

# Boards and Commissions Handbook

## Introduction

Welcome and thank you for becoming a board & commission member to serve as an active leader in our community! Because your appointment to a City of Clare board or commission\* requires no prior experience in public service, City staff have designed this guide to help you navigate your new role. This booklet will introduce you to some of the key information that you will need to serve on your board or commission.

The City of Clare appoints over 100 civic minded individuals on various boards and commissions to advise and assist in carrying out the functions of local government. These boards and commissions provide a critical reservoir of knowledge and community input that help to inform the City Commission in policy decisions and operations.

The City of Clare is a Council-Manager form of government. Under this system, the City Council (including the Mayor) sets policy, while the City Manager is the chief executive administrator who implements the policies and manages the daily operations of the City. This is somewhat analogous to a corporation, which is governed by a board of directors, but managed by a CEO. Over 70 City employees work across over a dozen departments to deliver exceptional services to the residents of Clare.

Most boards and commissions are created by City resolution or ordinance and serve as advisory bodies to the City Council or City Administrator. They provide information, analysis, and recommendations to inform the City Council's and City Administrator's decisions on matters pertaining to the board or commission's specialized knowledge. A few boards and commissions have specific authority to make binding decisions in certain areas, such as the Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Commission, and the Downtown Development Authority. These bodies generally derive their decision-making authority from state laws.

Regardless of the specific duties, each board and commission play an important part in City government. Appointees to boards and commissions perform a public service to their community and have both an obligation and an opportunity to provide wise input that will help shape their government. This requires a thorough understanding of their board or commission's role as well as a willingness to engage constructively with the public, elected officials, and City staff. Although much of learning how to do this will happen on the job, it is hoped that this handbook will provide useful introductory guidance.

\* There are a variety of names for City-created bodies, such as boards, commissions, committees, authorities, etc. This page uses "boards and/or commissions" to mean any such body.

## Process for New Appointments

Appointees who have been confirmed should familiarize themselves with the bylaws of your board or commission and review the upcoming agenda materials. You may also wish to review materials from prior meetings and an overview of city functions and department activities to provide familiarity with city operations is available on powerpoint. Contact your board's staff liaison or a member of the City Clerk's staff to access these materials. Your staff liaison should also be able to provide you with a schedule of meetings and any other pertinent information and the City Clerk can schedule department tours for interested board members.

## Qualities of a good board member

Local governments rely on the expertise and knowledge of business and community professionals—especially board members—to help develop and shape the community. Of course, the primary reason you should serve on a city board is that **you want to make the world a better place and you care about the place that you live, work and play.**

### **There are 5 Essential Qualities of an Effective Board Member**

Dedication and Commitment. ...

Ability to lead and influence others. ...

Straightforward and impartial. ...

Knowledgeable and an insatiable learner. ...

Values discretion and confidentiality.

## **Duties of Boards and Commissions**

### **General Duties and Responsibilities of Appointees**

In the broadest sense, the role of an individual appointee is to bring their experience and wisdom to the body and deliberate with other members to reach decisions that fulfill the purpose of the particular board or commission. Here are some general tips and expectations for appointees:

- Act courteously during meetings and treat other members of the body, the public, and City staff with respect. Disagreements are inevitable, but appointees should remain civil and focus on issues rather than personal differences.
- Observe good parliamentary practice. The chair's role is to run an efficient meeting while allowing all points of view to be heard and engage in a full discussion. Assist the chair by being concise in making your points and not interrupting others.
- Arrive to meetings on time and let City staff and the chair know if you will be absent. Unexpected absences can cause a meeting to be cancelled if not enough members are present to establish a quorum. If a quorum is not present the commission will be unable to conduct regular business, so as a courtesy to your fellow commissioners and the public, please provide advanced notice of any absences.
- Come prepared. Review proposed minutes, agenda packets, and other information ahead of time to allow for informed deliberation.
- Represent your board or commission appropriately. As an appointee, people may perceive you to speak on behalf of the City or your board or commission. Do not speak for your board or commission unless appropriately authorized to do so. Make clear that you are speaking in your personal capacity if there is any doubt.

### **Duties of Specific Members and Information about Member Types**

Enabling legislation and bylaws are important documents that delineate member types, below are short descriptions of the various attendees who regularly participate in meetings other than general members.

#### **Officers**

Boards and commissions often vote to authorize members appointed to offices to serve as the chair, secretary, or vice-chair to carry out specific functions in order to serve the rest of the board or commission. Major systems of parliamentary procedure define some of these functions, such as the duty of the chair to preside over and keep decorum during meetings.

#### **Bylaws**

Bylaws frequently grant other powers and duties. For example, some bylaws allow the chairperson to cancel meetings in the event of dangerous weather without consulting any other members. For more information about the powers of elected officers of boards, commissions, or committees, review the relevant bylaws. The bylaws will contain most of the information you need to perform your duties. The City's bylaws are standardized for most boards and commissions, with some specific provisions applicable to each body. The standard bylaws include sections on duties, ethics and conflicts of interest, and procedural matters, including scheduling, noticing, and conducting meetings and preparation of agendas. If, after reviewing the bylaws, you have questions or want clarification, contact City staff. Please note that state law or local nuances regarding the commission you serve can preempt bylaw provisions.

## Governing Rules

A few key resources provide structure for operating a healthy board and commission. It is important to be knowledgeable about bylaws and other legislation surrounding boards and commissions.

## Non-Voting Members

Although non-voting members lack the right to vote on a decision, non-voting members retain all other rights of membership, including the right to make motions and join in deliberation. It is important to read the enabling law that created the board or commission to determine who are the non-voting members. Some common examples of non-voting members include members of the City Council, members of the City staff, or youth members.

Being a non-voting member restricts certain other privileges of membership inherently. However, these restrictions stem from the lack of ability to vote and are consistent for voting members and non-voting members under certain circumstances. For example, a non-voting member can never make a motion to reconsider, as a non-voting member cannot vote on the prevailing side during a motion. However, the lack of authority to make a motion to reconsider is equally restricted from voting members who do not vote with the prevailing side.

## Non-Member Council Liaisons

The City Council regularly appoints councilmembers as non-member liaisons to City boards and commissions. Council liaisons will not be enumerated in enacting laws or bylaws, and have no voting rights or ability to make or second motions, but council liaisons provide a valuable resource to boards and commissions and make insightful contributions to discussions.

## Other Non-Member Liaisons

Members of the City staff or liaisons from other organizations may be appointed to work with your board or commission. If these liaisons are not included in the enabling law for your board or commission, they may only join in the discussion when invited pursuant to the rules your board or commission has adopted.

## Open Meetings Act

City commissions are expected to conduct themselves according to the procedures contained in the Michigan Open Meetings Act ("OMA"). Essentially, this means that City commissions should deliberate and make all their decisions during a public meeting, including a full discussion of the reasons for those decisions. Commissioners should avoid emailing, talking, or otherwise communicating with other members outside of a public meeting about how they will vote, reasons for voting a particular way, or the pros and cons of an issue or petition that may come before the commission.

Commissioners should avoid emailing the entire commission (or a quorum of the commission) about commission business. If commissioners have factual information they wish to communicate to the entire body, they should send it to the City Manager and request that it be provided to the body. Commissioners should never “reply to all” if they receive such an email.

Sometimes, discussion between commissioners outside of a public meeting may be necessary (for example, when developing draft policy recommendations for presentation to the full commission). In such cases, the discussions should involve as few commissioners as possible and never involve a quorum. If the matter warrants substantial discussion with multiple commissioners outside of the regular meeting schedule, a subcommittee may be appropriate, the meetings of which would be posted and open to the public.

Basic Rights of the Public during a meeting governed by the Open Meeting Act:

- The public can attend without a requirement to sign in
- The public can record and/or broadcast the proceedings
- The public can get a full picture of the decision-making process
- The public can address the assembly under the rules prescribed for public comment

## Freedom of Information Act

In general, records of the City are subject to disclosure under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Email communications about board or commission business are generally considered to be public records subject to disclosure under FOIA. For this reason, email correspondence regarding the board or commission's business should generally copy the FOIA Coordinator (City Clerk) so that the City has a record of the correspondence. Commissioners are otherwise responsible for retaining and producing emails and other records, including text messages related to board or commission business that they have in their possession upon request by the City's FOIA Coordinator or the City Attorney's Office. Note that email addresses used by commissioners may be subject to public disclosure, so commissioners may wish to create a separate email address for commission business if they have privacy concerns.

## Local Rules Relating to Meeting Documents

### Meeting Notices

Advanced Public Notice of meetings are provided, at a minimum, by physically posting a notice, listing the meeting on the City Website, and placed on Charter Cable Channel 189. Work with the City Clerk to ensure these notices are provided before any meeting.

There are two types of meetings: regular meetings and special meetings. Boards and commissions schedule regular meetings at the start of each year. When necessary, commissions reschedule regular meeting dates by vote at a meeting throughout the year. Special meetings supplement the regular meeting schedule and often focus on specific topics. The two types of meetings have different deadlines for informing the public, but scheduling either type of meeting includes many common key points.

Key Points for Scheduling Meetings:

- Each year City boards and commissions cumulatively hold multiple meetings. With more than a dozen active groups competing for a limited number of meeting venues—it is important to start planning for meetings early and collaborate with your staff liaison to make sure the scheduling process goes smoothly.

- Avoid scheduling meetings for dates identified as City holidays and/or other recommended holiday observances. Advanced notice of meetings is required for all meetings: regular meetings, special meetings, and (sub)committee meetings all require meeting notices. Work with your staff liaison to make sure these are published and distributed appropriately. When planning a special meeting, boards, commissions, and committees must provide at least three full business days' advanced notice to the staff liaison to ensure timely public notification.
- All meetings must be held in a public building, with adequate public space for the public to observe the proceedings and must be ADA accessible. Special accommodations may be arranged by contacting the City Clerk's Office at least two full business days before the date of the meeting

## Agendas & Agenda Packets

Agendas are critical documents for keeping meetings on topic and progressing in an orderly manner. With the exception of subcommittee meetings, agendas are required to be posted online for all meetings at least 18 hours ahead of each meeting. Staff liaisons help boards and commissions publish agendas online ahead of meetings and print off enough copies for the public.

Agenda packets are the supporting documents relating to items on the agenda and encompass the materials distributed to members for review and action. Under record retention rules, the City keeps all agendas and agenda packets created as a part of the permanent record of each meeting.

## Meeting Minutes

Staff liaisons prepare minutes and the proposed draft minutes will be available for public inspection and for review by members of boards and commissions as well as the general public within 8 business days after the meeting to which the minutes refer. Boards, commissions, and committees review, correct, and approve the proposed draft minutes at the next regular meeting.

Both regular and special meetings are documented by minutes, whenever a meeting is held. Minutes provide a record of the date, time, place and attendance of members at a meeting along with a record of any decisions made or roll call votes conducted at a meeting. Minutes are not a transcription or a set of notes recording discussions leading up to decisions. Members of boards and commissions are encouraged to bring a notebook to document discussions if a more detailed record is desired, but staff liaisons are directed to take action only minutes, including the information above. Once the board, commission or committee approves a set of minutes, staff liaisons will make approved minutes available for public inspection within five business days after the meeting at which the minutes are approved.

## Continuing Education and Professional Development

The City sets aside funding each budget year to provide for continued education and professional development for board, committee, and commission members. By state law, some board members are required to attend annual certification training, while others are strongly encouraged to attend training available through the State of Michigan, Michigan Municipal League, and the Michigan Association of Planners to name a few, to further advance their knowledge, skills and abilities to better serve their boards and the community .

There are many benefits reaped from training activities including collaboration and building collective knowledge; finding better ways of doing things; building a sense of community and a learning culture; creating better experiences for community members; it helps you to retain knowledge; it connects others with the knowledge obtained; and it provides positive motivation as you are a valued member of the team.

Sharing your newly attained knowledge is key to building a better board. Board member are asked to share what they've learned at their training events by providing a brief overview of the materials received and the

knowledge gained with other members of the board and city staff at the next meeting. This process is evaluated every two years.

Contact the City Clerk for more information on the available educational opportunities pertaining to your board.

## Role of City Staff

### Staff Liaisons

Each board and commission have a staff liaison who provides professional and administrative support. Staff liaisons are the primary conduit for members of boards and commissions to communicate with the City. Your staff liaison should be your first contact if you have any questions related to your board or commission. Staff liaisons perform a variety of roles, including:

- Serving as a channel of communication between the board/commission and other City staff
- Creating meeting notices, preparing minutes, and creating agendas
- Scheduling meetings and booking meeting locations
- Maintaining board/commission records
- Coordinating the collection and distribution of information requested by the board/commission

### City Clerk's Office

The City Clerk's Office provides a wide range of support and oversight to ensure meetings and records relating to boards and commissions are accurate and meet applicable requirements, including:

- Maintaining rosters by updating as needed with appointments and resignations Reviewing, posting, and mailing out meeting notices prepared by staff liaisons
- Arranging requested accessibility accommodations for public meetings
- Notifying the City Commission of board and committee members whose term is set to expire
- Swearing into office incoming appointees for whom a sworn oath is required
- Coordinating training with the City staff for appointees

### City Attorney's Office

The City Attorney's Office also provides support for City boards and commissions, including:

- Reviewing and advising on bylaws and ordinances
- Providing guidance on applicable procedural and legal requirements

### Mayor's Office

The Mayor and City Commission supports the application and appointment process and assists the City staff in the administrative work surrounding appointments.

## Conclusion

Hopefully, the information on this page will assist you in preparing to serve on a City board or commission. If you have additional questions, there are many people who can help, including your staff liaison, the City Clerk's Office, and the chair and other members of your board or commission.