



**FARMERS
BRANCH**

Council Travel and Reimbursement Policy City Manager and Municipal Judge

PURPOSE

This policy was created to provide guidelines, rules, and regulations for City Councilmembers (*Per Section 2.01 of the City Charter, a Councilmember includes the Mayor*) permitted to travel for or engage in their official duties as a representative of the City of Farmers Branch. It is the policy of the City to reimburse (and advance funds to) City Councilmembers for travel (including the cost of transportation, meal per diem, registration, and lodging) provided such travel is approved (according to this policy) and performed in the conduct of City business. This travel must be reasonable, given the circumstances. This policy mirrors the City's policy for employee travel.

Reimbursements are limited to the same constitutional and legal restrictions that control the use of City funds. Public funds may not be expended or used for private benefit; there must be an underlying public purpose for an expenditure for which reimbursement is requested, even if private persons, corporations or interests may receive some benefit. Expenditures for gifts or donations will not be reimbursed, and no reimbursement will be given if the expenditure was for the promotion or advocacy of a political candidate or measure. Councilmembers should be mindful of these limitations prior to incurring an expense. However, the use of stipends paid to Councilmembers, once received by him/her, is not so limited. If an expenditure may be doubtful, prior approval should be obtained from the City Council Travel Review Committee.

The Administrative Services office will make travel arrangements for all City Council travel. Under the Texas Public Information Act, all expenses, including travel expenses, are open to public inspection. Therefore, travel documentation will be completed, and the use of public funds should be transparent.

The allowances and amounts to City Councilmembers for official city business shall be established based on the guidelines below. The City will not pay any portion of a spouse's expenses.

Reimbursement requests should be submitted no later than three (3) months after expense is incurred. If not submitted within this time, a request may be denied.

CITY MANAGER AND CITY JUDGE

The City Manager will follow the City's Employee Travel Policy. All requests for travel and travel expense reimbursement reports by the City Manager will be approved by the City Council Travel Review Committee. (the "Committee")

The City Judge/Alternate Judge will follow the City's Employee Travel Policy. All requests for travel and travel expense reimbursement reports by the City Judge/Alternate Judge will be approved by the City Manager.

REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

All reimbursement requests for City Councilmember expenditures must be approved by the Committee, unless expressly provided otherwise in this policy.

APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS

- Prior to any travel, except for local meetings, City Councilmembers will obtain pre-approval from the Committee. Local meetings (as defined in this Policy) with travel expenses less than \$300 do not require pre-approval by the Committee, but require review and approval from the Committee before reimbursement. Local meetings with travel expenses exceeding \$300 will require pre-approval from the Committee.
- Expenses incurred by a City Councilmember for emergency travel related to attendance at legislative hearings or other meetings directly related to pending legislation during an active session of the Texas Legislature may be approved by the City Manager and do not require approval by the Committee. City Councilmembers should notify and obtain approval from the City Manager prior to incurring reimbursable expenses in connection with emergency travel under this section.

IN-STATE TRAVEL

- In-state day travel is defined as travel within the State of Texas, completed in one day with no lodging expenses and other activity expenses (excluding registration and air transportation expenses) totaling \$75 or less. This type of travel does not require an internal travel expense report.
- City Councilmembers engaged in same-day travel and training are not eligible for per diem allowance and meal reimbursements unless they are in conjunction with working sessions, included in the class registration, or reimbursed by another granting agency. See the 'Per Diem and Meal Functions' section of this policy for further details.

TRANSPORTATION

All modes of travel (air, rental/ personal/city vehicle, taxi, ride-hailing (e.g. Uber, Lyft, bus, train, or subway) should be chosen with consideration towards minimizing the loss of time, effectiveness, and productivity of the Councilmember and total cost to the City.

AIR TRAVEL

All travel arrangements will be coordinated by the Administrative Services Department. When traveling, airfare tickets of round-trip "coach class" will be purchased based on the best available cost. If applicable, all airline reservations should be made sufficiently in advance to take advantage of airline discount fares. Electronic or "E-tickets" should be utilized to avoid paper ticket surcharges.

RIDE-HAILING (e.g. Uber/Lyft)

Ride-hailing apps like Lyft and Uber are allowed while on official city business, and taxi fares are allowed. The City will reimburse fees incurred during travel dates for City business only.

RENTAL VEHICLES

When considering renting a vehicle, it is expected to obtain the lowest rental rate for cars when practical and to weigh the total cost versus the use of taxis or ride-hailing (Uber/Lyft). A compact-size car is encouraged unless several Councilmembers are pooling transportation. The Administrative Services Department will reserve and pay for the rental car. The City may reimburse rental costs for travel the day before and the day after the City business event dates due to discounted airfare and/or hotel stays. Car rental costs for personal use beyond these dates will be reimbursed for the business portion of the trip only. Car rental insurance is not to be purchased for business-related travel. Councilmembers should use their credit card if they plan on using a rental car for personal use for an extended period. Pooled transportation is encouraged to reduce costs.

MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT

Councilmember shall be reimbursed at the lesser of an advance purchase of round-trip coach class airfare (purchased sufficiently in advance to take advantage of airline discount fares when possible) or an amount based upon the number of miles x IRS mileage rate. Travel urgency, safety, health concerns, or the economy of using a personal vehicle at the destination site (instead of a rental vehicle) may alter the reimbursement method. The mileage payment will be based on the most direct route from the point of destination.

If a Councilmember is driving a personal vehicle outside of the City and has car failure, the City will pay the expense of towing the vehicle to the nearest garage, over and above the Council members personal towing insurance coverage. The Councilmember must pay for all repairs. The towing invoice and insurance documentation, reflecting the amount covered, must be provided for reimbursement.

Mileage reimbursement is not a reimbursable expense if travel is to or from home (or a local point of origin within the City) and city hall or a point of destination within the City's limits.

LODGING

Overnight lodging is allowable up to standard hotel room rates. It is not permissible to reserve an Airbnb or any other privately owned lodging while on official short-term business. Commercial lodging facilities are the only allowable lodging accommodations; however, there may be situational exceptions. If no commercial lodging facility is available due to a room shortage for a special event or location remoteness, then prior approval from the Committee must be obtained and documented.

MEALS & OTHER TRAVEL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Meals:

- a. The City will pay for meals consumed during official travel on a per diem basis at a daily rate as specified for the destination city by the U.S. General Services Administration (www.gsa.gov). Councilmembers will receive a per diem for all meals consumed, with the exception of meals that increase the cost of registration or otherwise result in an additional cost to the City. Meals increasing registration fees or costs to the City must be subtracted from the per diem rate based on the meal expense breakdown specified on the GSA website. For example, if a Councilmember registers for an optional lunch or banquet, which increases the cost of registration, the per diem (as itemized on the GSA website) for the meal or meals must be subtracted from the total per diem rate to be paid.
- b. The City will pay for the cost of meals for overnight travel on a per diem basis only. The City's per diem rate will be based on the current fiscal year rate established by the U.S. General Services Administration. The per diem shall be adjusted for partial travel days.
- c. For City-related travel that does not include an overnight stay and does not exceed 10 hours (e.g., conference/business meeting in Dallas), meal expenses shall be reimbursed based on GSA partial travel day per diem (75%). For travel without an overnight stay that exceeds 10 hours (e.g., conference/business meeting in Austin) from leaving to returning (home or office), a full day meal per-diem will be reimbursed upon approval of the Committee. A 75% meal per diem rate will be paid for travel days extending beyond the actual conference/meeting dates, not to exceed one day before and/or after a conference/meeting, provided the travel day or days are necessary.
- d. No receipts are utilized for meals. Any meals over the per diem amount are the responsibility of the Councilmember.

- e. If a meal is provided at a conference or event that a Councilmember chooses not to participate in, reimbursement for an additional meal will not be made.

2. Special Conference Activities

- a. Many conferences provide activities such as tours, receptions, meals, etc., which are offered at an additional cost to the participant. The City may pay for these activities if the activity is of reasonable cost, not purely social, and the information gained would benefit the City. Councilmembers are encouraged to request approval from the Committee before attending special conference activities.

3. Miscellaneous:

- a. The City will not pay for movies or between-meal snacks.
- b. Most airlines permit passengers to carry-on one standard bag and one small personal item (i.e. laptop, gaming console, etc.), per person, onto an aircraft at no charge. Councilmembers are strongly encouraged to utilize carry-on service. If a checked baggage fee is incurred the City will reimburse for one standard bag check fee both inbound and outbound. Fees incurred for excess, overweight, or oversized bags will not be reimbursed.
- c. The City will not reimburse for valet parking unless it is the only type of parking offered by the facility/hotel. Charges incurred for self-parking will be reimbursed when a facility/hotel does not offer free parking.
- d. Tipping for items such as meals and ride-sharing will be reimbursed. Tipping should be no more than 20% of the total cost.

LOCAL MEETINGS

Councilmembers may attend any local meeting dealing with any matter directly affecting the City or any meeting of an organization of which the City is a member. Local meetings shall be defined as those meetings held in Collin, Dallas, Denton, or Tarrant counties, but specifically excludes attendance at Farmers Branch council meetings or meetings and events conducted within the City's limits.

The City will reimburse expenses for local meetings, such as meeting lunches and dinners, as well as travel by personal vehicle for approved local meetings using the current IRS maximum rate,

plus tolls and parking fees. Expenses incurred while hosting visitors from other cities or organizations are also allowable and will be reviewed and approved by the Committee.

Claims for reimbursement should include the date, description of the meeting attended, itemized receipt for meals, and miles traveled if claiming mileage reimbursement. Alcoholic beverages are not a reimbursable item.

REIMBURSEMENT FOR GENERAL EXPENSES

A Councilmember is entitled to reimbursement for any actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of official duties of the Councilmember, including the following:

- Expenses incurred by the City official for which there is a reasonable connection with a City adopted policy position, purpose, or goal.
- Attending meetings or events at the direction or request of the City Council, for example, as a member of an advisory committee of the City Council.
- Communicating with representatives of local, regional, state, and national governments on policy positions adopted by the City.
- Attending educational seminars designed to improve the official's skills and information levels related to City business.
- Communicating with representatives of business or community interests at the local, regional, state, and national levels on policy positions adopted by the City.
- Participating in local, regional, state, and national organizations whose activities affect the City's interests. Such organizations include, but are not limited to, local civic organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, or Sierra Club.
- Attending events for which the City is a sponsor or participant.
- Implementing a city approved strategy for attracting or retaining business in the city.
- Recognizing service to the City by an employee, organization, or other person active in the community.

~~A Councilmember that has filed a waiver with the City Secretary electing to waive receipt of the stipend provided in Section 2.03 of the City Charter may additionally be reimbursed for general expenses that are not included in the foregoing list incurred by that member related to the performance of their official duties may be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$2,400 per calendar year. Such expenses are typically incidental expenses that a Councilmember incurs outside of travel for and/or attendance at official public meetings or events, including, without limitation, the following:~~

- ~~• **Community events:** Events hosted by local organizations or non-profits that benefit the City or align with its policies.~~
- ~~• **Meetings with constituents or stakeholders:** Social events that facilitate relationship building with key individuals or groups in furtherance of City business.~~

NON-REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES

All travel expenses shall relate to City business. The following expenses shall not be paid or reimbursed by the City:

- Alcoholic beverages or tobacco products
- Spouse expenses
- Passports
- Loss of funds or loss/damage to personal belongings
- Childcare, eldercare, or pet care
- Personal entertainment not related to the conference or meeting
- Parking or moving violation fines
- ATM or banking service fees
- Expenses related to vacations or personal trips in conjunction with travel not related to city business