



Council Education: Referral Process

Committee of the Whole
July 21, 2026



Sun Prairie Way

Referrals to staff may be made by any member of the council for matters of city-wide importance. Any alder may request that a referral receive a second prior to requiring staff to act. Individual constituent issues or personnel concerns should be addressed by reaching out directly to staff without waiting for a meeting consistent with the code of conduct. Staff will report back to council on all referrals within a reasonable time.

- Council Rule 8

What is a referral?

- Robert's Rules:
 - Used to send an item to another committee for review and research
 - Used as a postponement tactic
- Our practice:
 - Referrals used to ask staff to address a matter of city-wide importance
 - Policy, initiative, or issue that impacts the entire municipality
- Individual constituent issues should be sent directly to staff
- Personnel matters should be addressed consistent with the code of conduct



Examples

✓ Police Department to create a neighborhood watch program

✗ Police Department to do additional speed patrols on Wild Iris Drive

✓ City Attorney to develop a non-profit funding policy

✗ City Attorney to discipline City Clerk

✗ City Administrator to immediately delegate funds to a specific non-profit

✓ Finance and Parks to create a Tree Fund policy

✗ Parks to remove a hanging limb on St. Albert the Great Drive

✗ Finance to process an alder's expense report

✓ Clerk to provide a report on In-Person Absentee Voting

✗ Clerk to report if Mayor's absentee ballot has been received and processed

Why Not Constituent Concerns or Personnel Issues?

- Constituent concerns can be addressed more rapidly by referring it to the correct department
 - Resident calls on July 8 to report a streetlight out
 - Refer to SPU: Fixed by July 10
 - Wait for Council: Reported on July 21, not fixed until at least July 22nd
- Personnel Issues
 - Notice issues – should this be in open or closed session?
 - Addressing outside of policy exposes the city to liability

How to make a referral?

- Any alder may make a referral
- Any alder may request that a referral require a second

“I’d like to make a referral to the Police Department to develop a standard for Neighborhood Watch programs.”

No request for 2nd → referral stands

Request for 2nd → a second is needed or referral fails



Reminder

- Referrals are not required by law
- Peer communities
 - Dane County, Madison, and Fitchburg follow the Robert's Rules model
 - Middleton, Waunakee, and Verona do not use referrals
- Council Rules can be amended by a majority vote
- Rules exist to serve the legislative body



The background is a solid teal color. It features several abstract, organic shapes in a slightly lighter shade of teal. On the left side, there are several elongated, rounded rectangular shapes of varying lengths and orientations. On the right side, there are larger, curved, arc-like shapes that resemble stylized waves or partial circles.

Thank you.