

## **Roles and Expectations – Draft Liaison Guidebook – March 2023**

The Olympia City Council welcomes community comment and involvement.

Informally, individuals and groups share perspectives and advice with the City Council by phone, e-mail, personal contacts, and letters. Formally, the City Council accepts public testimony at its regular meetings, and the City sponsors open houses, community forums, and public hearings throughout the year on specific issues. In addition, the City Council has established several advisory boards and committees to provide advice on key issues.

### **The General Role of Olympia's Advisory Boards and Committees**

Advisory committees are a structured way for individual community members to share their opinions and perspectives, study issues, and develop recommendations in a focused, small group structure. The primary purpose of advisory committees is to provide judicious advice, from a community member perspective to the City Council which is the City's elected policy-making body.

Advisory committee activities may include study of critical issues, independent research, and briefings from staff. This is so the committee is prepared to discuss and create developed, thoughtful recommendations to the City Council when requested or required.

Boards and commissions may hear public testimony or have a more formal role in City policy decisions. The specific role of each advisory committee, board or commission is described in OMC 2.100.

### **Staff Liaisons**

Each Olympia advisory board, commission, or committee has an assigned staff liaison. In addition, the City's Strategic Communications Director serves as a general liaison to the committees on behalf of the City Council and the City Manager.

The word liaison is used deliberately by the City to describe the nature of the staff role in relation to the committee, instead of the phrase "committee staff." A liaison is defined as "one who maintains communication."

The liaisons are staff professionals with significant work responsibilities that relate to the same work area as the committee in addition to their committee liaison activities. The liaisons do not work "for" or "at the direction of" the committee. They are professionals who work with the committee to develop information and recommendations for Council consideration.

While Olympia's committee liaisons have some differing duties, depending on past committee practice, time availability, and departmental resources, in general Olympia's staff liaisons are responsible for:

- Preparing meeting agendas, drafting, and compiling staff reports and meeting minutes.
- Ensuring that meeting notifications and recordkeeping occurs consistent with applicable State laws.
- Serving as a communication link between the committee, City administration, departments, and the City Council, as appropriate.
- Providing professional guidance, issue analysis and recommendations.
- Assisting the committee with research, report preparation, and correspondence in keeping with the committee's Council-approved work plan (depending on their workload and time availability).
- Making sure the intent of the advisory committee is not lost after a decision, and that it is conveyed to the City Council in a timely manner.
- Assisting the advisory committee in staying on track and focused.
- Maintaining a positive working relationship with the Chair and committee members.

### **City Council Decision Making**

In making decisions, the Olympia City Council considers general citizen comment, advisory committee recommendations, staff recommendations, Council priorities and goals, research and background information, and individual Councilmember perspectives.

The City Council expects to receive recommendations from advisory committees that reflect the collective knowledge and thinking of the committee, particularly from the perspective of community members. Your committee's recommendations may be shared as part of a staff report or as a distinct memo or report either attached to the staff report or transmitted separately to the City Council. The staff liaison for your committee will assist with this effort; in all cases, a copy of your recommendation or report should be filed with both the staff liaison for your committee and with the City Council Executive Office as it is a public record.

The City Council also expects that City staff will present recommendations from a professional perspective. There may be times when the professional opinions and recommendations of City staff differ in part or in whole from yours or that of the committee, and that's okay. Differences of perspective are healthy in an organization that welcomes diverse perspectives. Please maintain a respectful and civil tone amid even strong disagreement. Insults, profanity, and disparagement will not be tolerated.

There may be times when your advisory committee's recommendations will either not prevail or will be modified by the City Council. It is important to recognize that this is not a rejection of the integrity of the recommendation it is an inevitable part of the process of municipal decision making in which a variety of views, perspectives, and recommendations are considered.

### **Advisory Committee Work Plans**

Each committee is expected to propose an annual work plan to the City Council for consideration in the first quarter of each year. In developing the work plans, committees are to consider:

- City Council established or adopted goals and priorities, including the City's Comprehensive Plan, annual Council goals, master plans, budget, and so on.
- Resource availability, such as budget, staff support, committee member time.
- Departmental work priorities.
- Committee member knowledge, interest, and expertise.

The work plans are annually reviewed by the Community Livability and Public Safety Committee and then formally adopted by the City Council.

During its review, the City Council may change or modify a committee's proposed work plan so that it reflects Council priorities, available resources, and emerging issues. Once adopted by City Council, the work plan serves as the basis for a committee's focus and effort during the year. The Council may refer other issues to the committee during the year.

### **Expectations for Advisory Committee Members**

The Council, along with the City Manager's Office, has adopted general Rules of Procedure for Olympia's advisory committees/commissions.

It is expected that:

- All advisory board and committee meetings are to be conducted in public session and noticed in accordance with State law, unless otherwise advised by Olympia 's City Attorney.
- Individual committee members and the collective group will be fair, impartial, and respectful of the public, staff, and each other.
- Committee members will respect the limitations of their individual and collective authority. The role of the committee is to advise the City Council and/or staff. Please keep in mind that committee appointment does not empower you to make final decisions, unless authorized by State law or the group's enabling ordinance, or to supervise staff.

- Members will strive to appreciate differences in approach and point of view, whether from each other, the community, the City Council, or staff.
- Each member will participate in the group's discussions and work assignments, without dominating the discussion or activity of the committee.
- The committee chair will ensure that all members have a fair, balanced, and respectful opportunity to share their knowledge and perspectives.
- The committee will attempt to reach consensus on issues. If consensus is not possible, strong differing opinions such as "minority" opinions should be recorded and acknowledged in the committee's report or letter to the City Council.
- There are "no surprises" from the Committee either in the nature of the work being undertaken by the committee or the method and timing for conveyance of recommendations to the City Council. The staff liaison fulfills an important role in assisting the committee in this regard.

Please be careful to not deliberate about committee work and issues via e-mail or in unnoticed "side meetings or gatherings" as these actions may be in violation of open meeting laws if the gathering or discussion constitutes a quorum (State Open Meetings Act: RCW 42.30). The City attorney is available, via your staff liaison, to consult with or provide advice to committees in this regard and on any other legal issue.