

## Planning Boards and Commissions

### Packet Synopsis

“A local government is not required to establish a **planning commission**. The law governing cities and townships authorizes these units to establish a “planning agency” – either a planning commission or staff – and requires the agency to prepare a comprehensive plan, and review and comment on any plan amendments before the plan is adopted by a council or board. Cities and townships that have not done so should create a planning agency before starting work on a comprehensive plan. Historically, most local governments, including counties, have chosen to form a planning commission because they see important benefits in doing so.”

“A **planning commission** advises the locally elected governing body. It initiates and proposes courses of action for the elected body to consider and drafts a comprehensive plan.”<sup>1</sup>

Having established the local **planning board** or **commission** in the context of your local governing community, a functioning and effective **planning board** or **commission** is an essential element for good land use planning and management that wisely and prudently uses and protects and advances the community’s patrimony, both for the present and for its future generations as well.

The following have been selected from an extensive literature to assist **planning commissions** and the planning commission member to better understand this very important civic function and how to be effective both as a commission and as an individual member.

“How to Be a Better Planning Commissioner”, *Planning Commissioner Service: News & Notes*, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL, Summer 1995 – present seven simple suggestions for a new commission member to follow in order to become an effective board member plus two suggestions for the board itself. The suggestion to meet with the planning director is especially apropos. Having an appreciation of the past is always helpful in going forward.

“A Layperson’s Guide to the Planning Process and the Tools That Make It Work”, *The Job of the Planning Commissioner: Third Edition Revised*, Solnit, Albert, Planners Press, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL, 1987 – is an illuminating summary of the author’s findings to questionnaires asked of planning commissioners regarding their planning commission experiences. Good cogent suggestions and recommendations for building better commissions but also the individual will find that his/her service experiences are not unique.

“Making Planning and Zoning Commissions More Effective”. McClendon, Bruce W. and Sally Shipman, *Texas Town & City*, April 1966 – is a descriptive list of sixteen

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<sup>1</sup> Under Construction: Tools and Techniques for Local Planning, Minnesota Planning, State of Minnesota, St Paul, MN 2002, pg. 28.

characteristics that an effective planning commissions should have. The essential beginning is with the member selection process itself.

“The Basics: Presentation Materials and Support Information”, Lockyear, Robert J., *Planning Institute*, Government Training Service, St Paul, MN, 1995 – lists the specific duties of the planning commission, the board of adjustment and the city council or county board in Minnesota land use planning and the role of planning staff. It then lists why the commission exists, its “tools of the trade” and fourteen ways to build better commissions.

“The Planning Commission”, *The Small Town Planning Handbook: Second Edition*, Daniels, Thomas L, John W. Keller and Mark A Lapping, Planners Press, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL, 1995 - in this, its Chapter 3 and its page 18-19, is an excellent commentary on the qualities required of good planning commission members and personality types that should not be consider.

“Changing Directions: Learning Module for Planning Commissions”, Local Planning Assistance, Minnesota Planning, St Paul, MN, August 2000 – briefly describes management practices and techniques for improving planning commission performance. Using Guidelines, Delegation, Organization of Meetings, Structure and Committees and more. Includes a sample planning commission one year work plan outline for scheduling tasks and assigning duties and timelines.

“Job Description: Planning Commissioner”, City of Lafayette, Colorado, Planning & Building – uses a job description to inform and apprise applicants of the duties, responsibilities and expectations inherent in the position. It lays it out up front.

“A Commission Member’s Code”, City of Linden, Washington – has as its purpose to establish a common ethic among a diverse membership to achieve common goals. A similar statement adapted to the particular sensibilities of the community could be incorporated into an “oath of office” upon one’s assuming appointment to a planning commission.

## **INTERLIBRARY LOAN MATERIALS**

The following on **planning commissions** can be borrowed via MnLINK.

- Planning Commissioner’s Guide, David J. Allor, *Planners Press*, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL. 1984.
- The Job of the Planning Commissioner: Third Edition Revised, Albert Solint, *Planners Press*, American Planning Association, Chicago, IL. 1987.

## **LEGAL NOTES**

The following Minnesota Statutes convey the authority to establish planning commissions:

- For townships, MS § 366.17 - Planning and zoning commissions.
- For counties, MS §394.30 - County board’s planning commission.

- For cities, MS § 462.354 - Organization for planning.
- For regional planning, MS § 462.373 - Regional planning board; powers and duties.
- For local government units within the seven county metropolitan area, MS § 473.858 – Comprehensive plans; local governmental units.

The **Local Planning Assistance Center at the Department of Administration** helps local governments with planning efforts, including comprehensive planning, zoning, hazard mitigation planning, GIS applications and development issues.

Upon request, this document will be made available in an alternate format, such as Braille, large print or audiotape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay Service at 800-627-3529 and ask for the Department of Administration.

**Local Planning Assistance Center**

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