



# **CITY OF LAKE FOREST PARK VOLUNTEER COMMISSION MANUAL**





## THE LAKE FOREST PARK VOLUNTEER COMMISSION SYSTEM

Commissions play an important role in city government. Commissioners represent the views, needs and values, and provide an independent voice of the community in making recommendations on programs and policies to the Mayor and City Council. Each commission maintains knowledge and expertise on issues related to their commission's focus and plays a role in influencing policy decisions.

Commission work presents many fulfilling experiences:

1. The satisfaction in fulfilling civic responsibilities and making the city a better place to live.
2. The opportunity to learn about broader aspects of government.
3. The opportunity to meet new people and work on behalf of the betterment of the community.
4. The opportunity to gain volunteer advisory experience to add to your resume.

### Commissions and Committees

- 1) **\* Planning Commission:** Drafts the city's comprehensive plan and makes recommendations on the zoning code and related land use policies.
- 2) **Transportation Commission:** Provides advice, guidance and support for improved movement throughout the city by foot, bus, bicycle or motor vehicle.
- 3) **The Community Services Commission:** Focuses on parks and recreation, human services, public safety in enhancing the quality of life and inspiring a sense of unique community.
- 4) **Environmental Quality Commission:** Advises on environmental policy issues, advocates for safeguarding and improving the environment, and provides related community education
- 5) **Economic Development Commission:** Promotes the long-term economic health and sustainability of the city.
- 6) **\* Civil Service Commission:** The Civil Service Commission has jurisdiction on police personnel issues, as required by state law. It administers civil service rules for the Police Department that includes establishing eligibility lists for hiring, reviewing candidate applications and making hiring recommendations. The additional duties of this commission are defined in the civil service code of the city.

\* Note: The Planning and Civil Service Commissions are required by Washington State Statute

- 7) **Library Committee:** Ensures that the library is responsive to the needs of the community by maintaining communication with city government, the community, and the King County Library System.

### **Task Forces**

The Mayor and the council may from time to time establish task forces. Task forces or committees are formed on a temporary basis to deal with a specific policy area or issues.

### **Sub-Committees**

Commissions may establish, through their approved work plan, sub-committees of the commission's appointed members in order to advise to commission on specific aspects of their work plan. Sub-committees make only recommendations to their commission, and may not take final action on any commission business even with a quorum of a commission present at a sub-committee meeting.

## **The Process for Becoming a Commissioner**

### **1) Residency Requirements for Commissioners**

Members of the planning and civil service commissions must be residents. However, on all of the other commissions, business owners or employees of businesses located in Lake Forest Park may serve in one position. The economic development commission may have three non-residents who own or work for local businesses. If a commissioner moves out of the city and/or is no longer employed in the city, the commissioner must resign.

### **2) Nomination Process**

Commissioners are nominated by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. Generally, the Mayor will request a resume or a letter of interest from an interested individual. The prospective member may also complete the commissioner application and send it to the deputy city clerk. The Mayor and the chair of the commission meet with a prospective commissioner prior to proceeding with a formal nomination.

### **3) Confirmation Process**

The council must confirm the appointments, with the exception of Civil Service commissioners. Prior to consideration of confirmation by the City Council, prospective commissioners must attend at least one meeting of the commission to which he or she is being appointed. The city councilmembers interview the candidate during a council work session. Nominees should be prepared to answer questions from the councilmembers. In the past, councilmembers have been interested in why the nominee wants to serve, as well as his or her interest and/or experience with the issues addressed by the commission. The nomination process is continued to the next council meeting for final action. After confirmation, the city clerk's office sends a letter to the individual notifying him/her of the appointment.



## Commission Terms and Reappointments

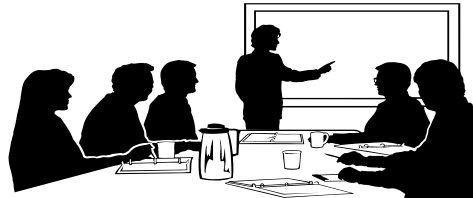
### 1) Term Commitments

Commission terms are three years, except for Civil Service commissioners who serve for six years. All of the commissions have nine members with the exception of the Civil Service Commission that has three. Commissioners are appointed starting March 1 of each year. Vacancies are filled throughout the year. An individual may be re-appointed to a commission with the approval of the Mayor and Council. Commissioners may serve for two consecutive three-year terms on the same commission. Commissioners who reach their term limit may be appointed to serve on the same commission after a one-year break in service. The Mayor may fill vacancies at any time. If a commissioner is appointed to fulfill the term of a commissioner who has left, the remainder of the term is not considered as part of the two three-year terms.

### 2) Resignations

If a commissioner is unable to complete the term, it is important to advise the Mayor and commission chair. A letter of resignation should be sent to the Mayor indicating the date the resignation is effective or whether the commissioner is able to serve until a replacement is named and confirmed.

## Work Schedule for Commissions



Written annual report completed	Last week in February
Term expiration	February 28
New commissioners begin their terms of office	March 1
Chair and vice chair selected by quorum of commission members	March 31
Annual work plan due to Mayor and City Council	August 30

## Commission Role and Responsibilities

Each commission is unique in its purpose, mission, and role. The ordinance passed by the City Council on June 24, 2008 is included in the appendix and provides further information on commission responsibilities.

### 1) Commission Role

Members of all commissions provide an important link between and among the public and city departments, the Council and the Mayor. The information that members provide about community needs and opinions can have a profound effect on local policies and lead to improved service. With their independent voices, commission members play a very special role in making recommendations on important societal and governmental issues. Individual commission members are encouraged to make their service on the commission known to their neighbors and community, and be open to input from the public.

Commissions do not create or administer policy, programs, or services. They do not have authority to enforce policy or create rules, but their analysis and recommendations can play an important role in furthering the effective operation of city government. Commissioners are not representatives of the city unless authorized by the Mayor and City Council to act or speak on the city's behalf.

### 2) Advisory Duties of Commissions

- Serve as advisors on policy matters to the Mayor and/or council.
- Study existing policy and its implementation and make recommendations for changes at request of Mayor and City Council.
- Implement the commission's approved work plan.
- Sponsor public meetings, public education programs, or surveys to gain insight about public views at the request of the administration with the approval of the administration. This may result in recommendations for new programs or new ways of approaching issues.
- Assist and evaluate the implementation of city sponsored programs.
- Volunteer in implementing projects.
- Provide budget input during the budget building process.



### 3) Restrictions and Requirements

The commissioner should be aware of certain restrictions and requirements that may affect a commissioner's tenure.

- Each commission is required to meet once a quarter unless they are subject to state requirements.
- Commission members must be familiar with and operate within the governing ordinance.
- Recommendations approved by the Commission should be in written notes.
- Commissioners vote by a show of hands, roll call or voice vote. A secret ballot is prohibited.
- Commission meetings and sub-committee meetings are open to the public.
- Meetings must be properly noticed in advance, posted on the City web site and attendance made accessible to the public.

- No commission member may make unilateral decisions on behalf of the commission, take action or represent the view of the commission without the consent of the commission.
- Individual commission members may not speak for the city or act in a manner that may be construed as representing the city unless specifically authorized to do so in coordination with the administration.
- Positions taken by a commission are advisory to the Mayor and City Council and are not positions of the City.
- Questions about commission issues should be directed to the commission's staff, the city administrator or the Mayor who will see that all commission members receive information by the next regular meeting.
- The Mayor and the city administrator are responsible for staffing the commissions and the daily work priorities of city staff.
- Commissions may initiate and propose, subject to approval by the council, new issue areas for review and discussion through their work plan and updates to their work plan. Discussion of new initiatives should not interfere with achievement of the adopted work plan.

## **The Commission Chair**

### **1) The Chair's Role**

The chair plays an important role as facilitator and leader of the commission. The chair works with staff in setting the agenda for meetings in order to achieve the commission work plan and provides the following:

- Keeps the discussion focused and on topic
- Clarifies and rephrases if people are not understood
- Assures that commissioners are heard on any given topic
- Manages the pacing of the meeting
- Separates areas of agreement from areas of disagreement
- Summarizes ideas, content and recommendations
- Manages conflict
- Tests for agreement
- Gets feedback
- Makes sure everyone know the decisions that are being made
- Calls for a vote of members as deemed necessary. Voting by secret ballot is prohibited and the chair as a member of the commission must vote.



### **2) Chair's Role in Relation to New or Prospective Members**

- The chair is responsible for meeting with individual prospective members in coordination with the Mayor.
- After a new member is accepted to the commission, the chair in coordination with staff is responsible for providing an orientation.

**3) The Vice Chair's Role**

The Vice Chair assumes the duties of the Chair in the Chair's absence. Commissions may delegate other normal functions and duties to the Vice Chair at each commission's discretion.

**4) Selection of the Chair and Vice Chair**

Each commission shall have a chair and vice chair, elected by a quorum of the appointed commission members by March 31 of each year. Commission members may be elected to chair the committee to which they are appointed no more than 36 months out of any 48-consecutive-month period. Chair terms will begin upon election and end upon election of a new chair or not later than March 31st of the subsequent year.

If no chair or vice chair are elected by March 31, the Mayor shall select a chair and vice chair from the appointed members of the commission and submit the names to the City Council by the first regular Council meeting of April for confirmation.

**5) Meeting Notes**

The commission chair must assign a commission member to take meeting notes if staff is not available. The names of members in attendance and those absent should be recorded in the notes. The purpose of the notes is to record important decisions and recommendations. Notes are a record of the summary of the meeting and should be distributed to members in a timely fashion for approval at the next meeting of the commission. Notes will be posted on the web after being approved by commission members.

**6) Guests, Experts and Other Outside Participation**

Commissions may invite guests, experts and other non-appointed individuals to participate in specific agenda item discussions. These invited participants may not vote on specific recommendations or decisions.

**7) Managing the Public at Commission Meetings**

Members of the public may attend commission meetings. It is at the discretion of the commission via the chair when the commission wants to hear from them. If there is a tight agenda, it may be best to have participation at the end of the meeting. If the public is to comment on a particular item it may be most appropriate to have comments first or when the specific item comes up. It is helpful to make meeting procedures clear to guests, especially if they are unfamiliar with commission procedures. The chair can also establish reasonable time limits for each speaker. Sometimes there will be difficult behavior at the meeting; it is the responsibility of the chair to manage the behavior. If there are ongoing problems, contact the Mayor for assistance.

**8) Quarterly Meetings with the Mayor and City Council**

Each quarter, the chairs and vice chairs of the commissions meet with the Mayor and a Council designated city councilmember. The purpose of these meetings is to share major issues with the other commissions and to provide an opportunity for joint planning. Meetings are held in the evening generally on the first Monday of the quarter.



## Being an Effective Commissioner

Lake Forest Park commissions vary in complexity and operation. Because commission members are in a critical position to shape and influence commission decisions and actions, it is important that each member keeps informed and up-to-date on issues, council activity, and ordinances affecting their commission. Individuals who accept an appointment to a commission are committing to attending commission meetings and becoming involved in deliberations.

### 1) Attendance

It is critical that commissioners attend commission meetings. It is important for the work of the commission and the decisions and deliberations the commissions make. Regular attendance is essential so that decisions are a true representation of the opinions of the commission as a whole. In addition, regular attendance enables commission members to keep abreast of commission concerns and helps ensure that issues are examined from a variety of perspectives.

The city ordinance is specific regarding the attendance requirements. Attendance will be monitored and assessed in six-month periods from March 1 to August 31, and September 1 to February 28.

The Mayor will be in contact with commissioners who are consistently absent from a significant number of meetings to discuss their participation. The city understands the need to balance family and work obligations with the needs of the commission. The Mayor will take into consideration if a commissioner has occasional family obligations, is required to travel because of work, or is ill. However, the Mayor may assume the position is vacant and appoint someone to the position if there are consistent absences of more than 50 percent of the meetings for a year or more. The ordinance requires the Mayor to monitor attendance whether it is excused or not.

### 2) Meeting Preparation

Adequate preparation is another requisite for effective membership on the commission. The commission's staff member will provide reports, proposals, and other information to help make informed decisions.

### 3) Keys to Being an Effective Commissioner:

- Attend all regularly scheduled and special commission meetings.
- Arrive well prepared and on time for meetings.
- Recognize that serving the public interest is the top priority.
- Recognize that the commission must operate in an open and public manner.
- Become knowledgeable about the legislative process and issues affecting the commission.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
- Communicate effectively and actively participate in group discussions.





- Remember that authority to act is granted to the commission as a whole, not to individual members.
- Possess a willingness to work with the group in making decisions.
- Recognize that compromise may be necessary in order to reach group consensus.
- Commission members are expected to work with all of the other members of the commission. If one member has personal problems with other members or staff, please contact the city administrator or Mayor.
- Remain open to ideas from other commissioners, your neighbors, and the community and public at large.

#### **4) Orientation to Your Commission**

After you are appointed, the chairperson of your commission will schedule an orientation session with you. During this time, the chairperson will review:

- The Volunteer Commission Manual
- Your commission's work plan for the year.
- Pertinent commission issues and projects (past and present).
- The City Council schedule.

#### **5) Removal of Commissioner**

A commission member can be removed for illegal, unethical, dishonest or disruptive behavior; neglect of duty; misrepresentation(s), lack of attendance or criminal conviction. The chair of the commission and/or the Mayor may make recommendations for removal of a commissioner. The removal of a commissioner is finalized when the City Council votes to approve the removal of a commissioner.

## **Conducting Commission Business**

### **1) Public Disclosure**

All commission meetings are open to the public. Commissions are required by city ordinance to make a record of meetings. When the commission approves the record, the record is filed with the city clerk who is responsible for distribution. All votes taken by the commission must be recorded including the names of commissioners who vote yes and those voting no on split votes. Approved meeting notes are sent to the deputy city clerk who posts them on the commission web site and sends email notification to councilmembers.

### **2) Ethics and the Appearance of Fairness**

Commission members are expected to uphold a high standard of ethics. It is extremely important that commission members avoid conflicts of interest, or even the appearance of conflicts of interest.

### **3) Quorum**

A majority of the membership of a commission constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. If a quorum is not present, no official business can take place. Any action taken by the

majority of those present, when those present constitute a quorum at any regular or special meeting of a commission, shall be deemed and taken as the action of the commission.

#### **4) Lobbying and Campaigning**

##### **a) Lobbying**

A commission member designated by his/her commission as its representative may provide information and make informed recommendations on issues to Council and the Mayor. Any commissioner may testify before the council as an individual citizen. Individuals acting on their own may not represent themselves as speaking for the commission. (See the section on policy-making recommendations below.)

##### **b) Presentation to Council**

A commission may request to make a presentation to the council. It is up to the council whether such requests will be placed on the agenda.

##### **c) Ballot Measures**

Commission members may not use any public facilities to assist a campaign for election of any person to any office or any ballot measure. This includes calling staff during office hours to ask advice on a ballot issue, or discussing activities regarding the ballot measure on public property. Commissions may recommend that the council endorses a public initiative related to the role of the commission. Commissions, as individual citizens may participate in ballot or election issues, but when speaking publicly must stipulate that they are speaking as an individual citizen.

#### **5) Legal Counsel**

If a commission needs to have any legal questions answered, they may ask staff to request clarification from the city attorney.



#### **6) City Website**

Each commission has a web page that includes the current agenda and meeting notes and a description of the commission role. Commissioners may work with staff to make additions and changes to the website.

#### **7) Council Liaisons**

Individual city councilmembers serve as a liaison between council and an assigned commission. Councilmembers attend the commission meetings and represent the commission to the council and vice versa. This provides for effective communication between the Council and the commissions.

#### **8) Work Plans**

A work plan is the annual summary of work, issues and policy areas that a commission is striving to achieve. Work plans are developed in conjunction with the administration and approved by Council. Work plans are based on commission areas of responsibility and are focused on city/council goals, the comprehensive plan or other adopted plans, policy recommendations and existing commission programs. Work plans include:

- A brief description of each of the policy or issues (whether initiated by the Council, Mayor or commission), for both single issues and ongoing areas of responsibility;
- The city mayoral or council goal to be advanced by the policy or issue;
- Deliverables;
- Estimated timeframes for deliverables;
- Costs and staffing needs;
- Sub-committees and their charge; and
- Other issues of note.

Changes to work plans are necessary when commissions seek to add/remove issues for study and evaluation or address.

Work plans are proposed by commissions to the Mayor and City Council, after working with the city administrator and Mayor to define staffing and funding needs. If the work plan is submitted by the required August 30 submission date, the Mayor will review, work with the commission and forward the work plan for adoption by resolution by October 1. For a work plan process initiated by the Mayor with the commission because it was not submitted by August 30, the Mayor will forward the work plan for adoption by resolution within three weeks of receipt of the final commission-approved plan. If the Mayor and commission cannot reach agreement on the work plan, council will consider both of the proposed work plans.

Commissions are encouraged to propose work plan updates as new initiatives and/or ideas are identified through community input and commission initial exploration. It is important to note that the exploration of new initiatives should not interfere with achievement of the approved work plan. If the commission submits a change or amendment to the work plan, the Mayor will begin the review process with the commission and will forward the amended work plan for adoption by resolution within three weeks of receipt of the final commission-approved plan. If the Mayor and commission cannot reach agreement on the amendment, council will consider both proposals.

## **Policy-Making Recommendations**

### **1) Public Policy**

Commissions may be asked by the Mayor or City Council to develop a policy recommendation for a specific issue. These recommendations are submitted to the Mayor for review, who will submit them to the Council. It is important that commissioners understand the fundamental meaning and characteristics of policy.

- Policy is a written statement.
- It is intended to be a guiding principle defining an organization's intent and direction. Policy should be set forth in broad terms so that it may remain applicable and usable for a long period of time.
- It should not be so detailed that it dictates how, when, or where things must be done.
- Policy may be amended, rewritten or abolished.

- Policy should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains relevant.
- Policy should be stated clearly and concisely.

## 2) Program Recommendations

The commissions also have a role in making program recommendations. For example, the decision to provide teen programs is a policy decision. Suggestions on the type of programs and how programs might work more effectively constitute program recommendations.



## 3) Making Recommendations to Council

The Mayor or the council may request a commission to review an issue and/or make a recommendation on a specific item. When presenting recommendations to the Council, it is essential that commission members keep the following in mind:

- All recommendations should be in written form; staff can assist in the preparation of the needed documents.
- All ideas should be expressed in clear and concise language.
- Proposed solutions should be viable and cost-effective.
- Recommendations should identify the reasons for the changes suggested.
- The advice should reflect *a consensus or a majority* of the commission members.
- The commission must make a recorded vote at a public meeting to make a recommendation from the commission.

If the commission submits a report or policy memorandum to the Mayor, the information shall be transmitted to the City Council at the next regular meeting with or without comments or recommendations.

## 4) Policy Documents that Guide the City

A primary policy document for the city is the City Comprehensive Plan. This is revised every four years. The Planning Commission and city planner are responsible for drafting the Comprehensive Plan and its proposed updates for City Council consideration. Individual commissions are asked to revise the section of the plan that is pertinent to their program area. In addition there are other policy documents that guide citywide policies these include: the Parks and Recreation Open Space Plan, the Shoreline Master Plan, and the Surface Water Plan.

## 5) Testifying at Public Hearings

Commission members may choose to testify at legislative, local government or community hearings. When providing testimony on behalf of the commission, members should refrain from expressing personal opinions. It can be helpful to provide copies of written testimony prior to the hearing. To provide effective testimony, members should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- All testimony should be brief, concise, and honest.
- Since you will not likely have time to read lengthy written testimony; you may want to highlight important points in the written report when you speak. The report can be distributed to the Mayor and City Council.
- If others are offering similar testimony, try to coordinate information to avoid repetition.

- Be prepared to answer questions. If you are unable to answer a question, offer to provide a written response later and always follow through.
- If you must give a personal opinion, make sure it is understood that you are not speaking for the commission, but for yourself.
- When lobbying as an individual, do not identify yourself as a commissioner.

## **Policy Implementation: The Budget Process**

### **1) City Budget Process**

The City is on a biennial budget or two-year budget cycle. The Mayor presents the proposed budget to council in October prior to the first year of the budget cycle. The Council reviews the budget and makes its own revisions. A balanced budget must be passed by Council by December 31. Commissions complete their work plans and may submit budget requests to support these plans by the end of August to the Mayor and Council. The Mayor may or may not include these requests in the budget submitted to the council.

### **2) Raising Money through Grants**

Funds may be available from other sources such as King County, Washington State agencies and the federal government. Local governments are sometimes eligible to apply for funds from foundations too. The Mayor must approve the application for grants. The City Council must approve the acceptance of grants. If a commission becomes aware of a funding source, it should work with the assigned commission staff to determine if the city should apply for a grant and, if so, who will write the grant, and the feasibility of administering the funded program.

*Thank you for volunteering to serve on a city  
commission*

