unable to comment on important issues that affect them.

The City should allow and facilitate public comment online for all City Council agenda items. This should be extended to Council committees and all possible boards and commissions. The "eComment" system in the City of Sacramento provides a possible model for this endeavor.

**Recommendation:**

Request the City Clerk develop, with public input, recommendations for creating and implementing an open government policy initiative, including but not limited to:

- An official open government policy and open government steering committee
- Placing completed contracts on-line
- On-line public comment

The report and recommendations should return to Council within 90 days and include projected costs of implementation.

**Fiscal Impact:**

There is no significant fiscal impact associated with these measures beyond staff time. City manager will report any specific costs when reporting back to Council.