



Facilitating Successful Community Engagement with City Advisory Groups

Expectations of advisory group members and City of Bellingham officials

An important way we partner with our community to better understand and address its diverse needs is through City advisory boards, commissions, committees and task forces. Volunteer members of these groups bring varied perspectives and lived experiences for City leaders to consider while making decisions.

Serving the public's interest is a top priority for all our advisory groups. Membership is an honor and an important responsibility, requiring commitment of time, energy, expertise, commitment to comply with laws, and interest in promoting public trust and accountability.

These are the City's expectations of advisory group members to facilitate successful community engagement and volunteer experiences:

- Unless otherwise provided in the City Charter or state law, boards and commissions “... shall be advisory only and shall be for the purpose of assisting the Mayor or City Council in the performance of their duties.” (*Section 7.01, Bellingham City Charter*)
- Advisory group work must pertain to City business, addressing matters over which the City has jurisdiction and where its leaders can shape policy to meet City needs.
- Advisory groups must adopt bylaws consistent with City policy and legal requirements to establish rules for conducting their business, as provided for in individual enabling ordinances, and periodically review and update them.
- Advisory groups may issue recommendations and suggestions within the scope of their responsibilities and workplans. They should not direct staff, or create or administer policies, programs or services.
- All advisory group meetings must be conducted in public session and notice of meetings must be given in accordance with state law.
- A quorum of members may not discuss advisory group work and related issues via email, telephone, text, or in unnoticed meetings, as these actions may be in violation of the Open Public Meeting Act.

- Individual advisory group members and the group as a whole should strive to be open-minded, professional and respectful when working alongside the public, staff and each other.
- Members should be respectful of differing opinions, committed to working effectively in the group setting, contribute to healthy discourse and resolve conflict constructively.
- Members may not use their positions to secure special privileges or exemptions for themselves or others.
- Members may not give or receive any compensation or gifts from entities or individuals engaged in items of business under consideration before the group and must avoid conflicts of interest.
- Members may not represent or speak on behalf of an advisory group unless given express direction to do so by a majority vote of the group.
- Members may not act as representatives of the City unless expressly commissioned to do so by the Mayor or by formal action of the City Council.
- Members must attend meetings regularly and may not designate proxies to serve in their place unless allowed by the establishing ordinance.
- Members should remain up to date on processes and issues affecting their groups, be well prepared for meetings, and participate in orientations and trainings.
- Appointment decisions are made by the identified appointing authority according to the establishing ordinance. Members do not have a vested right to appointment or reappointment to a position.

Advisory group members can have these expectations of the City to facilitate successful community engagement and volunteer experiences:

- Provide and broadly promote opportunities for people to apply for positions on advisory groups, specifically encouraging interest from traditionally under-represented communities. Use consistent, fair and transparent processes for considering applicants, and make timely appointments.


- Provide leadership, guidance and administrative support to help each advisory group achieve its established purpose, contribute successfully and meaningfully to the City, and meet legal and policy requirements.
- Provide designated City staff, including points of City contact for questions or concerns. Designate a City staff person to attend each meeting.
- Set and publish timely agendas, work plans and meeting minutes, using established City systems. Group members may make recommendations or suggestions for meeting agendas and work plans.
- Provide meeting space, technical and logistics support. Address needs for ADA accommodations and language access, and consider other requests to support successful member participation.
- Organize orientation and training sessions for members, including training on the state Open Public Meetings and Public Records acts.
- Be open-minded, professional and respectful, demonstrating the City's established public services expectations, including maintaining a service and results orientation and demonstrating teamwork and cooperation.
- Facilitate adoption of bylaws and other group agreements to enable healthy discourse and move through conflict constructively. Provide facilitation, mediation or other services in support of this work or when a group is unable to resolve conflicts.

Additional expectations may be described in establishing ordinances approved by City Council when each group was formed and in bylaws or other agreements approved by individual groups.

We value the perspectives and services provided by advisory group members who contribute significantly to the leadership of our City. Thank you to everyone serving these important roles in our community!



Mayor Kim Lund
August 12, 2024



Dan Hammill, City Council President
August 12, 2024