



Advisory Committee Roles and Expectations

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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 citizens 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 citizen perspective, to the City Council which is the City's elected policy-making body.

Advisory committee activities may include study of critical issues, hearing public testimony, independent research, and reviewing staff reports and recommendations - all of which is intended so that the committee is prepared to discuss, formulate, and forward well-developed, thoughtful recommendations to the City Council in a timely manner.

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 individual and collective knowledge and thinking of the committee, particularly from a citizen perspective. Your recommendations may be transmitted as part of the 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 can assist with this effort; and 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 inherent in policy formulation and deliberation work of an organization that welcomes diverse perspectives.

There also may be times when your advisory committee's recommendations will 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, but is an inevitable part of the process of municipal decisionmaking where 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 early 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 - budget, staff support, committee member time.
- Departmental work priorities.
- Committee member knowledge, interest, and expertise.

The work plans are formally reviewed and adopted by the City Council . The Council has asked that when the plans are transmitted, each be accompanied by a letter from:

- The committee chair outlining the past year accomplishments and highlighting the top two proposed priorities;
- The respective department director or staff liaison addressing resource availability to accomplish the work items and relationship of the proposed items to planned departmental activities for the year.

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, although the Council may, from time-to-time, refer other issues to the committee during the course of a year.

Expectations for Advisory Committee Members

The Council's General Government Committee 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 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. The City attorney is available to consult with or provide advice to committees in this regard and on any other legal issue.

Staff Liaisons

Each Olympia advisory board, commission, or committee has an assigned staff liaison. In addition, the City's Communication Manager serves as a general liaison with 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."

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:

- 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 and depending on their work load 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.
- Presenting advisory committee recommendations to the City Council, if requested to do so by either the committee or the City Council.
- Maintaining a positive working relationship with the Chair and committee members.

The liaisons are staff professionals with significant work responsibilities in addition to their committee liaison activities. In general, the liaisons are individuals who have significant staff responsibilities that relate to the same work area as the committee. 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.

The Olympia City Council's General Government Committee prepared this document.
The most recent review and update was in 2005.