

## Advisory Committee Structure and Logistics

An Advisory Committee can play a valuable role in a comprehensive planning process. The committee should be the focal point for dialogue and consensus-building so that the resulting plan is truly reflective of the interests and objectives of the community.

### Role of the Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee is usually appointed by the City Council. The committee is structured so its members reflect the range of interests and perspectives found in the community. The interests represented on the committee are discussed below.

The Advisory Committee has a central role in the process to create a new plan. It works with the City staff and consultants in reviewing information and analysis, defining and evaluating potential alternatives for the future and considering possible goals and action priorities. It recommends a draft document for consideration by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council. The Advisory Committee also plays an important role in building consensus among interests about the recommendations and direction of the plan. In this role, the committee members are expected to share their own perspectives, listen to the perspectives of other members, and seek to reach an agreement on recommendations that best serve the future of the community as a whole.

Ideally, the Advisory Committee becomes a group that champions the approval of the plan and its implementation over time.

### Responsibilities of Individual Advisory Committee Members

The knowledge, experience and perspectives each Committee member brings are very important to the future of the community. During the course of this process, members should contribute these perspectives to the discussion of issues and the creation of consensus recommendations.

While all Committee members should reflect and represent their own interests, they are also responsible for building agreement among committee members. Each member should listen to committee colleagues and seek to understand their ideas and concerns. Members should look for interests they share, understand the reasons for other members' positions, and try to develop recommendations that balance all interests represented on the committee. Committee members should expect to create trade-offs or compromises that will make it possible for all members to support the committee's direction and recommendations.

Each Committee member is also expected to be an 'ambassador' for the planning process. Throughout the process, members should share its progress with their colleagues and others who share their interests. Their assistance is important to let people know about the planning effort and to encourage colleagues to participate. Committee members should also work to build support for the draft plan's recommendations when those have been created.

### Committee Representation

Among the important issues in structuring the Committee is the question of representation. In general, the concepts are that representation should:

- Reflect the diversity of interests in the community (consider age, gender, ethnicity, length of experience with city affairs as well as those topical interests listed below)
- Include people from the various geographic parts of the community (if these have distinct issues and identities)
- Include key community leaders who can be champions for the plan and its implementation
- Include groups or individuals who could seek to block the plan if they have not been involved in its creation

Suggestions for Committee representation are:

- City Council. This requires consideration of a particular community's dynamics. If they are included, it usually makes sense to appoint two members with differing perspectives. In some communities, the City Council feels it's important to stay neutral while the plan is being drafted. If this is the case, it's still worthwhile to have discussions with Council during the planning process so members are aware of where things are heading and what's being discussed. This provides an opportunity to identify any potential situations where Council's perspective is dramatically different than that of the Committee and to address these early in the planning process.
- Planning and Zoning Commission. Usually a few members; sometimes a sub-committee of P&Z is used.
- Other Boards and Commissions. If the City has other specific Boards or Commissions that are likely to be important in plan implementation, they should be included in some way.
- Other Governmental Entities. Counties, state agencies, transportation providers and other governmental and quasi-governmental groups may be appropriate to include if they have or are making major investments that will shape or impact the community. Even if they are not formally represented on the committee, City staff should coordinate with staff at these agencies.
- Education. The local school district should participate. If there is only one (or one that's very dominant), that district should be included. If there are many, someone should represent them. Other educational interests to consider are charter schools, technical schools, community colleges and universities.
- Residents. These might include representative of neighborhood associations, umbrella neighborhood groups, homeowners associations, or tenant associations.
- Business. This often includes a Chamber of Commerce and/or an Economic Development Corporation. It can include organizations representing certain major industries or particular geographic business areas. Individual major employers can be included as well.
- Development and Real Estate. The development community may have its own organization, which would be included. The Realtors Association is also generally a player. Individuals in these fields may be invited because of their leadership role; alternatively, someone might be invited because they are doing creative, non-traditional development and this is expected to be a focus.
- Finance. Sometimes financial interests are included as part of business (i.e., the major local banks) or as part of development (i.e., broker and financial entities making the investments in development). Finance can be a separate group.
- Cultural or Ethnic Organizations. There may be particular organizations that represent cultural or ethnic groups (for instance, a Latina Women's' Leadership Group or an Asian-American Chamber of Commerce).

- Design Professionals. The professionals in this group include architects, engineers, urban designers, landscape architects and planners. In some cases, this expertise will be contributed by people in the development/real estate group. Depending on the project, the relevant professional organizations can be asked to provide a representative.
- Environmental Interests. These could include groups such as Audubon, Sierra Club, Trust for Public Land, etc.; there may be local groups that are active on these issues (such as a clean air coalition, or group organized around a particular environmental issue). Land conservancies (such as Nature Conservancy or Connemara Conservancy) and trails groups can be considered here, as well as Master Naturalists.
- Arts Organizations. These could include organizations such as museums, symphonies, or operas that provide major cultural contributions. They could also include smaller, more diverse creative organizations like local music or theater.
- Civic Groups. In some communities, organizations such as the League of Women Voters or another organization are active because they're interested in civic affairs in general. These people can often bring a good, balanced perspective and an ability to look at multiple sides of an issue.
- Other Specific Interests. Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to include groups like certain recreational interests (i.e., soccer groups, fishing enthusiasts), convention/tourism organizations, affordable housing organizations, historical preservation or heritage organizations, and so forth.