WILLMAR, MN COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY

10/15/17	Willmar Community Assembly Event Report

Over the course of three weekends in September and October of 2017, a diverse group of 32 Willmar community members met to learn about local government and make recommendations to strengthen local government structure, electoral processes, and public participation in the City of Willmar.

Willmar, MN Community Assembly

PROJECT SUMMARY

Willmar is the second of three communities participating in the Minnesota Community Assembly Project. Through in-depth, democratic deliberation, this project is intended to inspire new models for citizen-led reform and improvement on local government issues; to inform policymakers, researchers, and funders focusing on democracy, civic participation, and local government issues about the priorities of citizens; and to promote active participation among residents in local government and in their communities.

The project is a collaboration between Hamline University, the Jefferson Center, and ForgeWorks. The effort is supported by the Joyce Foundation and the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

The 8-day Willmar Community Assembly engaged a group of 32 community members selected to represent the diversity of Willmar. Over three weekends, these participants studied local government in detail and considered proposals for strengthening the City of Willmar's electoral and public participation processes. The summary below offers a brief look at the 8-day process. For more detail, including the information considered and the material generated by participants, please visit: *goo.gl/jcU1o8*

Weekend 1
The Willmar Community Assembly began with a simulation exercise to introduce participants to the deliberation process. Participants considered proposals for park projects based on public criteria for good parks.

Participants watched a presentation on the three levels of government - local, state, and federal - by Professor Miki Huntington. Participants generated a list of reflections detailing how each level of government affects their lives.

Next, participants watched a presentation outlining the roles and responsibilities of local government by Professor Lena Jones. Participants highlighted the most important information for others in the community to know about local government, including the balance of power between city, county, and state government, the classification of cities as either charter or statutory (among other classifications), and the level of authority delegated to cities in Minnesota.

Participants reviewed, discussed, and prioritized eight qualities of good government to help evaluate their current government structure and processes. These eight qualities would also help assess proposals to strengthen those structures and processes. The list of 8 qualities of good government, in order of prioritization, included accountability, transparency, trust, strategic vision, effectiveness and efficiency, participation, consensus orientation, and equity. For more detail, see "Qualities of Good Government" below.

Participants reviewed the City of Willmar's current structure of government regarding the different and complementary roles of the mayor, City Council, City Administrator, and the public. Participants then identified factors of the current system that contributed to or limited the expressions of the top qualities of good government for Willmar.

Weekend 2

On Day 1, participants reviewed the City of Willmar's current electoral processes before identifying strengths and challenges of the current system, considering the first past the post voting system, voter turnout, initiatives, referendums, and recall, campaign spending, and non-partisan elections. Participants then studied 6 electoral process alternatives, before choosing 4 to study further. The 4 options selected are in bold in the table below.

Participants also reviewed the City of Willmar's current public participation processes before identifying strengths and challenges of the current approaches. They considered board and commission opportunities, public meeting and face-to-face engagement opportunities, digital engagement, and open data. Participants then studied 7 public participation process alternatives, before choosing 4 to study further. The 4 options selected are in bold in the table below.

Electoral Processes	*Public Participation*
At-Large vs. Ward Elections	**Better Public Meetings**
Ranked Choice Voting	**Digital Public Engagement**
Public Funding for Elections	**Youth Councils**
Altered Financial Disclosure Requirements	**Open Government**
Proportional Representation	Crowdsourcing Policy Development
Staggered vs. Non-Staggered Elections	Participatory Budgeting
	Mini-Public Deliberation

On Day 2, participants identified potential benefits and things to consider for each of the four electoral process proposals: At-Large vs. Ward Election, Ranked Choice Voting, Public Funding for Elections, and Altered Financial Disclosure Requirements.

Participants then selected two electoral proposals to advance to Weekend 3, based on the expected impact of implementing that proposal in Willmar. The two proposals that advanced to Weekend 3 were *At-Large vs. Ward Elections* and *Ranked Choice Voting*.

On Day 3, participants identified potential benefits and things to consider for each of the four public participation process proposals: Better Public Meetings, Digital Public Engagement, Youth Councils, and Open Government.

Participants then selected two public participation proposals to advance to Weekend 3, based on the expected impact of implementing that proposal in Willmar. The two proposals that advanced to Weekend 3 were *Better Public Meetings* and *Digital Public Engagement*.

Weekend 3

In the final weekend, participants developed, finalized, and voted on their electoral and public participation recommendations, and drafted the report below, beginning with the group's "Statement to Our Community."

STATEMENT TO OUR COMMUNITY

The Willmar Community Assembly brought together a group of smart, talented, dedicated people that opened our eyes to the diversity of this community. Residents of all ages, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and life experiences came together to discuss Willmar's local government and offer ideas to strengthen our community.

We discovered that strangers within this city have similar thoughts and concerns about the issues our community faces, but we're all invested in making Willmar a better place. Our diversity helped us generate new, stronger ideas.

We began by focusing on our common desires, and this common ground opened up room for collaboration. We put aside political differences and worked together on complicated issues. Through this process, we were able to generate valuable input about and recommendations for our government.

We discussed how our city government works, including the roles of elected officials and staff, voting processes, and ways for community members to be involved. The structure and processes by which our government operates impact the quality of the political outcomes we achieve.

Our council members and board members make challenging decisions every day that affect our lives. Most of us, however, are often unaware of decisions being made at the local level. We've gained a better understanding and appreciation for the difficulties government faces. And while our community is strong in places, we certainly have room for improvement, especially in ways for community members to be involved in government.

We discussed the many different ways that other cities are making changes to get more citizens involved in government and decision-making processes, improve the diversity of elected officials, incorporate youth voices more effectively, and use processes (like this one) that bring community members together to share their perspectives and guide decision making.

Citizen involvement can make a big impact on outcomes. Our voices as citizens of Willmar matter in every way, but we must first become informed in order to have the knowledge to make ourselves be heard. We are responsible for making good government. We need to come to the table, not just wonder what we can do. At the end of the day, there are many ways to make Willmar better. We don't need to wait for permission from City Council to pursue that.

This was a great beginning. Citizen involvement is work that never ends and it is our duty and privilege to do it.

QUALITIES OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

The following are the prioritized top four qualities of good government as voted on by the Assembly. These qualities were used to evaluate both current processes in Willmar and alternative options. Below the definition of each quality are ideas about what the City of Willmar might look like if that quality was fully expressed in local government.

1. **Accountability:** Public institutions are required to justify decisions and outcomes to the public.
   - Council members would go into their neighborhoods to formulate quantifiable programs.
   - City employees and council members honestly convey to their constituents the business of the city.
   - Clear, impartial decision making, with reasons why decisions are made. An example: "why are some businesses allowed in the city, but not others?"
   - The public is clearly informed on a regular basis about the city's current "vision," with operational outcomes that are measurable that citizens can judge the results of.
   - Build trust with elected officials, because community would hold them accountable and therefore they'd make honest decisions.

2. **Transparency:** Processes, institutions, and information are accessible to the public, and enough information is provided for the public to understand and monitor them.
   - Increase public awareness by placing information in public, for the community to take some responsibility to find a way to get the information.
   - For city council: used close sessions only in very sensitive situations and be more open (there are laws governing this but may not always be followed); meetings would be livestreamed and people could comment and question as if they were attending, and additional questions would be responded to the next day; condense and summarize meetings so they are easy to read and understand; council meeting minutes would be reformatted in layman's terms and distributed widely in multiple languages, and/or interpreters would be provided at meetings.
   - Social media: learn to use it the right way, with wisdom.

3. **Trust:** All community members trust that public institutions are working in the best interests of the community.
   - The public interest is served, not private or corrupt interests.
   - Honesty and communication earn trust, and having that history will build trust.
   - Workshops should address the issue of trust and how to establish it.
   - Citizens should get to know their city leaders personally (not only through social media).
   - Open relationship between community and council. Council members would be present and active within the community. In turn, community members would feel they can bring issues to the council directly.

4. **Strategic Vision:** Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
   - Intentional recruitment of specific industries.
   - Long range planning for the city's development and growth.
   - Develop and expand based on resource management and meaningful data. Planned wiggle room for long term expansion in growth for the benefit of the community.
   - Decisions would reflect a holistic view of quality of life, including: assistance and accessibility for disabilities, etc.; outlook for new amenities to attract potential residents; a well-kept, attractive looking city; and united, big picture, proactive, and future orientated.
   - Decision-making process includes long-term costs as well as short-term benefits. Documents use "plain language." Staff provide information and research focused on accurately portraying implications of decisions (not just advocate their favorite idea). Be impartial, big picture, and consider costs and benefits.

EVALUATION OF THE CITY OF WILLMAR'S STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

"Structure of Government" refers to how government is organized to represent the community and deliver services. Participants considered what aspects of Willmar's current structure of government contributed to or might limit the expression of the top 4 qualities of good government in Willmar.

Aspects of Willmar's Government Structure that Contribute to Our Top Qualities

- City efforts to inform the public contribute to transparency and accountability. These efforts include:
  - Having the media meet with the city administrator keeps the public informed.
  - Using all media options allows broad access to the citizens.
  - Publicizing meetings and results makes the information easily available to citizens.
  - Holding open meetings disperses information and gives citizens the opportunity to have personal relationships with local officials.
  - Posting meeting minutes, agenda, and broadcasting videos allows the public and individuals who can't attend meetings to stay informed and aware of what is happening.
  - The City Administrator using social media and replying to all emails.

- City Council members having to provide financial disclosures contributes to accountability by showing conflict of interest.

- The Mayor's veto contributes to accountability by requiring an additional vote to pass certain bills.

- Council members and mayor are elected and can be recalled, which contributes to expression of accountability.

- Staggering term elections and having elections every two years contributes to accountability by giving the public a chance to change half the council every two years and keeping the people in positions in check.

- Unifying departments contributes to strategic vision by creating and pooling purchasing power.

Aspects of Willmar's Government Structure that Might Limit Our Top Qualities

- The mayor's veto power may limit accountability and strategic vision by picking and choosing items, overriding a simple majority of the council.

- Meetings that occur during business hours limits accountability by limiting access to elected officials. When community members are excluded or unable to participate, trust and transparency are diminished.

- Past history of confusion regarding practice of open meeting laws may contribute to lack of trust and perceptions of lack of transparency by citizens who feel left out.

- When clear and concise synopses of council meetings are not available, people may be unaware of the decision-making power of the council so accountability may be limited.

- Lack of inclusion of minority groups and unwillingness to keep an open mind limits strategic vision by closing perspectives of others.

- The public records of meetings being in English alone limits transparency by not allowing non-English speakers to understand.

- Apathy or lack of citizen participation and community engagement can limit accountability and trust due to lack of relationship between citizens and officials.

- The lack of term limits can limit the expression of strategic vision by limiting fresh ideas.

- The widespread presence of recording devices and social media limits trust by making people less comfortable and more afraid to speak extemporaneously or commit to an idea.

Proposals for New Electoral Processes, or How Citizens Influence Government Through Voting

Ranked Choice Voting

Summary of Ranked Choice Voting: Ranked Choice Voting (otherwise known as Instant Runoff Voting) is a method of determining the winner of elections. Instead of voting only for a single candidate, as in the widespread "first past the post" method, voters in Ranked Choice Voting elections can rank the candidates in order of preference, often with a limit on the number of candidates to be ranked so voters don't need to rank every candidate. Ballots are initially counted for each voter's top choice. If a candidate secures more than half of these votes, that candidate wins. Otherwise, the candidate in last place is eliminated and removed from consideration. The top remaining choices on all the ballots are then counted again, so that votes for candidates who get eliminated are assigned to that voter's second preference. This process repeats until one candidate is the top remaining choice of the majority of the voters.

Current Voting System in Willmar: Willmar uses the common first-past-the-post system, in which the candidate with the highest number of votes wins the election. This system has both strengths and weaknesses. In this system, the winner of the election is the candidate who receives a plurality of votes (the most votes), although they may not receive the majority of votes (more than 50%).

We believe pursuing Ranked Choice Voting might offer these benefits:
- No issue with feeling like you are wasting your vote.
- Improves trust and accountability by encouraging more people to run for office, which in turn gives more options to voters.
- Produces more accountability because elected official is more prepared to face challenges from diverse perspectives.
- Officials will have more direct and positive engagement with the voters.
- May improve all four qualities by encouraging positive campaigning.
- Improve trust by decreasing negativity and promoting new positive ideas and relationship building with all constituents.
- Encourages more positive campaigning and would be less expensive.
- Will produce shorter, cheaper, and positive elections due to a single vote.
- Creates shorter and less expensive elections.
- Increases accountability and transparency by higher voter turnout and decreases the cost.

However, we believe pursuing Ranked Choice Voting might require addressing these considerations:
- Many more candidates can add complexity to the process of voting and some candidates might be less qualified.
- Voters whose first choice loses might still feel their vote didn't matter or was wasted.
- Need to think about educating the public on the process of voting (it would be a change from the current way we vote).
- There will be a steep learning curve due to an unfamiliar process.
- Need to consider the way we educate the public on a new voting system to prevent confusion.
- Need to consider the potential for confusion by voters.
- We would have to consider educating the voters about the RCV system; for example, it's a system that does not mandate the use of every choice.
- Short term costs of changing election equipment and procedures.
- Equipment cost to start RCV.
- One-time cost of purchasing new equipment.

If we were to pursue Ranked Choice Voting in Willmar, we could:

- Get rid of Primary elections for city positions.
  - 24 of us preferred getting rid of Primary elections. Reasons cited were:
    - There are often few candidates in our Primary elections.
    - Our Primary elections often have low voter turnout.
    - Primaries are often used for party endorsements, but offices in Willmar are nonpartisan, so endorsements are less important.
    - May lead to lower costs.

  - 8 of us preferred keeping Primary elections. Reasons cited were:
    - We have to run a Primary for state and federal offices, so no need to eliminate just for city offices.
    - Since we have to run a Primary election anyway, eliminating it for city offices may not reduce costs.

- Educate voters about Ranked Choice Voting, including by:
  - Creating educational videos about Ranked Choice Voting, including options with different numbers of candidates and poll locations, to share online, on local public TV, and elsewhere.
  - Creating a website, game, or Conversation Café-style meeting so voters can practice Ranked Choice Voting, with incentives to participate.
  - Using multiple outlets to educate voters, including sample ballots in newspapers, flyers, posters, simple images, direct mail, local media, social media, TV ads, and public meetings. Materials should use simple concise language to appeal to individual learning styles.
  - Creating simple guides about Ranked Choice Voting, like an animated video, printed guide, or something else, to make RCV understandable to voters and easy to learn. We could share this guide in a YouTube link on a voter confirmation email, during the voter registration process, and/or along with a voters' voting ballot to ensure all voters have been notified of the changes to the election process.

- Ensure effective administration of the election process, including:
  - Easy to understand ballots with clear instructions to reduce voter error and to ensure accuracy, efficiency, and cost-savings.
  - A system that allows clear expression of voter intent by accurately executing voters' ballots, ensuring security, privacy, and voter confidence, similar to conventional methods.
  - A system with hardware and software that accurately transfers 2nd and 3rd choice votes to the intended candidates.
  - Purchasing voting equipment from the same vendor to maintain accuracy.
  - Making sure that complications related to local adoption of RCV do not disrupt the administration of the rest of the election process, like state and federal races that don't use Ranked Choice Voting.
  - Making sure the election judges are well-trained on the different election styles and how to tabulate votes.
  - Putting up multilingual signs educating the public about who can and who can't vote.
  - Providing as many "practice" voting opportunities as possible to build confidence in the voting process.
  - The most cost effective way to implement RCV.
  - Looking into using existing optical voting machines, by upgrading them for the new ballots to save costs.

- Questions We'd Want Considered about Ranked Choice Voting
    - Why does Willmar have a Primary for city offices that narrows the field down to only two candidates before the General election?
    - What is the opinion of local elected officials about effective implementation of Ranked Choice Voting?
    - What ballot formats could we use? Would we be locked into the least optimal ballot format given current structures?
    - Could we use our current optical scanning equipment for Ranked Choice Voting?
    - Is there a possible scenario in Ranked Choice Voting where a winning candidate may not reach 50%?
    - Might manual tabulation (counting) of votes be feasible in Willmar?
    - Why is it necessary to list the candidates multiple times on a ballot, rather than just having multiple bullets?
    - How might we prevent errors in vote tabulation (counting)?
    - If Ranked Choice Voting lends itself to digital ballots, how could we have a paper backup? Could we have a paper backup?

Vote Total:

12 voted in favor of pursuing the Ranked Choice Voting proposal above.

17 voted in favor of keeping the current system.

At-Large vs. Wards

Summary of At-Large vs. Wards: In municipal elections, members of city council are elected either at-large (representing the whole city) or to serve a specific ward (representing a small part of the city). Cities may have all councilmembers elected at-large, all councilmembers elected to represent wards, or a mix of at-large and ward-based seats.

Current System in Willmar: Willmar has eight Councilmembers, two from each ward. The City of Willmar is divided into four wards. Each Councilmember represents about 4,890 people.

If we kept the ward system, some benefits to the city might include:
- Improved accountability by having dedicated council members that represent the specific individuals of that community.
- Improved accountability and trust by providing strong representation for the people and voicing their concerns, which would help keep the system accountable.
- Improved accountability and trust by providing accessibility and communication to/with council members.
- Help create diversity and better representation of smaller sections of the city and promotes transparency.
- Better representation leading to more accountability.
- Equity, especially for minorities.

If we adopted a combined system (both at-large and wards), some benefits to the city might include:
- Take the best of both. Strategic vision benefits of at-large and the representation of Wards.
- Improved accountability by reducing "vote trading" while keeping most council members focused on their wards.

If we adopted an at-large system, some benefits to the city might include:
- Better big picture planning and improved strategic vision.
- Improved strategic vision by officials looking at the needs of the entire city.
- Help cover issues of the entire community.

If we kept the ward system, we would need to consider:
- The ward system could continue to encourage carpet bagging [candidates moving from ward to ward to get elected] and insider dealing.
- Vote trading
- Redrawing boundaries/redistricting every 10 years (time and cost)
- The potential for becoming ward-centric.
- Council members focusing on their ward, and limit looking at city as a whole, strategic vision

If we adopted a combined system (both at-large and wards), we would need to consider:
- Changing the existing charter.

If we adopted the at-large system or a combined system, we would need to consider:
- That council members would have a broader focus which may result in the weakening of representation of local communities.

If we adopted an at-large system, we would need to consider:
- That smaller groups could lack representation.
- Larger areas to represent (unpersonal level).
- Costs.
- Decreasing likelihood that citizens get to know his/her council member personally (limiting accountability and trust).

We considered and ranked four options (see point totals) related to At-Large vs. Wards: Increasing the Number of Wards, a Mixed System, an At-Large system, and Keeping the Current System.

Increasing the Number of Wards (57pts)

*Reasons **for** increasing the number of wards:*
- Gives the potential for minorities to have more representation if wards are drawn so that minority neighborhoods aren't split into separate wards.
- Makes campaigns less time consuming and less complicated because candidates have a smaller area to cover.

*Reasons **against** increasing the number of wards:*
- The ward system could be more easily manipulated to prevent minority representation, by splitting minority neighborhoods into two wards, so that minority populations don't have a majority in either ward.
- Reduces residents' access to the council by cutting their representation from 2 council members to 1.
- Smaller pool of potential candidates makes it harder to find someone to run.

Mixed System (88pts)

*Reasons **for** a mixed system:*
- Can draw on talented candidates from the community as a whole.
- Voter has a greater choice for whom to vote because voters are choosing both a ward council member and at-large council members.
- A citizen has more council members.

*Reasons **against** a mixed system:*
- It could be difficult to find the appropriate balance of ward vs at-large representation in a mixed system.
- There is an implied difference between at-large and ward council members because of the amount of time and money to campaign and the perceived responsibility of the office.
- Under a system with 4 wards and 4 at-large council members, it would be more difficult to establish a coalition for a ward because there would be only a single person representing that ward.
- All at-large members could come from a concentrated area.

At-Large System (44 pts)

*Reasons **for** an at-large system:*
- Greater pool of talent for candidates and possibly more willing candidates to enter the system.
- More representatives for the voters (8 for each).
- Representatives would focus on large picture issues and away from manipulation of geographical concerns.
- Increased ability to change half the council every election cycle (every 2 years).

*Reasons **against** an at-large system:*
- Campaign expenses and time can be too much for each candidate.
- Some representatives may be less well known by all the voters.
- Representatives may be held less accountable.
- Minority communities may be underrepresented on the council.

Current System in Willmar (92pts)
- Willmar has 4 wards, with 2 council members from each ward, for a total of 8 council members.

- Questions We'd Want Considered about At-Large vs. Wards:
  - If a citizen lives outside of wards, how do they relate to the electoral system in terms of representatives, taxes, etc.?
  - How would a mixed system impact the ballot and voting process?
  - How many wards or at-large council members would we have in a different system?
  - If a change to the system was made, how would we minimize disruption?
  - If we increased the number of wards, who would decide on the new boundaries?
  - If wards have worked well so far, what might have to happen to make people more ward-focused?
  - What would it take to add 2 at-large council members to the existing system?

Proposals for Public Participation, or how citizens influence the quality of government by acting in the community and with government.

Better Public Meetings

Summary of Better Public Meetings: Public meetings are a common feature of local government, and sometimes required by state and federal law. "Better Public Meetings" refers to the concept of improving face-to-face meetings of community members and public officials to encourage more productive dialogue and decision-making among diverse groups of a community. There are a variety of public meeting formats that move beyond the common townhall-style meeting where individual community members wait to speak for a few minutes at a microphone without engaging in conversation with others.

Current Status of Public Meetings in Willmar: Community members can speak during open comment periods at City Council meetings and can attend public meetings or town halls, which are often focused on a particular topic. Social/political groups and clubs can also invite the Mayor or another elected official to a meeting to provide information and answer questions.

We believe pursuing Better Public Meetings might offer these benefits:

- Improving Top Qualities: Improve trust and strategic vision by providing more actionable input to city staff. Improve trust, transparency, accountability, and strategic vision by educating and empowering citizens by participating. Help trust, accountability, and strategic vision of a community by engaging a more diverse group of citizens. Promote trust and transparency by creating a less intimidating environment that would all voices to the table. Improve all qualities by giving meetings a more focused agenda and an opportunity for more people to participate. Improve strategic vision by having a template that would keep people focused on the issues at hand. Lends to trust in the process because more people feel their voices have been heard.

- More Opportunities to Engage: Offer opportunities to engage and offer input despite schedules or learning and communication styles, and embracing technology. Could include a defined process that doesn't require attendance at a meeting to engage the public. Mechanisms to offer input on their own time and at own pace improves trust, etc.

- Better Engagement Environment: Help minimize the chaos and develop enhanced collaboration through skilled facilitation. Create an environment that allows citizens to be comfortable to express their opinions and more fully understand issues.

However, we believe pursuing Better Public Meetings might require addressing these considerations:

- Facilitators: Time and cost to train dedicated facilitators. Finding really good facilitators to help ensure a successful outcome. Need for volunteers to facilitate a new form of meeting style.

- Resources: The time to plan the meetings would increase cost. The logistics of hosting the meetings as well as cost, time, and effort. Extra time, staff, and patience. Added time and cost to run these meetings and find appropriate venues. The cost that would be added as well as the time. The expense (time + money, etc.) of a longer, more complicated process.

- Compliance: Be aware of compliance considerations with open meeting and open record laws.

- Public Education: Having to raise awareness (educate the public) about the new process. People might still be hesitant at first. Would people actually show up?

- Engagement Environment: Potential for strong personalities to affect the outcome of the meetings. Need to consider how the meetings are kept under control (no fights). People may not feel that they have had an opportunity to full vent their passions under a better public meeting. Consider the learning process for participants to facilitate a safe and civil discussion. People may be too hostile or entrenched in their positions. It is harder to anticipate what will be said, or control what will be accomplished. This could become an obstacle to getting things done in a timely way. Have to consider facts vs. opinion (focus on issues, not people).

If we were to pursue Better Public Meetings in Willmar, we could:

- Select a test case or project to demonstrate the efficacy of the better public meeting approach.

- Investigate training and certification opportunities (e.g. for facilitation) for city staff to enable them to properly implement and identify when better public meetings are appropriate, and what type.

- Hire an experienced facilitator that would be able to help the council decide which process would work best for Willmar's community issues.

- Create an environment that allows citizens to be comfortable expressing their opinions and more fully understand the issues.

- Encourage better public meetings, especially during the beginning stages of an idea or project. For example, using conversation cafes. [Definition of Conversation Café available here: *goo.gl/sbGupF*]
  - Make sure meetings coordinate with open meetings laws.
  - Invite all residents to participate.
  - Could be with a single large group or multiple small groups.

- Conduct a public survey to allow participants to be involved in planning, decision making, and solutions.

- Inform the public about upcoming meetings or topics.
  - Meeting organizers and Councilmembers would actively recruit people to participate.

- For example: going door-to-door, focusing on an engaging/important issue that's up for consideration, use flyers, recruit core group of volunteers to invite friends and neighbors, incentivize attendance (for example, with food), have someone that speaks the languages that members of the community speak, and identify community leaders to improve scope of outreach.

- Let the public know they are important participants in the process and their ideas matter.
  - Publicize the agenda and time through mailings, media, and/or social media to engage a broad group of people.

Vote Total:

30 voted in favor of pursuing the above Better Public Meetings proposal.

2 voted in favor of keeping the current system.

Digital Public Engagement

Summary of Digital Public Engagement: Digital public engagement can take many forms, but is intended to support participation in government decisions or activities via the internet and/or digital tools. Digital public engagement provides opportunities for community members who can't attend public meetings or feel less comfortable reaching out directly to elected officials to offer their input and recommendations, have conversations with other community members, or vote directly on public decisions.

Current Status of Digital Public Engagement in Willmar: Willmar residents can engage digitally through contacting the City on social media, the contact form on the City's website, or emailing staff or elected officials directly.

We believe pursuing Digital Public Engagement might offer these benefits:

- Provides elected officials with information that is improved in both quality and quantity, resulting in better decisions.
- Improve strategic vision by providing public officials the information they need to make informed decisions.
- Improve transparency by providing a wide range of easy and efficient tools that would make the public engaged and aware of issues.
- Improve strategic vision by targeting a broader demographic, including youth, and capturing their input.
- Improve trust, strategic vision, and transparency by creating actionable input from broad public participation.
- Increase accessibility and participation.
- Expanding the ways people can engage and participate broadens the demographics that are able to offer input for consideration, in addition to just meetings. This improves transparency.
- Improve trust, accountability, and strategic vision by saving time and giving the public broader ways of being involved.

However, we believe pursuing Digital Public Engagement might require addressing these considerations:

- Need to think about educating the public about the tools and how to use them to develop a clear strategic vision.
- Consider news ways of motivating the public to use new digital mediums.
- Have to educate how to use the tools and make it accessible to citizens.
- Consider finding a balance between digital and traditional engagement to maximize community involvement.
- Not everyone is online. We would still need face to face options for engagement.
- Need to consider the lack of internet or skills to use the internet among community members.
- Need to consider crafting the questions to relay the true response of the people.
- Have to have a plan for knowing what to do with the results and how to use the information.
- Need to think about complexity of the issues.
- Need to consider ways to reduce "trolling" and un-needed conflicts.
- There would be a cost involved in hiring the correct experts to create the tools, promote them to the public, and analyze the data.
- Finding the right people to manage and maintain the data from the website.
- Cost of design and analysis of the data.
- Cost of implementing the technology and training staff.

If we were to pursue Digital Public Engagement in Willmar, we could:

- Clearly define our goals to achieve a digital public engagement platform that would meet the needs of the community within the available budget.
    o Investigate list of various costs, and leave open room to expand as things become more feasible.
    o Need sufficient resources and staff to manage the input and information, including protocols to screen for malicious activity.
    o Maintain the digital tools for security and backups.
    o Use volunteers to create or manage the digital engagement tool in order to minimize costs.

- Use existing digital platforms (like the City website) and traditional engagement methods to create opportunities for residents to contribute their opinions and learn about the business of the city.
    o A digital platform would allow many people to participate that normally would not, for example, many people have phones with internet.
    o This would supplement, not replace, traditional methods.
    o Redesign the existing website to be fun, eye-catching, interactive, relatable, and easy to understand.
    o Making the business of the city less meeting-centric.

- Provide incentives for digital participation.

- Educate the public on how to use digital tools to enhance participation.

- Conduct outreach to inform people about opportunities to participate.

- Solicit input via surveys.

- Have a printed publicized directory to provide email addresses and contact information of public officials and department heads.

Vote Total:
26 voted in favor of pursuing the Digital Public Engagement proposal.
5 voted in favor of keeping the current system.

Of these four topics (Better Public Meetings, Digital Public Engagement, Ranked Choice Voting, and At-Large vs. Wards), we'd like to see them discussed more in Willmar in the following order:

1. Better Public Meetings (102pts)
2. Digital Public Engagement (79pts)
3. At-Large vs. Wards (58pts)
4. Ranked Choice Voting (51pts)

WEEKEND 1, 2 AND 3 - SATISFACTION WITH WILLMAR GOVERNMENT

Throughout the Willmar Community Assembly, participants rated their satisfaction with the City of Willmar government relative to the current Structure of Government, Electoral Processes, and Public Participation Processes. The votes measured satisfaction overall and relative to their top 4 qualities of good government. The votes below indicated the weighted average of the group, where 1 is highly dissatisfied, 3 is in the middle, and 5 is highly satisfied.

	Structure of Government	**Electoral Processes**	**Public Participation Processes**
Weekend 1	Overall – 3.29 Accountability – 3.13 Transparency – 2.77 Trust – 2.94 Strategic Vision – 3.26	Overall – 3.32 Accountability – 2.97 Transparency – 2.87 Trust – 2.97 Strategic Vision – 2.94	Overall – 3.1 Accountability – 2.94 Transparency – 2.77 Trust – 2.77 Strategic Vision – 3.03
Weekend 2	N/A	Overall – 3.31 Accountability – 3.08 Transparency – 3.04 Trust – 2.92 Strategic Vision – 2.85	Overall – 2.94 Accountability – 2.84 Transparency – 2.68 Trust – 2.77 Strategic Vision – 2.77
Weekend 3	Overall – 3.34 Accountability – 3.38 Transparency – 3.00 Trust – 3.14 Strategic Vision – 3.14	Overall – 3.48 Accountability – 3.48 Transparency – 3.34 Trust – 3.41 Strategic Vision – 3.28	Overall – 2.70 Accountability – 2.89 Transparency – 2.96 Trust – 2.89 Strategic Vision – 2.78

Participant Demographic Information

Demographic[1]	Willmar Percentage	Ideal # of Participants	Actual # of Participants
Gender			
Female	49.9%	16	17
Male	50.1%	16	15
Ethnicity			
White/European-American	71%	23	25
Hispanic/Latino	21%	6-7	4
Black/African-American	6%	1-2	2
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.4%	0-1	0
Asian	-	0	0
Multiracial	1.5%	0-1	1
Party Affiliation[2]			
Democrat	36%	11-12	10
No Party, Other	33%	10-11	10
Republican	30%	9-10	12
Age			
18-39	41%	13	13
40-64	38%	12	10
65 & over	21%	7	9
Education			
Less than High School	7%	2	1
High School-GED	37%	12	6
Some College or Associate's degree	36%	12	15
Bachelor's degree	13%	4	7
Graduate degree	7%	2	3
Annual Household Income			
Less than $10,000	11%	3-4	3
$10,000 to 14,999	7%	2	1
$15,000-$24,999	13%	4	3
$25,000-$34,999	10%	3	2
$35,000-$49,999	17%	5-6	7
$50,000-$74,999	19%	6	5
$75,000-$99,999	12%	3-4	3
$100,000+	12%	3-4	3
Prefer Not to Answer	-	-	5
Total Number of Participants	100%	32	32

[1] All statistics compiled from American Community Survey results unless otherwise noted
[2] Extrapolated from recent election results