



PLANNING COMMISSIONER

Type of Position: Volunteer
Board/Commission: Planning Commission

Residency Requirement: Yes
Term: 4 Years

General Description

The Planning Commission is an advisory body to the City Council. The Commission is responsible for providing oversight of and an input into the preparation of the City's Comprehensive Plan which contains goals, policies and maps to guide the community's physical, social and economic development. They often work with other committees, boards and civic groups on the development of such plans. The Commission also deals with specific development issues such as zoning and subdivisions reviews.

Although it is impossible for members of the Commission to function apolitically, it is their role to make decisions and recommendations based on objective findings and established policies, not political expediency. The City Council depends on objective and fair recommendations from the Planning Commission and may use these as a basis for decisions which may be unpopular for them politically, even though these decisions are rational and responsible for the present and future generations.

Specific Responsibilities

The Planning Commission is responsible for the following:

1. Assist in the preparation and updating of the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Conduct special studies and analyze data needed to examine development problems and opportunities, and work to create a vision of the future of the community.
3. Assist in originating or reviewing development controls such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, conditional use permits, etc.
4. Review and make recommendations to the City Council on: zoning map amendments, zoning ordinance text amendments, subdivisions, street and alley vacations, and conditional use permits.
5. To act as the Board of Zoning Appeals and hold public hearings to review and rule upon petitions requesting variances from the City's Zoning Ordinance

Through these activities, the Planning Commission instills planning principles into the City's decision making process.

Qualifications

It is important that the makeup of the Commissions is intergenerational and integrated by race and gender so that all concerns of the future can be placed in the forum. Planning Commissioner need to have a few basic skills in order to help carry out the functions of the Commission.

1. Interest and concern about the present and future development of the community.
2. Ability to keep an open and objective mind in reviewing proposals and policies.
3. Ability to express ideas at meetings of the commission.
4. Should have linkages with neighborhood, citizens group, or business community.
5. Must be a resident of the City of Grand Rapids.

Training

Planning Commissioners do not need to have extensive background in zoning, real estate, or related matters. New members will be provided with a training manual with outlines the basic responsibilities, procedures, etc. The City has funds budgeted on an annual basis for workshops and seminars to orient new commissioners and to provide general training for the entire commission.

Commitment

Planning Commissioners are expected to volunteer several hours per month in order to carry out their duties.

- ✓ Regular Meeting: 1st Thursday of the Month @ 4:00pm. (2-3 hours)
- ✓ Work sessions/committee meetings: Monthly as needed (2-3 hours)
- ✓ Review staff reports for upcoming agenda items (monthly, 2-3 hours)
- ✓ May be required to visit development sites to become familiarized with the situation

Because of the continuing nature of many of the items and issues addressed by the Planning Commission, it is important for Commissioner to attend scheduled meetings.

Organizational Structure

The Planning Commission is a 7 member body that is advisory to the City Council (see attached City organizational chart). The Commission has a Chair and Vice-Chair/Secretary. The Commission has no standing committees, but does appoint committees to address special issues or topics. A quorum of 4 members is needed to conduct a meeting and the Commission's meetings are subject to the requirements of the Minnesota Open Meeting Law.

Staff Support

Staff support is provided primarily through the Community Development Department and the City Attorney. The City Engineer and Public Utilities Manager are sometimes referred to for technical advice.

The Community Development Department prepares meeting agendas, takes care of any notice requirements and prepares staff reports for all items on the meeting agenda. The role of staff is to facilitate the review and planning processes to insure that the proper legal steps are followed, to identify issues, provide technical analysis and expert advice, and assist the Commission in forming recommendations and findings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact the Community Development Director at City Hall, or phone 218.326.7601