



Boards & Commissions Handbook

The City of Houghton is proud to have many residents and community members dedicate their time and talents to the city's boards and commissions. The function and responsibility of each board, and commission varies, but all of them work to improve the city and create an environment in which people want to live and work.

Your volunteerism as a member of one of our boards or commissions will afford you with the opportunity to become involved with the operation of municipal government. As a member of a board or commission you will be responsible for assisting the city in the decision making process by reviewing and evaluating information and rendering recommendations within the context of your board or commission. Your influence over policy, direction and approvals makes your role very important.

Remember that as a member of a board or commission you are representing the city as a whole. It is important to avoid supporting single issues or pursuing a personal or private agenda.

The City of Houghton encourages residents to get involved in local government by joining a board or commission.

Appointments are made by the mayor, council, or city manager. Except for a vacancy, appointments are made yearly at the second council meeting in December.

Applications are available at the City Clerk's Office and on the City's website, www.cityofhoughton.com, and can be submitted to: City Clerk, P.O. Box 606, Houghton, Michigan 49931.

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APPOINTMENT PROCESS

Most appointments to boards and commissions will be made at the second council meeting in December as terms generally begin on January 1st each year. Sixty days prior to any expiration of a board or commission term of office, the current member will be notified and asked if they would like to be re-appointed. If the member accepts re-appointment their name will be submitted for approval. If the member declines, the position will be posted on the city's website, www.cityofhoughton.com and in the newspaper.

Individuals interested in an opening on a board or commission will be directed to complete an Application for Appointment which can be downloaded from the city's web site or obtained from the clerk's office.

All applications must be submitted to the clerk's office by the deadline date specified on each posting. All applications received by the clerk's office will be provided to the mayor, council, and city manager for consideration.

In the event a term is vacated due to resignation, the same process will be followed once notification of said resignation has been received.

OPERATING PROCEDURES

Rules of Procedure

Each board and commission shall follow Rules of Procedure created by the board or commission and provided to the clerk for record keeping.

Attendance

Appointment to a board or commission is a privilege freely sought by the applicant. It carries with it the responsibility to participate in board or commission activities and represent the residents of the city. Good attendance ensures a steady flow of communication and keeps everyone abreast of current topics under discussion. Therefore each member should make every effort to attend all meetings.

When a member is unable to attend a meeting, the clerk should be notified as soon as possible. A member may be removed for absenteeism based on the By-laws or Rules of Procedure created by the board or commission.

Posting for Regular and Special Meetings

All meetings of boards and commissions will be posted on the city website as well as at the city office. Each posting will state the date, time and place of the meeting. All meetings should be posted at least seven days prior to the meeting. However, in some cases special meetings can be posted at least 24 hours before the meeting.

Regular Meetings

All meetings of boards and commissions shall be properly posted and held in compliance with state statutes, including the Open Meetings Act, 1976 PA 267, as amended. All meetings shall be open to the public.

If it is known in advance that a quorum (more than half the members of the board or commission) cannot be achieved, consideration will be taken to notify all members and persons interested in the

business before the body. A notice will be posted indicating that due to a lack of quorum, the meeting is cancelled or rescheduled.

Special Meetings

Boards and commissions may hold special meetings as circumstances dictate. Notice stating the date, time and place of any special meeting and the purpose for which called shall be posted for the public and given to each member of the board or commission at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

Quorum

A majority of the members of any board or commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at all meetings.

Rescheduled or Adjourned Meetings

For a rescheduled or adjourned regular or special meeting of any board or committee, a public notice stating the time and place of the meeting shall be posted at least 24 hours prior to the meeting in the city office, on the city website, and all other places as may be determined.

Meetings to be Public

All meetings shall be open to the public and shall be held in a place available to the general public. All persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting except as otherwise provided by state law, and all persons shall have a reasonable opportunity to be heard. Boards and commissions may limit the amount of time one individual can address the board or commission in their Rules of Procedure. All decisions of any board or commission shall be made at a meeting open to the public. All deliberations of any board or commission constituting a quorum of its members shall take place at a meeting open to the public except as otherwise provided for in the Open Meetings Act.

Meeting Preparation

There are various approaches to prepare for meetings. The following are some suggestions.

- Prepare by budgeting enough time to thoroughly review the entire agenda packet.
- When the packet is delivered; examine the agenda to get an idea of:
 - The number of items
 - Controversial issues
 - Difficult procedural items
 - Issues you know little about
- Begin your study of the individual agenda items.
- Visit any sites or facilities that will help you deal with the issues. Research the topics as necessary for a complete understanding of the issues/topics.
- If you have questions after completing your review of the agenda, feel free to call the chairperson or city manager to go over the various items.

Presiding Officer

The Chairperson will preside at all meetings of the board or commission. In the absence of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson will preside. All comments must be directed to the presiding officer.

Members of the public will speak only when recognized by the presiding officer.

Agenda Preparation

Agendas for all meetings shall be prepared by the city manager or staff liaison. Any agenda item requested to be placed on an agenda must generally be submitted to the city manager prior to the meeting. Board and commission members will have the opportunity to add items to the agenda at the beginning of each meeting.

The agenda and supporting materials will be sent at least 24 hours before the meeting date.

Agenda Format

The following agenda format is recommended for all boards and commissions:

- Call meeting to Order
- Roll Call of Members
- Approval of Minutes
- Citizen Participation
- Public Hearings
- Reports
- New Business
- Unfinished Business
- Adjournment

Minutes

Written minutes, upon the approval of the board or commission, constitute the official action record of its activities. The minutes are not verbatim; they record the essence of the decisions made and action taken. Minutes of meetings must be given to the clerk for official record keeping.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Please note that any documents relating to any board or commission (i.e. minutes, personal notes, emails, public notices, etc.) are considered public records and copies can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Annual Reports and Joint Meetings

On an annual basis, the planning commission shall prepare an Annual Report to be approved by the membership and provided to the council.

Every February the council will hold a joint meeting with the planning commission and DDA/TIFA.

Training

The city encourages all members of boards and commissions to take part in any training courses offered by the city and other organizations. State law may require training for members of some boards or commissions. Individual boards and commissions will establish training priorities for the year and track attendance of members at training events in the minutes.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The following general information is designed to provide you with tools and techniques for you to follow as a guide in your role as a board or commission member. Hopefully some of the information provided will be of value as you participate in your various meetings.

Public Participation

People presenting an issue or even speaking at a meeting may have never appeared before a public body. The experience can be intimidating. This is not uncommon and you can help these individuals by:

1. Explaining meeting procedures.
2. Paying attention.
3. Actively listening to what they are saying.

Managing Difficult Meetings

From time to time you may face a controversial issue that will manifest itself in a very difficult meeting environment. This type of meeting will most likely involve representatives from one or more sides of an issue who will try and convince you that their position is the correct and right one. Keep the following in mind as you prepare for and participate in this meeting environment.

- **Before the Meeting**
 - If possible, the chairperson may ask that participants designate one or more spokespersons to represent like viewpoints. This may help reduce redundancy while making sure that all sides of the issue will be heard.
 - The staff representative or recorder should make sure to have agendas and any backup information available for attendees.
 - Make certain that adequate seating is available. Consider moving the meeting to a larger room if necessary.
 - Establish and announce the rules before the meeting.

- **During the Meeting**
 - The chairperson should explain the issues, the possible actions and procedures that will be followed at the meeting.
 - Have speakers address the board or commission and not the audience.
 - Stop any clapping or shouting early. If not already covered at the beginning of the meeting, explain the reasons why such actions are disruptive and counterproductive.
 - Citizen pressure on boards and commissions can be tough. It is important to remember to address an issue with an open mind and weigh all the facts. Your credibility will be greatly diminished if there is a perception that an issue is a “Done Deal.”

Making Tough Decisions

When considering decision making on tough issues, here are questions that might help you think through a pending decision. Not all of these apply in all situations.

- Do I have a conflict of interest in this matter and have I disclosed it?
- Do others who are involved have a conflict of interest?
- Are ethical issues involved?
- Is it permitted by law?
- Do I have enough information to make a decision?
- Can I live with the proposed decision?
- Who will be hurt by the proposed action? Who will benefit?
- Is the decision in the best interest of the majority of residents?
- How will the community view the decision?
- Is the proposed action consistent with my board's or commission's mission?
- What past practices relate to this issue?
- If the decision is made, and it turns out wrong, can it be reversed?
- If I am hesitating – why?

Working With Other Board or Commission Members

It is important to remember that your fellow members have opinions and thoughts that may not coincide with yours. Divergent opinions are not a bad thing and the democratic process works best when all points of view are able to be expressed freely and openly. Your colleagues deserve your respect and the freedom to express their viewpoints. Here are behaviors or actions that negatively affect your working relationships with fellow members:

- Magnify errors of fellow members
- Attempts to dominate meetings
- Cut off statements of fellow members
- Make fun of fellow members
- Not show up at scheduled meetings or events
- Commit to a position before the meeting
- Take individual credit for group accomplishments

- Fail to listen to fellow members
- Violate a fellow member's confidence
- Force a vote on a key issue before the group is ready
- Criticize staff in public
- Fail to prepare for meetings

GENERAL PARLIAMENTARY RULES

Rules of Parliamentary Procedure - The rules of parliamentary practice as contained in Robert's Rules of Order, most recent edition, may be followed in all cases to which they are applicable, provided they are not in conflict with these Rules, the Board or Commission's Rules of Procedure, City Ordinances, Charter, or other applicable laws.

Discussion. A board or committee member may speak when no motion is pending upon recognition by the presiding officer as provided in these rules. Comments should be limited to the next pending item of business on the agenda.

Withdrawal of a Motion or Support. A member may withdraw his or her motion or support at any time before it is put to a vote.

CONCLUSION

This handbook has been presented to you as a guide for your participation on a board or commission. It does not cover all aspects of the board or commission that you may be requesting or have been appointed to. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of staff that will assist you in the performance of your duties and responsibilities.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT RELATED
BOARDS AND COMMITTEES**

Please utilize the following plans and documents:

Zoning Ordinance
Master Plan
Public Participation Plan

These documents are located on the City website at:
www.cityofhoughton.com