

The intense discussions that transpired in Madison over the course of the past several months serve as a defining illustration of the essential need for the city of Milwaukee to have a dynamic approach to government relations.

This practice also reinforced the recognition of some deficiencies within this important work.

The reorganization of the city's lobbying structure and creation of the Legislative Affairs Division aims to mitigate those concerns and enhance this effort going forward.

First, it must be clearly defined what this proposal does not do.

It does not change the fact that the common council possesses, and has always held, the sanctioned responsibility to determine the official policy stance for the city.

Any position taken in negotiations when representing the city must fully meet guidelines expressly approved within the legislative package, as defined by the council.

Representatives of the city must not negotiate an alternative position without first "submitting to the common council of any recommended changes or amendments to laws and thereby obtaining approval and a directive from the council." (See 350-211. Political Activity Prohibited. For full definition.)

This proposal is not intended to be a reflection solely of the mayor's recent efforts. He and the IRD team have proven to be a vital partner and valuable asset to building relations in Madison.

However, the administration is still obligated to work within the parameters set by the council and cannot, in good faith, exclusively negotiate with other parties an official position of the city without the direct consent of the common council. Particularly, when agreeing to terms that then must then be delivered by the council and with no guarantees of the outcome.

Additionally, as currently operated, the process produces a distinct conflict of interest for the IRD Director who is appointed and reports to the mayor as cabinet member, but is accountable to both the demands of the administration and legislative branch.

At its core, this proposal and overall restructuring is rather modest and logical.

It cleans up a dated and convoluted ordinance that hasn't been reevaluated in nearly six decades.

It rightly affirms and codifies that the council interprets and directs lobbying efforts in collaboration with IRD, ensuring that the city's official position set by the council is fully recognized and represented in all legislative negotiations.

This will effectively establish better trust and long-term relations with our legislative counterparts, improve internal communication, and ensure that the sentiments of council members are more successfully incorporated into the process.

Perhaps most notably, this proposed organizational structure has already proven its merit.

As members are aware, without the council proactively inserting itself into recent legislative negotiations, it surely would have faced untenable results and the city's fiscal solvency would still likely be in jeopardy. For many, that vote was challenging. This vote should not be.