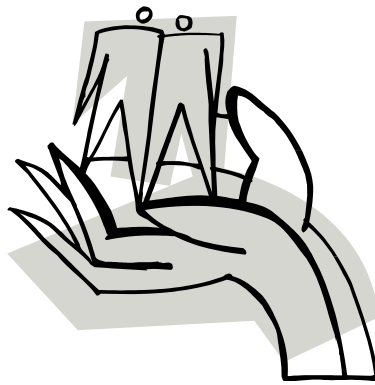


# The City of East Lansing Board & Commission Training Seminar



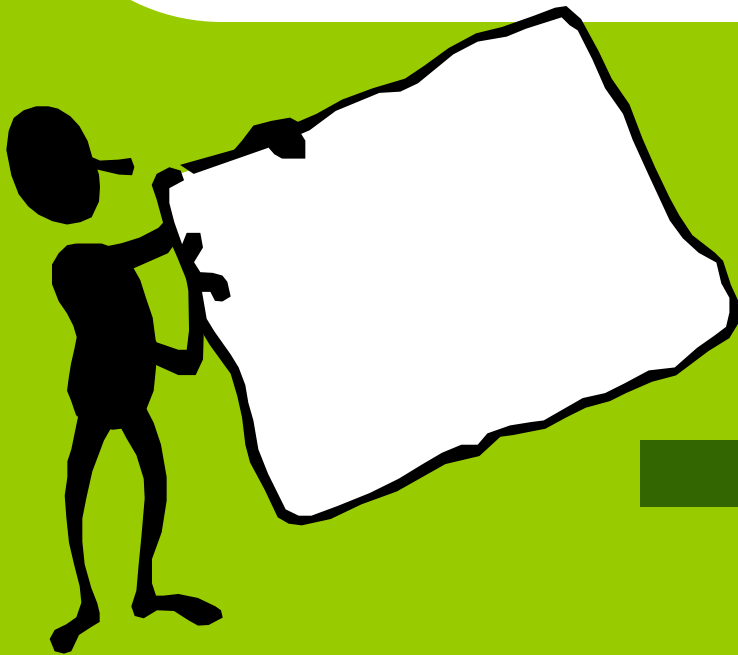
May 12, 2008



***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”***

***- Margaret Mead***

**Marie McKenna**  
**Assistant to the City Manager**



# Specific Roles of Appointed Boards & Commissions

- **Advisory:**
  - Deliberates and makes recommendations to City Council which may or may not be adopted
  - Examples: USC and the Senior Commission
- **Administrative**
  - Statute or local mandates guide process
  - Can make independent decisions which may be appealed to the City Council or Circuit Court
  - Example: Zoning Board of Appeals



# Relationship with City Council

- Each CC member serves as a non-voting liaison to several boards & commissions
- Councilmembers share commission updates with CC
- CC Strategic Priorities guide decision-making
- Boards & Commission provide annual reports to CC during a televised CC meeting

# Relationship with City Staff

- Each Board & Commission is assigned a staff liaison
- City staff are non-voting, neutral participants
- Staff presents formal recommendations to CC on behalf of Boards & Commissions
- Department heads direct staff activities, it is not appropriate for commissioners to do so

# Role of the City Attorney

- All contact with the City Attorney must be arranged through the staff liaison
- The City Attorney provides legal counsel to the CC and represents the City as an entity (rather than individuals)
- City Attorney decisions are binding as he or she will defend the City in the case of a legal challenge

# Working Successfully Together

- Diversity on Boards & Commissions ensures that a breadth of community perspectives can be heard
- Thoughtful consideration of all points of view is strongly encouraged
- Separate people from issues when conflict arises
- Teamwork and consensus building are paramount





# Board & Commission Responsibilities

- Regular attendance
- Advance preparation and review of materials
- Observe and model decorum at all times
- Follow parliamentary procedure to conduct meetings
- Make recommendations to CC as required by law or upon request
- Abide by the requirements of the Open Meetings Act



# Media Relations

- East Lansing is covered by all forms of media
- Media may misquote or misrepresent your comments so if you don't want to read it in the paper (or see it on U-tube!) then don't say it!
- Be certain that you are the appropriate person to speak with the media on a given topic
- You have the right to expression as a private citizen, but be sure to clarify with the media that you are not representing a view other than your own

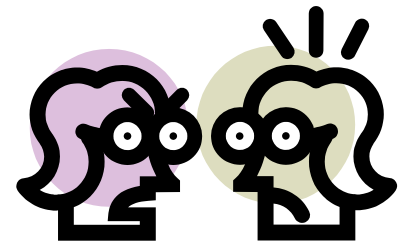
# Role of the Chairperson

- As the presiding officer, the chair is key to the effectiveness of meetings
- The chair must use Parliamentary Procedure to conduct smooth meetings
- The chair must set the tone by ensuring that all voices are heard and divergent perspectives are given consideration
- The chair must treat the public with courtesy and diplomacy

# Successful Meetings

- Public hearings are public meetings...  
*not meetings of the public*
- Refrain from displaying negative gestures and sounds of disagreement (practice that poker face!)
- Technical jargon should be clarified so all can follow the meeting
- Treat the public with dignity and respect, thank them for their participation





# The Challenging Meeting

- Plan the agenda strategically and carefully
- Convey that you are aware of concerns so that all will remain calm and receptive during deliberations
- Anticipate and prepare in advance, responses to difficult questions that may arise
- Request that staff re-state the issue(s) so that all are working with the same set of facts

# The Challenging Meeting – cont'd

- Explain the rules surrounding public comment at the outset
- Make sure that all who wish to speak have the opportunity to do so
- Model polite listening behavior
- Apply public speaking time limits impartially and consistently



# General Liability

- The City's "errors and omissions" insurance policy covers commissioners engaged in City business
- Actions must be based on standards and accepted review practices that comply with the legal framework under which they operate
- Administrative decisions that are "arbitrary and capricious" may not be covered

# Rules & Procedures for Boards and Commissions

- Appointments are for three-year terms, with a two terms maximum
- A commissioner filling a vacancy for the remainder of the terms is still eligible for two full terms on the same commission
- A quorum is required to conduct business and is defined as a majority of the members *appointed and serving*
- You must inform staff if you are unable to attend so that the presence of a quorum can be determined



# Questions & Answers



# **Dennis McGinty**

## **East Lansing City Attorney**



Over view of the legal &  
ethical framework for  
public bodies