

Amendments to Rules of Debate regarding Speaking Times

Date:	June 13, 2012
To:	Government Management Committee
From:	City Clerk
Wards:	All

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to propose changes to the rules for speaking during debate at meetings of City Council and its committees.

These changes require amendments to the Council Procedures and must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of City Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Clerk recommends that:

1. City Council amend the Rules for Speaking contained in the Council Procedures by eliminating the two-minute extension, leaving a maximum speaking time of five minutes.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications.

DECISION HISTORY

Over the last several meetings of City Council, several Members of Council have expressed concern about speaking extensions and the time used to conduct recorded votes on them. The Speaker has advised Members of Council that she had asked the City Clerk to report on this matter.

In addition, the Executive Committee referred a letter from Councillors Grimes and Colle to the City Clerk for a report to the Government Management Committee (EX5.11). The Councillors recommended that:

- The speaking time at City Council meetings be changed to 6 minutes with no possibility of extension;
- The speaking time at meetings of committees remain at five minutes.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Current rules regarding speaking times

Subsection 27-92B of the Council Procedures provide that a member may speak on a matter for up to five minutes, but Council may consent to extend that time for up to two more minutes. The rule applies to both meetings of City Council and to its committees. This rule may not be waived.

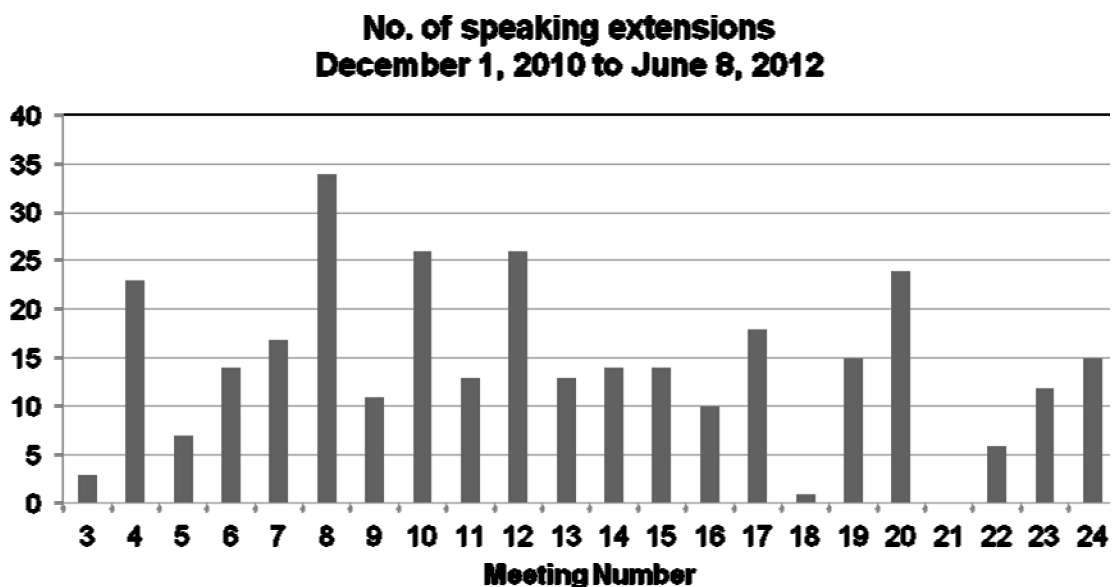
Based on an analysis of speaking times at the June 2012 City council meeting:

- 50% of the speeches made by Members last four minutes or more
- 27% of the speeches last five minutes or more

Current practice regarding extensions

On average, City Council has considered motions to extend speaking times 15 times per meeting this term. When the average time to take a recorded vote (70 seconds) is added, this adds approximately 50 minutes to the duration of a meeting.

The following chart shows the number of speaking extensions for the term up to and including meeting 24 on June 6, 7 and 8, 2012.



Speaking Times in Other Jurisdictions

Here is a chart of speaking times in other municipal councils and legislative assemblies:

Jurisdiction	Speaking Times
City of Ottawa	5 minutes, no extension
City of Calgary	5 minutes with an extension by a vote of Council.
City of Edmonton	5 minutes with one-five minute extension by a 2/3 vote
City of Vancouver	5 minutes with one 5-minute extension
City of Hamilton	5 minutes, no extension
Region of Peel	5 minutes, no extension
City of Halifax	5 minutes, no extension
House of Commons	20 minutes
Ontario Legislative Assembly	20 minutes (10 minutes if debate is more than 7 hours in duration)

COMMENTS

Principles

The rules for speaking must balance two important parliamentary principles. On the one hand, individual Members have the right to be heard and adequate time to make their points in debate. At the same time, all Members have the right to an efficient meeting. The right to an efficient meeting must be balanced with effectiveness of decision-making. For example, Members are not entitled to the shortest meeting possible if that would reduce the effectiveness of decision-making or diminish the rights of Members to be heard in debate.

Options

We have examined three options that will improve the efficiency of meetings without materially affecting the ability of Members to be heard:

1. Maximum five minutes speaking time with no possibility of extension
2. Maximum six minutes speaking time with no possibility of extension.
3. End the practice of automatic recorded votes on extension to save time conducting recorded votes.

The following table summarizes the options.

Options	Comment
5 minutes, no extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eliminates need to conduct vote (saves 70 seconds per extension)• Eliminates two-minute extension• Estimated time saving: 50 minutes in an average meeting
6 minutes, no extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eliminates need to conduct vote (saves 70 seconds per extension)• Effectively reduces maximum time to speak by one minute• Savings may be offset by additional minute provided to Members who speak to the full time available.• Estimated time saving: 24 minutes in an average meeting
End the practice of automatic recorded votes on extensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eliminates need to conduct vote (saves 70 seconds per extension)• Requires cooperation of Members (any of whom may request a recorded vote) and cannot be mandated• Estimated time saving: 17 minutes on an average meeting

Increasing to six minutes may offset time savings from eliminating extensions

While the elimination of speaking extensions could save 50 minutes for an average meeting, the increase in speaking time to six minutes could add some or all of that time back.

For example, using the City Council meeting of June 6, 7 and 8, 2012:

- 15 extensions took 48 minutes for voting and additional speaking (4% of the total meeting duration)
- If the six-minute rule were in effect, it would have saved 30 minutes, but 15 minutes would have been added if everyone who spoke to the maximum five minutes had spoken to a six minute limit.

Five minutes, no extensions yield greatest time savings

If City Council wishes to have the greatest impact of reducing the length of meetings, it should consider adopting a five minute rule with no extensions. This would bring City Council in line with several other jurisdictions listed above.

While some other municipalities provide for extensions as Toronto does now, none of these municipalities has 45 Members of Council and their meetings are already considerably shorter.

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SIGNATURE

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