

To: Members of the Common Council  
From: Isabel Piedmont-Smith  
Date: June 7, 2024  
Subj: Ordinance 2024-16: Amending Bloomington Municipal Code 2.04.120 "Limits on Debate"

## SUMMARY

In the interest of making our regular session meetings more efficient, I am introducing Ordinance 2024-16, which would limit the number and length of councilmember speeches (that is, comments after the presentation of the legislation, any question/answer period, and public comment) to three minutes for the first "bite at the apple" and one minute as a follow-up or rebuttal. The legislation still leaves room for deviations "with leave of the Council." The Council could give leave through a motion or through unanimous consent (the chair asking if anyone objects).

## CLARIFICATIONS

### ***Debate***

The current Bloomington Municipal Code section 2.04.120 is entitled "Limits on Debate" in the context of Robert's Rules of Order, wherein "debate" is all discussion on the merits of a pending question that occurs after a motion is made, which is often a motion to adopt legislation. In the Council's current practice, council debate includes the presentation of the legislation; questions from councilmembers; answers from staff, sponsors, and/or experts; public comment; and final councilmember comments. In common parlance, we have in the past referred to only the last item as "council debate," but in the BMC this word is interpreted more broadly.

To further clarify the text of this ordinance, I note that the following sentence, which already exists in code, means that, prior to considering a motion, the council may set other time limits on any part of the process.

The council may, before debate begins, decide by a two-thirds vote of all members to set time limits on debate upon a particular pending question, but time spent in answering questions shall not be counted against the speaker.

We have done this in the past with particularly complex items, such as our second reading of Ordinance 2024-07 regarding the Summit District PUD on April 17 and the 2019 repeal and replacement of the text of the Unified Development Ordinance.

### ***Speech***

The proposed language to be added to 2.04.120 refers to councilmember "speech" rather than "comment." This, too, is rooted in Robert's Rules of Order (which is the default way the Council conducts its business unless otherwise dictated by local code), which refers to "speeches" or "speaking in debate."