



OFFICE OF CITY AUDITOR
POLICY AND RESEARCH DIVISION

OPERATIONS MANUAL

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To ensure we can be as responsive as possible, an inbox monitored by division staff is available at PolicyResearch@minneapolismn.gov.

MISSION AND FUNCTION

POLICY AND RESEARCH DIVISION MISSION

To provide clear, objective, nonpartisan research and analysis in support of effective, informed, and evidence-based legislative policy making.

ABOUT POLICY AND RESEARCH

Established in 2023 as a division within the Office of City Auditor, the Policy and Research team is a nonpartisan entity that provides research and analysis services to council members and committees at the discretion of the City's [Audit Committee](#).

Policy and Research (PAR) staff support legislative decision making throughout each stage of the policy process through consultation services, independent research and analysis that produces preliminary assessments, policy briefings, or formal reports on requested areas of focus. PAR may also be asked to review legislative items scheduled for consideration by the City Council to provide added context or information on any potential impact(s).

Additionally, PAR staff are assigned as a liaison for each established committee to participate in the agenda setting process and, as appropriate, meetings of each body. PAR staff may also provide specific support services to individual council offices, policy working groups or task forces, and other efforts focused on the coordinated discussion or dissemination of information on a specific policy area.

PROCESS CONTROLS AND TRANSPARENCY

Policy and Research is structured to operate as an independent and non-partisan entity to conduct its research and reporting. This structure serves to mitigate the potential of research or findings being improperly influenced by other parties and requires multiple controls that are implemented at various stages of a project.

PAR research is centered around the objective of providing fact-based information. In support of this objective, multiple controls have been implemented during the research and reporting process including:

- 1) All information contained within a report will include the source or evidence in support through citations or direct reference(s).
- 2) During review of the draft report, and based on available capacity, additional staff may be asked to conduct the following reviews:
 - a. Validation of relevant information, data, sources, and evidence.
 - b. Review of content to identify areas that could benefit from additional context or materials to provide increased clarity to the reader.

PAR research may provide a comparison of specific policies or programs. In some cases, review of the outcomes or impacts may provide a clear “best practice,” PAR reports will abstain from providing ANY official recommendation(s) in its materials. The extent of PAR support of the legislative decision-making process consists of providing research on data-based or real-world examples and identifying potential questions or next steps based on that research.

Communications with the requestor(s) are a necessary part of the service request process. However, when a request is reviewed by a council committee for approval, it becomes a request from that body as a whole. Once approved, any necessary communication related to a specific request becomes more restricted and, with few exceptions, will be shared with all members. Potential exceptions may include:

- 1) PAR staff reaching out during the interview process to verify contact information a specific office indicated they could provide, or the potential outreach to a council member on a topic where they may have first-hand knowledge (either from their time as an elected official or from a previous role) that would benefit the information gathering process.
- 2) PAR staff providing information necessary to facilitate committee work planning, including the agenda setting process (Ex. project timelines, identifying related/overlapping scopes of work in reports, determining appropriate committee for specific requests).

Once work has commenced on an approved request, it is considered a deliberative work product and the distribution of draft materials is extremely limited. While PAR staff may provide updates on the progress of a report, or highlight general areas of focus or review, draft copies of a report will only be shared under the following circumstances:

- 1) Sharing of relevant sections with subject matter experts to confirm accuracy or provide additional context.
- 2) Sharing of relevant sections with appropriate parties to confirm that any input provided has been reflected correctly.
- 3) Sharing with the City Attorney for review of any legal components within, or potentially resulting from, the report.

Once a report has been completed, it will be shared with relevant parties and be considered a public document. Upon completion of any review (memo, briefing, report, etc.), PAR will also publish the material(s) to the [Policy and Research Library](#) where it shall be available to the public.

While not charged with the provision of auditing services, Policy and Research processes and standards are informed by the Government Accountability Office’s [“Yellow Book: Government Auditing Standards”](#) whenever possible.

POLICY AND RESEARCH SERVICES

CONSULTATION(S)

- A discussion between PAR and council offices, intended to initiate PAR services or explore the potential for PAR support.
- May be requested by an individual council member.
- A necessary step to discuss the nature, scope, and focus of possible PAR services.
- Should be requested once a council member has arrived at the stage of wanting to explore an issue in support of potential legislation.
- Council offices should use these meetings to explain the problem they are attempting to solve, address, or understand.
- PAR assistance may include the determination of a project's scope and timeline, as well as drafting any motion necessary to initiative services.
- Consultations or requests for technical assistance can occur prior to crafting legislation or at various stages in the legislative process, unless a research report has already been initiated on the topic.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

- Following a consultation, as relevant, PAR will draft a "preliminary assessment" memo elaborating on the potential scope, nature, and focus of PAR services – to be confirmed or amended by the requesting council member office(s).
- This preliminary assessment reflects initial PAR research (potentially including conversations from relevant city staff) and may pose additional questions for clarification from the requestor(s).
- This memo is intended to provide additional clarity and agreement on PAR services before any significant work is undertaken.

POLICY BRIEFING(S)

- A policy briefing may be requested by an individual council member or committee.
- Intended to provide information as the potential first step towards legislation, to address general questions, or help address a specific issue raised by a council member.
- Analysis provides preliminary research or estimates to council offices on an identified subject of policy and may include an initial assessment of comparative data, landscape of comparative experiences, potential barriers, and potential options for city action.

ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH REPORT(S)

- Must be initiated by a majority vote of the City Council or, if delegated authority, standing committee.
- May cover topics being brought forward to, or reviewed by, the City Council.
- May be accompanied by public presentations and data visualizations.

- Reports may include some combination of the following types of content:
 - *Feasibility analysis*
 - Analysis of the feasibility of realizing a specific policy or program goal.
 - Opportunities, challenges, and potential barriers to realizing a specific policy or program goal.
 - May include estimate of required resources to implement specific policy/program.
 - *For example: Identifying barriers/challenges to acting on eviction prevention.*
 - *Landscape/comparative analysis*
 - Overview of similar policies/programs in other localities.
 - Applicable lessons learned and/or good practices.
 - May be used to provide additional context or benchmarking to an existing proposal, presentation, or report.
 - *For example: Comparing MPD organization, staffing, and capacity to comparable police departments.*
 - *Case study*
 - Assessment of the effectiveness, impacts, and lessons from one or two comparable policies/programs.
 - Comparison to existing Minneapolis policies/programs.
 - *For example: Comparing and contrasting the effectiveness and results of Saint Paul and Minneapolis' approaches to auto theft.*
 - *Joint report*
 - Stems from assessment of content ownership.
 - Requires direct substantial contribution of executive branch staff charged with related scopes of responsibility.
 - *For example: CPED and Regulatory Services providing expert input, advice, and feasibility analysis on potential changes in housing policy.*

FOCUSED PRESENTATION

- Intended to provide additional context to an existing proposal, presentation, or report.
- Provides perspective that may not be evident from the existing materials.
- Can include analysis of relevant data and case examples.
- *NOTE: In the absence of a requested presentation for a final report provided to City Council, this service could be requested upon receipt and review of the final report.*

REPORT ADDENDUMS

- Intended to provide additional context to an existing proposal, presentation, or report.
- Provides perspective that may not be evident from the existing materials.
- Can include analysis of relevant data and case examples.

POLICY AND RESEARCH OPERATING PROCEDURES

Policy and Research requests are primarily received through an electronic request form that is provided to council offices. This allows requests to be automatically entered into a request management database that is used by PAR staff and provides real-time updates to PAR's public data dashboards.

Once a request has been received, it will be reviewed by PAR staff to assess a list of components that will inform the consultation process. In the event a council member or committee request a Policy Briefing and has provided enough information for staff to have a clear understanding for what will be needed, a consultation may not be needed. For all other requests, the consultation will be informed by PAR's request intake assessment of the following factors:

- Scope Authority or Jurisdiction
 - Is the request within the authorized scope and functions of PAR?
- Project Timeline(s)
 - Is the timeline for the request being driven, or impacted, by external events or factors?
- Staff Capacity
 - What is the current allocation of PAR resources? Are there opportunities to utilize external vendors or parties? What additional groups or resources within the City, or through partnerships, will be needed to support this request?
- Scope and Potential Components
 - Often directly impacted by the desired timeline and staff capacity, what is the range and depth of research and analysis that PAR may support on this subject?
- Fit to Purpose and Needs Assessment
 - Is it necessary that any requested analysis is conducted by PAR as an independent and non-partisan entity? If not, could this be addressed through another channel (i.e., a Legislative Directive to the Administration, internal council office analysis, etc.)?

PAR REQUEST INTAKE AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1) Request Review Process

- a. Upon receipt of a request, PAR staff will review the request to determine the service requested and if any additional information is needed.
- b. If a policy briefing is requested, and adequate information has been provided to begin work, PAR staff will begin work as capacity allows.
- c. If a research report has been requested, or additional information is needed for a policy briefing, PAR staff will schedule a consultation with the requestor(s) to discuss the scope, objectives, and other relevant components of the request.

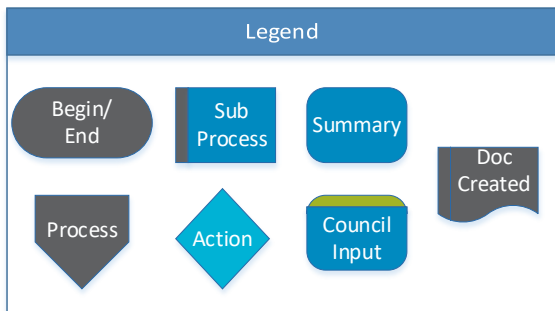
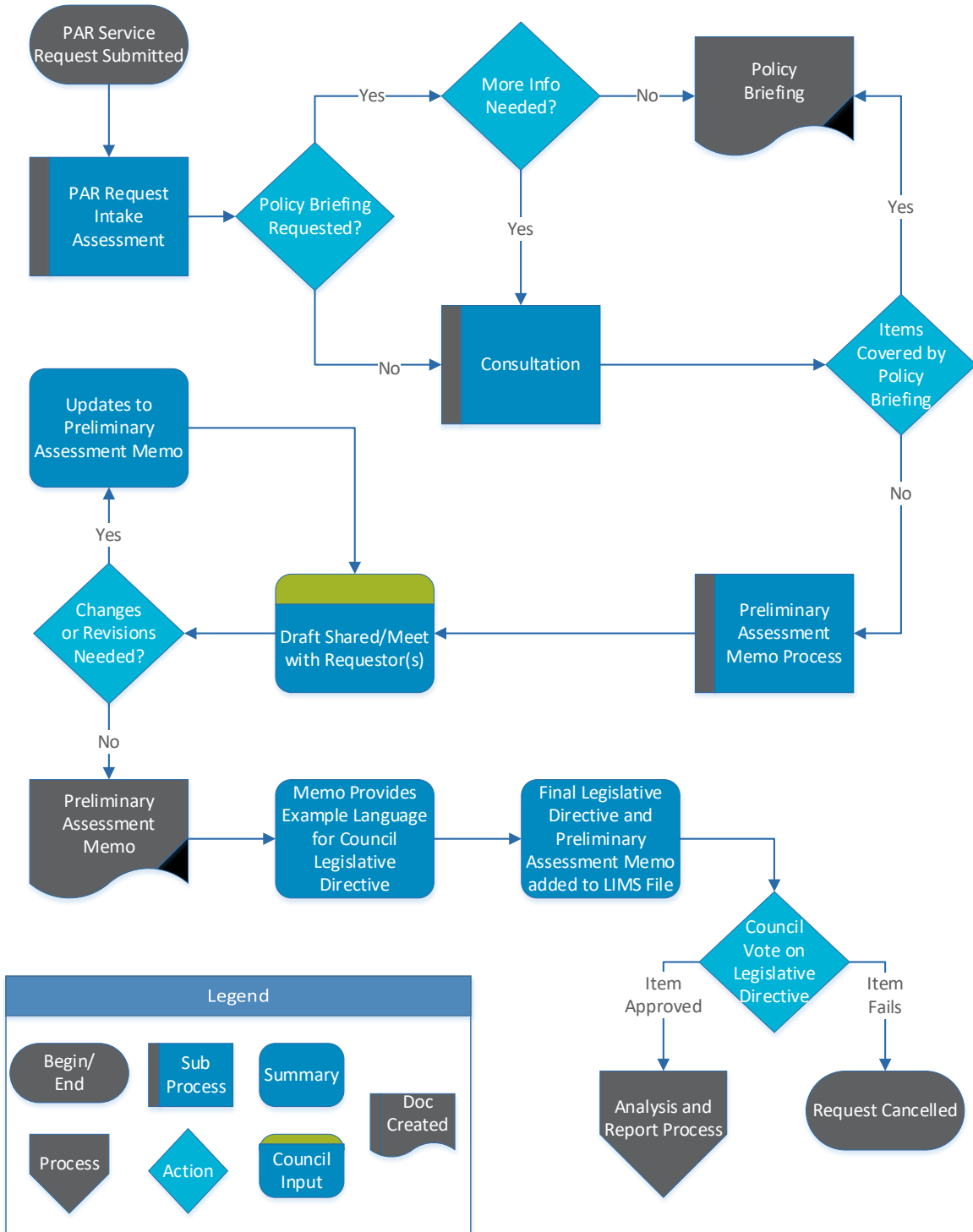
2) Preliminary Assessment

- a. At the completion of the consultation process, PAR staff will draft a "Preliminary Assessment Memo."
- b. The memo is intended to provide an overview of the subject matter being requested and the potential research objectives, report components, and challenges or barriers that have been identified.
- c. The initial draft of the preliminary assessment is shared with the requestor(s) and there is an opportunity for final input or edits to ensure that everything is reflected correctly.
- d. Once completed, the final preliminary assessment memo is uploaded into LIMS to be attached to the request file to provide additional information on the request and the potential research and analysis that will be conducted.
- e. In the event Policy and Research staff believe that new information or data require a significant deviation from this preliminary assessment, a revised assessment will be prepared and shared with the appropriate committee for a determination on how to proceed.

3) Council Vote

- a. Once the request has been added to the agenda for the appropriate council committee, members can review the request language and preliminary assessment to determine if there are any questions or potential modifications to the scope.
- b. At the conclusion of any discussion on the request, members will vote on approval.
- c. If the request is approved, PAR will add the request to its workplan and begin the research process accordingly. If the request is not approved, PAR will change the request status to "Cancelled" in the PAR request status dashboard.

Policy and Research Request Review Process



PAR RESEARCH AND REPORTING PROCESS

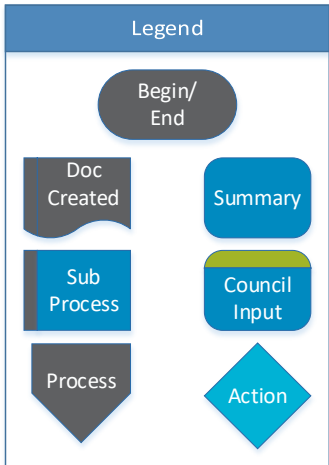
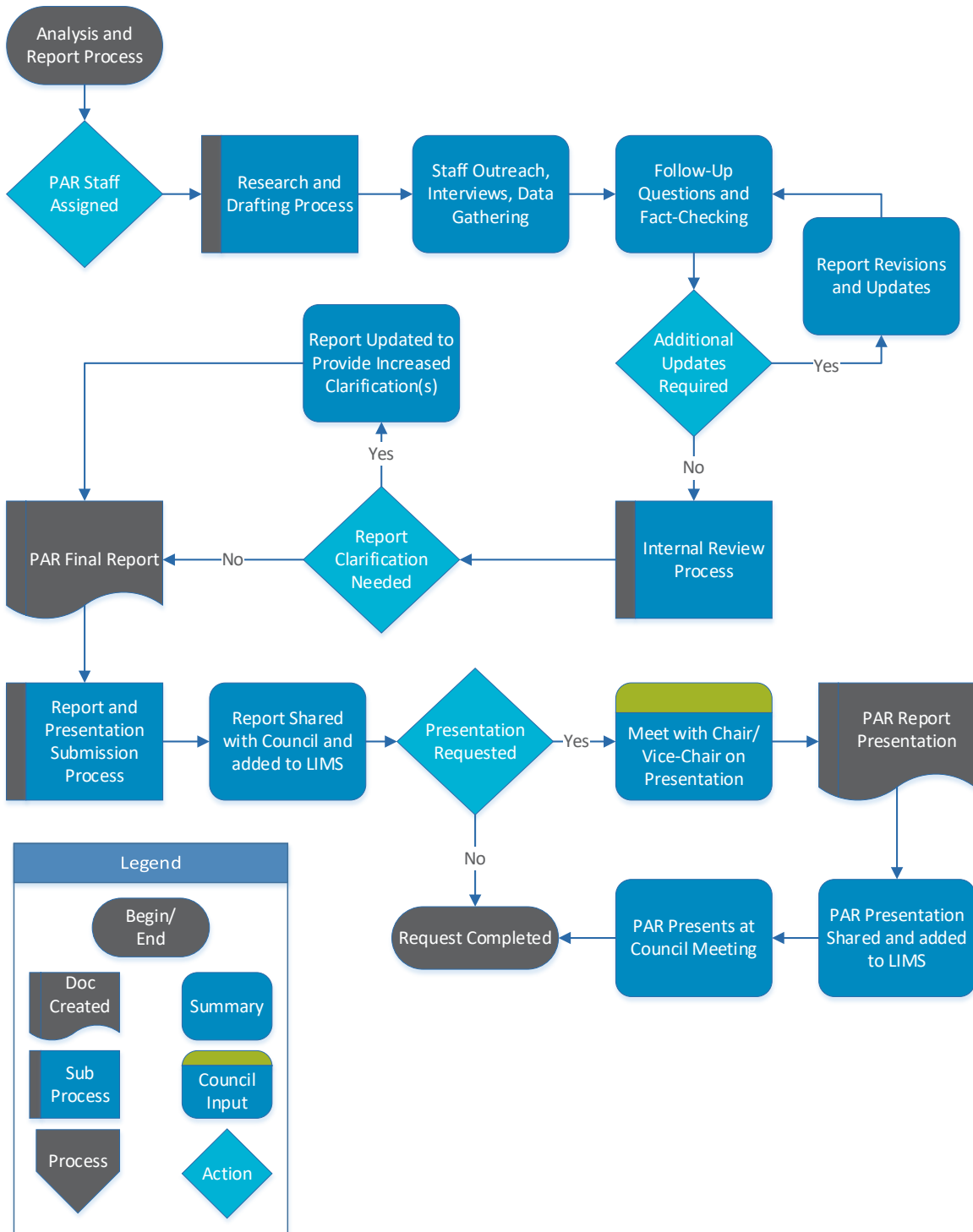
- 1) Research and Drafting Process
 - a. Building from the preliminary assessment, PAR staff will begin by determining what potential resources and information are available on the specific request topic.
 - b. Based on project resources and timelines, research types may include review of available reports or materials, interviews with subject matter experts (internal and external), data collection and analysis, and site visits.
 - c. Once an initial draft has been completed, PAR will perform a follow-up with the appropriate parties on any items that require clarification or to confirm that information provided has been reflected correctly.

- 2) Internal Review Process
 - a. After completion of a final draft, PAR will conduct an internal review that is intended to identify any areas that may benefit from additional information or clarification.
 - b. Based on available capacity, the internal review process requires one or two staff members to review completed draft reports for content and clarity.
 - c. Any modifications or recommendations made by reviewers will be shared with the author to be incorporated in the final version as necessary.
 - d. To ensure the review process is as objective and effective as possible, review staff should not have contributed any substantive work or material(s) to the draft report in question.
 - e. In addition to the tracking of request timelines and assigned analyst(s), staff assigned for internal review are also documented by PAR to ensure a complete and transparent record.

- 3) Report Presentation and Submission
 - a. The final report will be uploaded to LIMS and shared with council members.
 - b. If a presentation was requested, PAR staff will meet with the Chair and Vice-Chair to determine the desired scope of the presentation.
 - c. Once the presentation has been completed, it will be uploaded into LIMS and presented at the scheduled council meeting.

- 4) Post-Submission
 - a. Following the completion, submission, and presentation (if necessary), PAR staff remain available for any potential follow-up items related to the subject matter including:
 - i. Outstanding questions or clarification requests on specific items from a report.
 - ii. Consultations on potential supplemental or breakout research request.
 - iii. Potential staff support on a related working group, task force, or other efforts relating to the subject matter of a specific report.
 - b. If no further support is required, PAR staff will consider the item closed and transition to a subsequent project.

Policy and Research Analysis and Report Process



GOVERNANCE

The Policy and Research Division exists as a division under the Office of City Auditor and resultingly is responsible to the City's Audit Committee. The ability for PAR to receive project requests from the City Council exists as granted by the Audit Committee and in accordance with PAR's established operating procedures as outlined in this document.

Should a request create a potential challenge or conflict with PAR's established operating procedures or independence, the matter will be raised to the Policy and Research Director. Further, if the PAR Director is unable to find a resolution to the situation that resolves the issue in a satisfactory manner, it shall then be brought to the attention of the City Auditor and reported to the Audit Committee.

It is the authority of the Audit Committee to review and deliberate on the reported potential conflict or challenge so that it may provide a resolution to the City Auditor that disposes the issue (Ex. proposed modification of a request, dismissal of a request, denial of a potential conflict, or other authorized actions).

CITY ORDINANCE

The Policy and Research Division function is codified in City Ordinance, Chapter 8, section 8.130.

8.130 Office of the City Auditor

- (a) *Established.* The office of city auditor is established as an office within the legislative department and shall be supervised, controlled, and directed by the city auditor. The office of city auditor shall provide independent, objective assurance, and consulting services to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the city's operations.
- (b) *City auditor.* The city auditor shall be appointed to a four-year term by an independent audit committee established by the city council as provided by city charter. The city auditor shall have the necessary professional qualifications to perform the duties of the office and shall be licensed as a certified public accountant or a certified internal auditor and be knowledgeable in financial and performance auditing, public administration, and public financial and fiscal practices. The city auditor serves in the unclassified service of the city and shall continue in office until a successor has been appointed and qualified. The city auditor may only be removed for cause during their appointed term. The city auditor shall have and perform the duties prescribed by city charter, resolution, policy, or by applicable law as well as such further or additional duties as may from time to time be prescribed by the audit committee and shall be responsible to the audit committee for the due and faithful performance of all matters assigned to the office of city auditor.
- (c) *Duties.* Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, it shall be the duty and obligation of the city auditor to:

- (1) Plan, direct, organize, and supervise the work of the office, its divisions, staff, and any contractors, vendors, and others engaged in the work of the office all of which the city auditor shall hold final responsibility.
 - (2) Plan, organize, and conduct examinations of city operations to identify opportunities to reduce costs, to increase efficiency, quality, and effectiveness, and to improve the management of city policies, functions, services, and programs.
 - (3) Prepare and submit to the audit committee an annual enterprise risk assessment and rolling audit plan which shall identify known and anticipated enterprise risks and specify the audits, reviews, and other work to be conducted by the office. As part of the rolling audit plan, the city auditor shall identify the department, policy, function, service, or program to be audited or reviewed, the anticipated timeline to complete the audit or review, and the objectives to be addressed. Once approved by the audit committee, the city auditor shall be responsible for managing performance against the plan and for submitting periodic reports on the accomplishment of the work contained therein.
 - (4) As authorized by the audit committee, and when directed by the city council, to provide professional research, policy and fiscal analysis, and evaluatory services to ensure accurate, independent, and unbiased information to support legislative, policymaking, and oversight functions.
 - (5) Perform such other duties as may be required by the audit committee, or which may be prescribed by the city charter, ordinance, policy, or other applicable law.
- (d) *Composition.* The city auditor, subject to civil service rules and within the appropriations provided by city council, shall appoint and remove all assistants and staff as may be required to perform the work of the office. The city council must provide for the office's staff and other resources that the city auditor needs for the effective performance of assigned duties. The office of city auditor shall encompass three (3) divisions:
- (1) *Audit.* The audit division provides risk-based and objective auditing, advice, and insight to the audit committee, city council, and city administration through comprehensive enterprise audit and consultative services. The division has investigative powers to investigate allegations of fraud, waste, and abuse whether reported or discovered during its normal duties. The audit division shall be led by the internal audit director, who shall be appointed by the city auditor and confirmed by formal vote of the audit committee and thereafter shall serve under the supervision and direction of the city auditor. The director and staff of the audit division shall discharge the duties prescribed by city charter, ordinance, resolution, policy, or other applicable law or which may be required by the city council or city auditor. All audit work conducted by the office of city auditor shall be guided by the International Professional Practices Framework established by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and such other standards set by other bodies that apply to internal audit practices of local governments to conduct the auditor's work and be independent as defined by the IIA. Audits conducted by the office of city auditor shall conform to the reporting standards for audits prescribed by the International Professional Practices Framework.
 - (2) *Policy and research.* The policy and research division provides professional, nonpartisan research, analysis, evaluation, and consulting services to the city council and its committees in support of legislative and policymaking functions. The head of the division shall be a director who shall be appointed by the city auditor and serve under the supervision and

direction of the city auditor. The director and staff of the policy and research division shall discharge the duties prescribed by city charter, ordinance, resolution, policy, or other applicable law or which may be required by the city council or city auditor.

(3) *Oversight and evaluation.* The oversight and evaluation division provides professional, nonpartisan analysis, evaluation, and consulting services to the city council and its committees in support of oversight and evaluation functions. The head of the division shall be a director who shall be appointed by the city auditor and serve under the supervision and direction of the city auditor. The director and staff of the oversight and evaluation division shall discharge the duties prescribed by city charter, ordinance, resolution, policy, or other applicable law or which may be required by the city council or city auditor.

(e) *Access to information.* The city auditor and the office of city auditor, including all divisions, shall have free, full, and unrestricted access to information necessary to perform authorized work, which shall include but not be limited to any data, files, records, books, and other materials made or produced, accepted or received, maintained, or otherwise controlled by the city and any of its officers, officials, departments, boards or commissions, or agencies.

(f) *Independence.* The city auditor shall organize the auditor's office to operate independently and free from interference or undue influence which might adversely affect the independent and objective judgement of the city auditor and the city auditor's staff or which might adversely affect the capacity of the office to provide non-partisan research and evaluations to the audit committee and city council. Challenges to the independence of the office of city auditor, whether real or perceived, shall be reported to the audit committee by the city auditor.

(g) *Deputies.* To ensure continuity in the office of the city auditor, the city auditor may, within appropriations provided, appoint, direct, and supervise one (1) or more deputies to have and perform such duties as may be assigned from time to time by the city auditor to facilitate the effective and efficient service provisions of the office of city auditor.

(h) *Temporary vacancy.* In the temporary absence or disability of the city auditor, a deputy city auditor shall assume and perform the duties of that position. The city auditor shall designate in writing filed with the chair of the audit committee and city clerk the order in which the deputies shall assume the position of city auditor. In the event the city auditor is absent, disabled, or otherwise unavailable to perform the duties assigned, then the deputy city auditor shall be fully authorized to act on behalf of the city auditor and to perform all duties of that office as needed.

8.140. - Audit committee.

(a) To ensure the independence of the audit function, the city council shall establish an audit committee which is responsible for providing general oversight of the office of city auditor.

(b) *Composition.* The audit committee shall consist of seven (7) members, as follows:

(1) Two (2) members of the city council appointed by the council president. The two (2) council members appointed by the council president shall be made as part of the city council's

organizational meeting following each general municipal election, or whenever necessary due to vacancy or other reason.

(2) One (1) commissioner designated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

(3) Four (4) community members who shall be:

a. Residents of the city who are not current city employees, are not past or current elected officials of the city council, and who have expertise in relevant fields related to the functions of the audit committee, including but not limited to auditing, preferably public sector internal or management auditing, or financial management. Community members should expand and enhance the perspective of the audit committee in order to increase the value of its oversight and direction of the city's audit function.

b. Appointed by the city council through the open appointments process. All community member appointments will be made for three-year terms and no community member shall be appointed for more than two (2) terms.

(c) *Organization and operations.*

(1) The council president shall designate one (1) of the council members appointed to the audit committee to be its chair. The audit committee shall select its own vice-chair from amongst its members.

(2) The audit committee shall conduct a minimum of four (4) regular meetings per year, but special meetings may be conducted when necessary, at the call of the committee chair. A majority of members appointed to the audit committee shall constitute a quorum for the conduct of business. All meetings of the audit committee shall comply with the Minnesota Open Meeting Law.

(3) The city clerk, or a designee of the city clerk, shall be secretary to the audit committee and shall:

a. Issue notices of its meetings and other actions when required.

b. Attend its meetings and record the proceedings thereof and all decisions made.

c. Keep and preserve its files and papers.

(d) *Duties.* The audit committee shall:

(1) Provide general oversight and direction to the office of city auditor and its functions, including financial reporting practices, internal controls, compliance with applicable laws and regulations relating to financial controls, and other related matters.

(2) Appoint the city auditor to a four-year term.

- (3) Confirm the appointment by the city auditor of the internal audit director.
- (4) On at least an annual basis, conduct a performance review of the city auditor's performance.
- (5) Review and approve the city auditor's annual audit plan and monitor the auditor's results and follow-up activities.
- (6) Review the audit reports directed to it and may make recommendations on any such audit reports to:
 - a. The city council for consideration on the appropriate course of action for findings requiring city council action to remediate, such as legislative changes, regulations, or referral to legislative analysts.
 - b. The mayor for consideration on the appropriate course of action for reports concerning the operations, functions, or performance of city offices or officials, departments, and boards and commissions, and agencies, or for consideration of the appropriate course of action where findings impact the city budget.
 - c. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board for consideration on the appropriate course of action for reports concerning Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board activities.
- (7) Monitor the city auditor's results and effectiveness of proposed corrective actions.
- (8) Review reports of the state auditor prepared for any of the city's departments, boards and commissions.

CITY POLICIES

Policy and Research (PAR) division employees are expected to follow all City Policies and Procedures. A complete list of policies can be accessed via <http://www.minneapolismn.gov/policies/>.

APPENDIX

Change Log

This policy and procedure document should be reviewed at least annually, with updates and changes recorded below.

Description of Change	Date	Approval

