By Amy Sylvestri

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In an effort to use city staff time more wisely, the City Council has decided to stop meeting in committees in 2013.

The committees were usually made up of three members of the City Council, plus city staff specializing in the issues before them and they would meet monthly or bimonthly, often during weekdays when it would be difficult for the public to attend the meeting. The committees would make recommendations on a topic and send it to the City Council to vote on as a whole.

Now, the City Council will hear matters that would have gone before committees at their Monday night work sessions, which occur on the second and fourth Mondays of each month.

“It’s an experiment,” said Mayor Stephen Cassidy of eliminating committees. “We asked ourselves, ‘Is this the best use of staff time?’ There comes a point when having multiple meetings becomes time consuming.”

The following committees will be disbanded at the first of the year: the finance committee, the rules and communications committee, the community development committee, the facilities and transportation committee, the shoreline-marina committee, city/ school liaison committees, and the civic and cultural committee.

The city’s boards and commissions, which are made up of non-elected members, won’t be affected.

Having a single concentrated work session will also hopefully inspire more public participation, which is why Councilwoman Ursula Reed voted in favor of the one-year experiment.

“It helps the community as well because committee meetings were in the mornings and afternoons and this will help,” said Reed.

Cassidy said that audio recordings of all the work sessions will be available on the city's website, which wasn't true of the smaller committee meetings. At the next City Council meeting on Dec. 3 at 7 p.m. at City Hall, the council will vote on whether to begin video recording of all meetings.