

CITY OF  
*WESTLAND*  
MICHIGAN



# Boards and Commissions Handbook

**36300 Warren Rd  
Westland, MI 48185**

**Mayor Kevin Coleman**

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## **BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS INFORMATION**

Welcome! Congratulations on your appointment to a City of Westland Board or Commission\*. The City has designed this handbook to help you navigate your new role. This handbook will introduce you to some key information that guides you in operations and expectations.

\*There are a variety of names of City-created bodies, such as Boards, Commissions, Committees, Authorities, etc. This document used “Boards and/or Commissions” to mean any such body.

Municipal Boards and Commissions serve an important function within the City of Westland. As advisory bodies are responsible for assisting the City with areas or issues of importance, Boards and Commissions provide valuable insight to both City policy makers and administrators.

The City of Westland by City Charter, operates under a Strong Mayor form of government. Under this form of government, the Mayor serves as the executive and administrative head of the City, while the City Council serves as the City’s Legislative Body. The Mayor is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the City, as well as the overview and assignment of City staff. The Mayor, and by extension City staff members, provide assistance and expertise to Boards and Commissions. While Board and Commission members can expect to work closely with City staff, it is important to note that they do not have any authority over staff members or the Mayor.

### **The Value of Service**

While service on a Board or Commission involves real work, it is also tremendously important and rewarding. As a member of a Board or Commission, you will have a chance to influence public policy through your recommendations to the Administration or City Council and gain a better understanding of the issues facing the City. As a Board or Commission member, you will also have the chance to interact with other citizens on meaningful issues, participate in and gain new insights into the public policy process, and give back to the community by using your time and talent to make Westland a better place for all.

### **Types of Boards and Commissions**

There are two major types of Boards and Commissions that exist in Westland. The first and more formal of these types is the standing Board or Commission. These groups are created and authorized by either the City Charter or municipal ordinance to provide the Administration or City Council with in-depth advice on a variety of topics and/or to research particular issues and gather public input. These standing boards serve the City long-term and rotate membership based on terms of service outlined in their authorizing legislation and bylaws.

The majority of these standing boards are comprised of citizens appointed to serve by the Mayor. Often these groups will also have a staff liaison assigned providing a link between the Board or Commission and the Mayor. A few Standing Boards are comprised solely of either City Commission members or a mixture of staff and Commissioners.

The second form of Boards or Commissions within the City are temporary or ad-hoc. These boards will often serve similar advisory or information-gathering roles as the Standing Boards, but on issues or in areas less permanent in nature. While these Boards and Commissions may have authorizing legislation to guide their purpose, they rarely will have formal bylaws.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Boards and Commissions**

The role of an individual appointee, in the broadest sense, is to utilize their personal and professional experience and deliberate with other members to reach decisions that fulfill the purpose of the particular Board or Commission.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Application Process**

Individuals interested in serving on a City Board or Commission must complete the “City of Westland Appointed Boards/Commissions Application”, indicating which Board or Commission they are applying for. This application can be submitted via the City’s website at [www.cityofwestland.com](http://www.cityofwestland.com) or obtained and returned to the Mayor’s Office upon completion. The application will be held on file by the Mayor’s Office for one year and will be considered if an opening in the applicable Board or Commission becomes available. The Human Resource Director and the Executive Secretary to the Mayor or a designee serve as the review committee and supports the application and appointment process while also assisting the Mayor and City Council in the administrative work surrounding appointments.

Eligibility to apply and serve on a Board or Commission varies based on their bylaws and authorizing legislation. Several Boards and Commissions require residency within the City of Westland; see the Boards and Commissions list in the appendix for the eligibility requirements of a particular Board or Commission.

### **Process for New Appointments**

Upon notification of a Board or Commission opening or Board resignation, vacancies for the positions will be posted through the City of Westland’s website [www.cityofwestland.com](http://www.cityofwestland.com) and other local community information sources. The Review Committee will review all applications and forward to the Appointing Body for consideration. All new applications received will be reviewed and individuals who had submitted an application within the last year will be contacted to confirm continued interest. All appointments will be made pursuant to the City Charter and requirements may differ depending on the Board or Commission. Applicants must not have open balances or code enforcement citations with the City in order to be eligible to be appointed to a Board or Commission. Applicants will be notified if their application is unable to be considered due to any outstanding balances over 60 days past due or open citations with the City. Applicants may reapply once the outstanding issues have been remedied. The City reserves the right to terminate any appointment for felonious charges or falsifying information on the appointee’s application.

Appointees who have been confirmed will receive notification from the Mayor’s Office informing them of their appointment, contact information for the staff liaison to the Board or Commission, and the start and end date of their term. The notification will indicate if City Council confirmation is needed. The staff liaison will contact the Appointee within 7 days to notify them of the meeting dates, time and location.

Individuals, excluding City employees, are eligible to receive a stipend for the attendance of Board or Commission meetings pending the submission of attendance forms to the Personnel Department through the staff liaison, as designated through the annual budget process. Appointees may choose to not accept a stipend as well.

It is the Board or Commission member’s responsibility to notify staff liaison of any change in address, phone number or email address.

## **Term of Service**

Each Board and Commission has different terms of service based on their bylaws and authorizing legislation. See the Boards and Commissions list in the appendix for the term of service for a particular Board or Commission.

## **Reappointment**

If a member would like to be considered for reappointment, the member must submit a letter of interest to the staff liaison or the Mayor's Office 60 days prior to the end of their term. Reappointments are not automatic. Reappointment is at the discretion of the appointing body and consideration may be given to others who have also applied.

## **Resignation**

Any Board member that intends to resign must forward a letter to their Board or Commission chair or staff liaison, who will then forward that letter to the appointing body. If a Board or Commission member resigns before their term expires, a replacement member will be appointed via the process listed above to serve the remainder of the term.

## **Board and Commission Organization**

All Boards and Commissions are organized to include a chairperson and a staff liaison. Some Boards may also use sub-committees to handle special topics.

Unless otherwise stated in their bylaws, on an annual basis at the Board or Commission's first meeting of the year, a Board or Commission will elect its officers. For all Boards this will include the election of a chairperson, while some Boards will elect vice-chairs, secretaries and other officers as outlined in their bylaws.

## **Board / Commission Chairperson**

The Chair of a Board or Commission maintains his or her status as a voting member and takes on additional duties. These include but are not limited to:

- Assist staff in preparing meeting agendas
- Run Board/Commission meetings
- Serve as contact person for staff liaison to the Board/Commission
- Keep Board/Commission discussions on topic
- Ensure all points of discussion are clear and understood
- Ensure all individuals (Board/Commission members and citizens) are given a chance to speak
- Minimize conflict and developing Board/Commission consensus
- Summarize discussion and clarifying what decisions were made
- The Board/Commission Chairperson or designee will serve as the spokesperson on behalf of the entire Board or Commission

### **City Staff Liaison**

Assigned by the Mayor, most Boards and Commissions will have a City staff liaison who, in either a formal or informal capacity, will serve as the staff contact for the Board or Commission. The role of the staff liaison is to aid the Board or Commission in fulfilling their duties by providing administrative assistance through their training and experience in local government operation and their functional area. Duties may include, but not limited to:

- Attend meetings of the Board/Commission
- Assist in the preparation of meeting agendas and/or minutes
- Arrange times and locations for Board/Commission meetings (if necessary)
- Research issues and preparing reports for the Board or Commission
- Disseminate information to Board/Commission members
- Ensure compliance with the Open Meetings Act
- Serve as the point of contact between the Board/Commission and City Administration
- Ensure reports to the City Council are reflective of Board/Commission consensus
- When necessary, provide alternative reports to City Administration as a staff recommendation.
- The Planning Commission, EDC/TIFA/BRA, and DDA shall submit an annual report to the Mayor's Office
- Provide updated by-laws or other Board or Commission documents to the Mayor's Office.
- While Boards and Commissions are expected to work closely with the staff liaison, they have no authority to direct the work of staff or assign staff to a task; this authority lies with the Mayor. If a Board feels they are receiving insufficient staff support, they should contact the Mayor.

### **Board / Commission Meetings**

The work of a Board or Commission is typically accomplished within the scope of a meeting. Several Boards and Commissions have regularly scheduled meetings established by statute or Board/Commission bylaws, while others meet as needed. These Boards and Commissions meet in a variety of locations; some will meet in a particular place according to bylaws or custom, while others will meet at locations based on availability. Please see the Boards and Commissions list in the appendix for the meeting time and location of a particular Board or Commission.

In addition to regular meetings, there may be occasions where a Board or Commission will need to cancel or postpone a meeting, reschedule an issue for consideration to another meeting, or hold a special meeting to address a pressing issue. In all such cases, the Chair and staff liaison should take care to ensure requirements of the Open Meetings Act are upheld and critically affected parties are notified.

## **Commission Recommendations**

One critical role of Boards or Commissions is to make recommendations to the Administration or City Council. In making these recommendations, several factors need to be considered:

- While Boards or Commission members may be appointed to represent a particular group of people or may have ties to a particular interest group, the goal of the group is to make recommendations that reflect what is best for the entire City.
- Board and Commission members should take care that deliberations include thorough research and review of all alternatives on an issue prior to making a recommendation.
- Recommendations should reflect the consensus or majority position of the entire Board or Commission and not the position of a single member or minority.
- It will be the responsibility of the staff liaison to forward any Board or Commission recommendations to the Administration and/or City Council prior to the Council Meeting.
- Any representative should take care not to give personal opinions or recommendations before the Board or Commission without clarifying them as such.

## **Keys to Becoming an Effective Board or Commission Member**

Like any endeavor, serving as a Board or Commission member requires you to put in time and effort. Several key behaviors can help make you a more effective part of these groups:

- Be familiar with the operating statute, bylaws, and other critical documents of your particular Board or Commission
- Review the Open Meetings Act
- Attend meetings and come prepared
- Understand the role of your Board and Commission and constraints on the City
- Remember you are one member of a committee

## **Attendance**

Because so much of the work of Boards or Commissions is completed at meetings, attendance is a critical component of successful Boards and Commissions. High rates of attendance ensure full discussion of issues and the broadest range of perspectives; these factors lead to more comprehensive and collective recommendations.

Therefore, members of Boards or Commissions are expected to attend meetings on a regular basis. If a Board member is unable to attend a meeting, they should inform the Chair or the City staff liaison.

In cases where absenteeism is a chronic issue for a particular Board member, the Mayor or the head of the appointing body may take steps to contact the individual or Board Chair to determine if action to remove or replace the member is warranted.

## **Decorum and Rules of Order**

Members of a Board or Commission, by nature of their appointment, are representatives of the City of Westland. As such, members are expected to act with respectability and courtesy toward each other, City staff, and members of the public appearing at Board or Commission meetings. In the same manner, members of the staff and public are also expected to follow rules of decorum and order at Board and Commission meetings. City staff is expected at all times to act in a professional manner towards members of Commissions and Boards and members of the public.

In cases where the behavior at a meeting is outside proper decorum, it is the responsibility of the Chair of the Board or Commission to control the situation and resolve any issues. If the problem is persistent, it is suggested to follow the tips in the “Conflict Resolution and Dealing with the Public” section of this handbook.

Depending on the Board or Commission, rules regarding meeting order may vary from very formal to less formal. The bylaws of the particular Board or Commission should be followed at all times; where the bylaws are not specific or do not exist, guidelines from the [Roberts Rules of Order](#) should be followed, to be supplemented as necessary with Board/Commission custom or common sense rules of operation. For members of the public or other guests attending a Board or Commission meeting, rules of order may not be known or understood; in these cases it is appropriate for the Chair to explain how the meeting will proceed. A full version of Roberts Rules of Order is available for review at [www.parliamentarians.org](http://www.parliamentarians.org).

## **Meeting Agenda**

An agenda lays out the order of a meeting and which issues will be discussed. Development of the agenda is handled by the staff liaison with assistance from the Board/Commission chair and is prepared in advance of the meeting date.

Once complete, the agenda should be disseminated to the members of the Board/Commission and posted and made available to the public in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. All members of the Board or Commission and the staff liaison may add items to the meeting agenda prior to any formal posting by contacting the Chair or staff liaison. After formal posting, the agenda should be considered set, with any changes made adhering to the rules of the Open Meetings Act and Board/Commission bylaws.

## **Public Comment**

In cases where members of the public have attended to speak on a particular issue, comments should be made during the time that agenda item is discussed. All meetings are open under the Open Meetings Act. There should be placement on the agenda for public comment. The Board or Commission by-laws should address time limits for public comments.

## **Voting and Quorum**

In cases where a Board or Commission must vote or where a critical issue is being decided, a majority of the Board/Commission members (a quorum) must be present. For official actions, a majority of the quorum must vote in favor.

## **Meeting Minutes**

Meeting minutes for a Board or Commission describe the action and discussion that took place at a given meeting. Minutes are typically taken by a Board or Commission secretary, other member, or the staff liaison. In general, the minutes should include a brief summary of a discussion and should contain mainly a record of the legislative actions from the meeting. Board or Commission bylaws may provide more specific procedures regarding meeting minutes. Typically minutes will be approved at the next meeting of the Board or Commission, and any changes should be made in open session with approval of a majority of members. From there minutes will be handled by the staff liaison, who will see that they are appropriately archived with the City and made available to citizens in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.



## **Open Meetings Act**

The Open Meetings Act of Michigan, Public Act 267 of 1976, requires that meetings of a public body, including Boards, Commissions, Committees, or Subcommittees authorized to “perform a governmental or proprietary function,” make all decisions and hold all deliberations that include a quorum at a meeting open to the public, with limited exceptions. For this reason Boards, Commissions, Committees and Subcommittees should not make decisions by email or text. It is therefore important that the members do not fall into the habit of hitting “reply all” and accidentally making decisions on email questions posed. The Act also allows members of the public to address the public body, requires public notice of meeting times and places as well as changes to the same, and calls for the keeping of meeting minutes and the ability for the public to access these minutes. The OMA allows for closed sessions in limited situations and the City Attorney should be involved in any decision to go into closed session. A full version of the Open Meetings Act is available for review online at [www.legislature.mi.gov](http://www.legislature.mi.gov).

## **OTHER ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Orientation**

For all new Board or Commission members, City staff will provide an orientation session that includes a review of enabling legislation for that Board or Commission, Rules of Order, historical perspectives on work of the Board or Commission, and any other material appropriate to the work of the particular Board or Commission such as bylaws, traditional practices, etc.

### **Training**

As part of the City’s commitment to good governance and Standard of Excellence, members may be asked to attend certain training. Certain training may be required for your role as a Board or Commission member. Your staff liaison may suggest certain training(s) for you in this role.

### **Public Disclosure / Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of interest questions arise periodically at all levels of government and can become very complex. Generally, a conflict of interest occurs when you, as a member of a Board or Commission, are slated to vote on a matter:

1. Involving you or a member of your family by blood or marriage.
2. Involving a business owned in whole or part by you or a member of your family by blood or marriage.
3. When the outcome would be economically advantageous to you or a member of your family or to a business owned in whole or in part by you or a member of your family.

In any such case, there is no question that you have a responsibility to disclose this information to the rest of the Commission and to abstain from any discussion or vote on the matter.

Openness is generally the best policy. When these issues arise, discuss them openly with the Board or Commission. If you are in doubt, the safest course of action is to abstain from participating in any discussions on that particular issue, or contact the Board or Commission staff liaison or Board Chair to discuss.

## **Access to Legal Counsel**

If legal questions arise that the Board or Commission needs clarification on, the City Attorney is available to provide legal opinion. Contact with the City Attorney should be arranged through the staff liaison and not independently by the Board or Commission. Typically, and with very few exceptions, the City Attorney will not attend Board and Commission meetings. If an issue arises during a meeting that requires a legal opinion, decisions on the issue should be held until the next meeting so consultation with the City Attorney can take place.

## **Conflict Resolution and Dealing with the Public**

At various times individuals or the Board or Commission as a whole may come into conflict over a particularly difficult or impassioned issue or other problem. The following rules will assist in reaching a positive conclusion to the issue.

### **Conflict Between Individuals**

Step 1: When two individuals have a conflict, they will try to resolve it between themselves.

Step 2: If unable to resolve the conflict, the two parties will contact the Board Chair.

Step 3: If step two does not work, the parties shall go to the staff liaison.

## **Handling Citizen Concerns or Complaints**

If a Board or Commission member receives a complaint or concern from a citizen, they should first ask if the complaint has been submitted to the appropriate City department. The City has processes in place to handle complaints, therefore residents should be encouraged to use the processes established to ensure a timely response that is consistent with policies. Also, making sure that complaints are directed through the appropriate staff person ensures that supervisors are aware of ongoing issues or trends that may need attention.

Board or Commission members should take care not to represent promises or assurances to resolve a complaint. Remember, a Board or Commission member has limited authority to take action. While individual Board members and the Board as a whole may take actions appropriate within the scope and power of their mandate, they do not necessarily have the authority to address the citizen's issue or complaint. Initially not all citizens will understand this, and may need to be provided information of the member or Board's role. As a rule, all complaints should be referred to the staff liaison who can either handle the complaint or refer it to the Mayor for proper staff assignment.

## **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**

In general, records of the City are subject to disclosure under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Email communications about Board or Commission business are generally considered to be public records subject to disclosure under FOIA. For this reason, email correspondence regarding the Board or Commission's business should generally also be sent to the staff liaison so that the City has a record of the correspondence. Commissioners are otherwise responsible for retaining and producing emails and other records, including text messages related to Board or Commission business that they have in their possession upon request by the City's FOIA Coordinator or the City Attorney's Office. Certain items are exempt from FOIA and again the FOIA Coordinator and the City Attorney should be involved in making those decisions.

## **Incompatible Offices**

A public officer or public employee is prohibited from holding two or more incompatible offices at the same time. MCL 15.181(2). As a member of a Board, Commission, Committee and Subcommittee you are subject to the State of Michigan Incompatible Office Act. If during your appointment you have a change in circumstance and feel you may be in conflict with the Incompatible Offices Act, immediately notify your staff liaison so the facts can be reviewed and with the advice of the City Attorney if the Act is implicated.

## **Conclusion**

We hope this handbook has been helpful and informational to you in preparing to serve on a City Board or Commission. If you have any additional questions, there are many people who can help, including your staff liaison, the chair and other members of your Board or Commission.

\*A copy of the Boards and Commissions Appointment Policy and Procedures is available on the Boards and Commission Page of the City's website at [www.cityofwestland.com](http://www.cityofwestland.com).

# Appendix A:

## List of Boards and Commissions

- Beautification Committee
- Board of Ethics
- Board of Review
- Building Authority
- Civil Service Commission
- Commission on Aging
- Community Development Citizens Advisory Committee (CDCAC)
- Disability Advocacy Committee
- Downtown Development Authority (DDA)
- Economic Development Corporation (EDC)/Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA)/Brownfield Redevelopment Authority
- Ethics Board
- Historical Commission
- Housing Commission
- Library Board
- Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA)
- Local Officer's Compensation Commission (LOCC)
- Marijuana Business License Selection Committee
- Marijuana Business Review Board
- Municipal Service Bureau
- Nankin Transit Commission
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Council
- Planning Commission
- Police & Fire Civil Service Commission
- Police & Fire Retirement Board
- Sanitation Authority
- Youth Assistance Advisory Council
- Zoning Board of Appeals

Please visit the City of Westland's website at [Boards and Commissions Information](#) for a detailed summary of all City Boards and Commissions.