

**City of Laingsburg**  
**New Member Orientation Packets**

The City of Laingsburg is proud to have volunteers dedicate their time and talents to the City's boards and committees. The function and responsibility of each board, and committee varies, but all work to improve City services, beautify the City and maintain the City's history as a benefit to all residents and for generations to come.

Members meet regularly to support the City through the efforts of the City Council and City administration.

Your volunteerism as a member of one of our Boards and Committees will afford you with the opportunity to become involved with the operation of municipal government. As a member of a Board and Committee 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 Committee. Your influence over policy, direction and approvals makes your role very important.

Remember that as a member of a Board or Committee 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 Laingsburg encourages residents to get involved in your local government by joining a board or committee.

Appointments are made by the Mayor, with approval of the City Council.

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## **APPOINTMENT PROCESS**

Most appointments to Boards and Committees will be made by the Mayor subject to the approval of City Council. Sixty days prior to any expiration of a Board or Committee 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 to the Mayor and City Council for approval. Individuals interested in an opening on a Board or Committee will be directed to complete a Board/ Commission Application. All applications must be submitted to the City Clerk's office by the deadline date specified on each posting. Those submitted after the deadline will not be considered for the current position openings. All applications received by the City Clerk's office will be given to the Mayor 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**

### **By-Laws**

Each Board and Committee shall have established By-laws. For those Boards and Committees that do not have established By-laws as of the date of this Handbook, By-laws shall be established and sent to the City Clerk's Office.

### **Attendance**

Appointment to a Board or Committee is a privilege freely sought by the applicant. It carries with it the responsibility to participate in Board or Committee activities and represent the residents of the City. Good attendance ensures a steady flow of communication and keeps everyone abreast of current topics under discussions. Therefore, each member should make every effort to attend all meetings. When a member is unable to attend a meeting, the board or committee contact person should be notified as soon as possible. A member may be removed for absenteeism based on the following policy: No more than three excused absences within one year, and/or no more than two unexcused absences within one year for boards and committees that meet once a month. The number of allowable absences is adjusted for those boards and committees which meet less often. If a meeting is rescheduled from its normal meeting date and time and a member cannot attend the rescheduled meeting, it should not be held against them.

### **Posting for Regular and Special Meetings**

Each board and committee will provide a public notice stating the dates, times and places of the regular meetings which must be posted at City Hall and all other places as may be determined. Notices of Special meetings shall be posted at least 24 hours in advance of said meeting.

### **Regular Meetings**

All meetings of Boards and Committees 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 committee) 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/or Committees may call for a special meeting as circumstances dictate. This may be called by the Chairperson or upon written request of three members. No official action shall be transacted at any special meeting of a board or committee unless the item has been stated in the notice of such meeting. Notice stating the time and place of any special meeting and the purpose for which called shall be given to each member of the Board or Committee at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

## **Quorum**

A majority of the members of any Board or Committee shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at all meetings, but in the absence of a quorum a lesser number may adjourn any meeting to a later date.

It is recommended that each board or committee wait 10 minutes after the start of each meeting before the adjournment when a quorum is not present. This practice will take any question out of the timing of not conducting a meeting and eliminate questions.

## **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 Hall 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. All decisions of any Board or Committee shall be made at a meeting open to the public. All deliberations of any Board or Committee constituting a quorum of its members shall take place at an open meeting 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.

Step 1 - Prepare by budgeting enough time to thoroughly review the entire agenda packet.

Step 2 - When the packet is delivered; examine the agenda to get an idea of:

- a. The number of items
- b. Controversial issues
- c. Difficult procedural items
- d. Issues you know little about

Step 3 - Begin your study of the individual agenda items. While some people prefer to review the agenda in the listed order, another approach is to study the most important items first.

Step 4 - Visit any sites or facilities that will help you deal with the issues. Research topic as necessary for a complete understanding of the issues/topics.

Step 5 - If you have questions after completing your review of the agenda, feel free to call the Chairperson or staff liaison to go over the various items.

Just a note: Nobody likes surprises. Within the public setting surprises are particularly deadly. Being caught unprepared, unaware or by surprise is embarrassing. One of the most important rules is: Never spring surprises on anyone at a public meeting. If you are going to make an earthshaking statement or request make sure that the groundwork has been laid beforehand. The companion to the no surprise rule is to never be caught by surprise.

### **Conduct of Meeting**

The Chairperson will preside at all meetings of the board or committee. In the absence of the above, the vice-chair 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 Chairperson or board liaison. Any agenda item so requested to be placed on an agenda must generally be submitted 10 days prior to the regular meeting, subject to the discretion of the Chairperson. The agenda and supporting materials will be sent at least one week before the meeting date. Each board or committee shall have the option of deleting or adding any item to or from the agenda or

postponing an item on the agenda to a subsequent meeting. Should an item be postponed, but not to a certain date, it shall not appear until it is requested to be considered.

### **Agenda Format**

The following agenda format is recommended for all Boards and Committees:

- Call meeting to Order
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Roll Call of Members
- Approval of Minutes
- Citizen Participation
- Public Hearings
- Agenda Items
- Report of Members/New Business
- Adjournment

### **Minutes**

Written minutes, upon the approval of the board or committee constitute the official action record of its activities. The minutes are not verbatim; they record the essence of the decisions made and action taken.

### **Review of Minutes by City Commission**

It is a requirement of all boards and committees to keep record of its actions by minutes. The minutes of meetings are to be prepared and submitted to the City Council with a copy to be kept on file with the City Clerk. The purpose of this is to keep the City Council informed about their activities.

### **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)**

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

### **Rules of Procedure**

All boards and committees follow Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition. Each board or committee shall outline their rules and procedures in their by-laws.



## **Annual Reports**

On an annual basis, the Chairperson of each board or committee shall provide a written report as to the board's or committee's activities for the past year. This report will also include proposed goals and objectives for the upcoming year, as well as any other issue the board or committee wishes to address. This report shall be submitted to the City Manager's office.

## **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 committee 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. Calming and reassuring them.
2. Explaining meeting procedures.
3. Paying attention and not doodling or reading.
4. Actively listening to what they are saying.
5. Avoid using third degree questioning techniques.
6. Don't bait or lecture.

### **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. Aggressiveness and hostility may characterize the group demeanor. 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.

Don't waste time at the beginning of the meeting on routine items such as correcting the minutes. Consider moving an item up on the agenda if there are many people to hear. Have speakers address the board or committee 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 committees can be tough. It is important to remember to address an issue with an open mind and weigh all the facts. Your creditability 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?
- Is the fight for or against the issue really worth it?
- 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?
- How will it look in the newspaper?
- Is the proposed action consistent with my boards or committees mission?
- What past practices relate to this issue?
- Will it really matter five years from now?
- If the decision is made, and it turns out wrong, can it be reversed?
- If I am hesitating – why?

### **Working with Other Board or Committee 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
- Appeal directly to the audience
- Cut off statements of fellow members
- Make fun of fellow members
- Tell fellow members they are wrong
- Amend a motion to soften it and then not vote on it
- 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
- Pressure fellow members to take a position before the meeting
- Pack the meeting for pressure purposes
- Violate a fellow member's confidence
- Covertly use the media to achieve your agenda
- 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, shall govern the board or committee in all cases to which they are applicable, provided they are not in conflict with these Rules, 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.

**Varying Order of Procedure.** The Mayor may, at any time, by a majority vote of the members of the City Commission present permit a member to introduce an item of business out of the regular order of business.

### **Points of Order.**

- The Presiding Officer shall be addressed as “Mr. Mayor/Madam Mayor” or “Mr. Chairman/Madam Chairwoman.” The Mayor Pro Tempore, when acting for the Mayor, shall be addressed as “Mayor Pro Temp (surname).”
- A motion may be made by saying, “Mr. Mayor/Madam Mayor, I move that, etc.” or “Mr. Chairman/Madam Chairwoman, I move that, etc.”
- A speaker is out of order when speaking of matters foreign to the issue.
- Rule violations must receive immediate attention from the Presiding Officer.
- It is the privilege of any member to request a roll call vote. No vote on the request is required.
- On questions that are debatable, the minority has the undeniable right to deliberate.

## CONCLUSION

This handbook has been presented to you as a guide for your participation on a board or committee. It does not cover all aspects of the board or committee that you may be requesting or have been appointed too. There may be training opportunities that will be afforded to you during your term of office. You will be notified by the staff liaison of any training opportunities available. You are encouraged to take advantage of them as they arise. Also, 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 links (or visit the City's website: [www.laingsburg.us](http://www.laingsburg.us)) to access important development related plans and documents:

- [Building/Zoning Information](#)
- [Zoning Map](#)
- [Planning and Zoning Guide](#)
- [Full Zoning Ordinance](#)

Board and Committee members are strongly encouraged to attend training opportunities, depending upon actual costs. Although not a complete list, important training opportunities can typically be found at the following:

Michigan Municipal League  
Michigan Association of Planning

If you are interested in a training opportunity, please contact City staff.