BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

MESSAGE FROM THE CLERK OF COUNCIL:

Members of boards and commissions provide an invaluable service to our City. They advise the City Council on a wide variety of subjects by making recommendations on important policy matters. Over the years, the services and programs provided by the City have expanded. Without the assistance of the various boards and commissions, the City Council could give many complex and significant matters only a cursory review. The detailed studies and considered advice of boards and commissions are often catalysts for innovative programs and improved services.

Serving on a board or commission can be a rewarding experience for community service-minded residents. It is an excellent way to participate in the functioning of local government and to make a personal contribution to the improvement of our community. If we are to have government "of the people, by the people and for the people," we must have the continued participation of the many dedicated board and commission members. Making local government effective and responsive is everybody's responsibility.

On behalf of the City Council, I wish to thank each board and commission for their service and extend an invitation to all residents of the City to give serious consideration to serving on a citizens' advisory body.

Belinda Anderson, Clerk of Council 2026

This revised 2026 edition reflects updated procedures, clearer expectations, and the City's continued commitment to transparent and inclusive public service.

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Introduction

Welcome to the City of Oberlin Boards and Commissions Handbook. This handbook provides City board and commission members with guidance on their roles, responsibilities, and meeting procedures. It is intended to provide an overview of the expectations, responsibilities and roles of Oberlin boards and commissions and their members, tools to identify and address conflicts of interest and other matters relating to the ethics laws, open meeting and public records law and a review of basic parliamentary procedures. This handbook is not intended to be exhaustive and to the extent that it does not address concerns that may arise during your tenure, please consult the staff or council liaison or the appropriate council appointee for assistance. This handbook should be read in conjunction with your board or commission's specific rules of procedure and its Charter.

Following the procedures and requirements outlined here will enable City boards and commissions to conduct themselves in accordance with the laws of the State of Ohio and the policies and procedures established by the City of Oberlin.

If you have any questions about the information included in the handbook, please contact the City of Oberlin Clerk of Council's office at 440-775-7203.

City Charter:

The City Charter is a governing document that provides a level of flexibility in local decision-making. Article XVIII, Section 3 of the Constitution of the State of Ohio, authorizes municipalities to exercise all powers of local self-government and to enforce local police, sanitary, and other similar regulations as are not in conflict with the general laws. This means that City ordinances will take precedence over the conflicting provisions of the Ohio Revised Code, unless the specific provision of the Ohio Revised Code is determined by a "general law." The Charter also prescribes the organizational structure, duties, and responsibilities of elected and appointed officials. The Charter of the City of Oberlin was adopted initially by the electors on November 2, 1954. Since it has been reviewed and amended every 10 years by the majority of the electors of the City.

Council - Manager System:

Oberlin operates under a Council–Manager form of government which combines the elected City Council's policy leadership with the professional management expertise of an appointed City Manager.

The City Manager is appointed by and reports directly to the City Council. As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the City Manager is responsible for directing the city's day-to-day operations and carrying out the policies set forth by the City Council.

City Council Responsibilities:

The City Council consists of seven members elected at large in nonpartisan elections held in odd-numbered years. Members shall serve concurrently and no member shall serve more than five consecutive terms. City Council has the power to pass ordinances, adopt resolutions, appoint officers, and board and commission members, as specified in the charter.

City Boards and Commissions

Purpose of City Boards and Commissions:

City boards and commissions are created by City Council, either through provisions in the City Charter or by adopting ordinances or resolutions. The specific duties of the board or

commission are defined in the City Charter or the establishing ordinance or resolution. Members of the board or commission are appointed by the City Council.

Establishment of City Boards and Commissions:

Under Section VII of the Oberlin City Charter, City Council may, by ordinance, create, modify, or dissolve offices, commissions, departments, and other entities not established by the Charter. Council may also assign additional duties to existing bodies but cannot eliminate or reassign responsibilities explicitly designed by the Charter.

Each board or commission is unique in its purpose, mission and role. Boards and commissions may serve in one or more of the following capacities: advisory (providing recommendations to Council), rule-making (establishing procedures within their authority), or quasi-judicial (conducting hearings and making determinations on specific cases). For example, the Planning Commission makes recommendations to Council on matters relating to zoning but also issues approvals for subdivisions, commercial developments, the subdivision of land and authorization for signs. The Board of Zoning Appeals conducts hearings on appeal and authorizes variances from the provisions of the Zoning Code when warranted. The Civil Service Commission makes rules governing the Civil Service and makes recommendations regarding those rules to Council for approval. It is important that members of boards and commissions be familiar with the governing statutes or other authorizing directives in order to understand the framework within which the board must operate. Copies of a boards or commissions governing statutes or authority may be obtained from the board and commission's staff liaison or the Clerk of Council's office.

Boards and Commissions Established by Charter:

The following City boards and commissions have been established by the Oberlin City Charter.

- Civil Service Commission
- Planning Commission
- Public Utilities Commission
- Recreation Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals

Boards Established by Ordinance or Resolution:

- Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

- Fire Code Board of Appeals
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Housing Renewal Commission
- Human Relations Commission
- Income Tax Board of Review
- Oberlin Community Improvement Corporation Board
- Open Space and Visual Environment Commission
- Records Commission
- Resource Conservation Recovery Commission
- Social Equity Implementation Committee
- Volunteer Firefighters' Dependents Board

External Appointments:

- Library Board of Trustees
- Lorain County General Health District Board
- Central Lorain County Joint Ambulance District Board
- Ohio Municipal Electric Association
- Senior Citizens Board
- Lorain County Community Action Agency

The Clerk of Council maintains an updated list of all active boards and commissions, including their membership, meeting schedules, and responsibilities.

Boards and Commissions Year at a Glance: See Resolution 25-16 CMS

Timeline for vacancies:

- October: Candidate review and liaison consultation
  - *Staff and Council liaisons should identify upcoming needs and desired skills for each board and commission prior to the annual appointment cycle.*
- Nominations submitted and vacancies filled at the first council meeting in December.

Filled Board and Commission Timeline:

- Prior to the organizational meetings at the beginning of each calendar year, an Annual Welcome/Orientation Session for new and returning members will take place. This session reviews expectations, meeting procedures, and the role of the leadership in local government
- First meeting of the new year, the secretary will act as interim until the second meeting when elections will be held.
    - Those boards meeting less frequently than once per month may want to add a special meeting for elections or conduct elections at the end of the first meeting.
- February: Board-specific orientations and Elections of Chair and Vice Chair.
- November/December: Annual recognition event for outgoing members.

Participation through Boards and Commissions:

Oberlin residents have a long tradition of active participation in local government and civic life. Through representation on boards and commissions, Oberlin residents are offered an important avenue to help create effective and equitable policies. Resident involvement contributes to the success of government and the quality of life enjoyed by our families and communities.

Resident participation encompasses a broad range of issues, such as the environment and natural resources, social services, planning, economic development, and parks and recreation. Some boards appointed by the City Council help to shape policy affecting Oberlin residents and some serve solely in an advisory capacity. In selecting members, City Council strives to choose members of diverse backgrounds with relevant skills and interests. It also attempts to involve as many residents as possible. This approach ensures that decisions and services more adequately reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of Oberlin residents. .

Eligibility for City Boards and Commissions:

Members of City boards and commissions must be residents and registered and qualified electors of the Municipality at the time of their appointment unless otherwise authorized by ordinance. Change of residence to outside the corporate limits of the Municipality shall automatically end the term of any board or commission member.

Screening and Appointments to City Boards and Commissions:

Each year, the Clerk of Council's Office advertises upcoming vacancies in accordance with Council procedures. Applications are reviewed and appointments made by City Council.

Length of Service and Terms of Office:

Most terms range from one to three years, as defined by the City Charter or the ordinance that created the board. Members may be reappointed at Council's discretion.

Being an Effective Board Member:

Despite the different sizes and types of Oberlin boards and commissions, it is imperative that board and commission members recognize they are in a critical position to shape and influence decisions and actions. It is important that each member keeps informed and up-to-date on issues, legislative activity and statutes affecting their board or commission.

The Advisory Role:

Members serve as a link between the community, City Council and the City Staff. Members provide informed perspectives on community needs and policy issues that help shape City decisions and services.

Rule Making:

Boards and commissions shall abide by the procedures, rules, and regulations duly adopted by the body and approved by City Council. A template or guidance can be provided by the Clerk of Council upon request.

Attendance:

Consistent attendance is essential to ensure that decisions reflect the collective perspective of the board or commission. According to Section XIX(A) of the City Charter, members who miss more than three consecutive meetings without an approved excuse are subject to removal by City Council.

Preparation:

- Members should review meeting material in advance, participate actively in discussions, and communicate respectfully. Requests for additional information may be made through the staff liaison. Effective board and commission members:
- Attend all board or commission meetings.
- Are well prepared for meetings.
- Recognize that serving the public interest is the top priority.
- Recognize that the board or commission must operate in an open and public manner.
- Are knowledgeable about the legislative process and issues affecting the board or commission.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
- Communicate well and participate in board or commission discussions.
- Are aware that individual members do not speak for the board or commission. Any public statement must be made by the Chair, or representative as voted by the board or commission.
- Exhibit a willingness to work with the board or commission in making decisions.
- Recognize that compromise may be necessary to reach consensus.
- Do not let personal feelings toward other members, members of Council or City employees interfere with their judgment
- Are familiar with Parliamentary Procedures (i.e., motions, amendments, respectful of the rules of decorum in debate)

Resignation and Removal:

If a member cannot complete their term, they should submit a signed letter of resignation to the Clerk of Council, addressed to the Council President, stating the effective date. The Clerk of Council shall forward a copy of the resignation to the respective Board or Commission Chair and shall inform the nomination committee of the Council.

City Council may remove a board or commission member by majority vote for reasons including three (3) consecutive unexcused absences, failure to carry out the responsibilities of the position, or conduct that disrupts the orderly business of the board or commission.

ROLES

Role of the Chair:

The board or commission Chair has several main responsibilities, including:

- Presides over meetings and ensures orderly discussion.

- Works with the staff liaison to prepare agendas.
- Review applicable Charter sections or ordinances to ensure compliance.
- Presents the board's annual report to the City Council at least once a year, with staff assistance.
- May represent the board publicly only with majority approval from members.

Role of Vice Chair:

- Presides in the absence of the Chair and assumes their duties as needed.

Role of City Staff Liaison:

- Serves as a communication link between City Council and the board.
- Provides updates to the Council and ensures awareness of board activities.
- Does not vote or direct discussion.
- Additional duties will include:
    - Ensure that a complete file for each meeting is maintained pursuant to Ohio statutes and City of Oberlin retention schedules for public records. This includes but is not limited to:
        - Agenda for the meeting which must be published online 72 hours prior to a meeting.
        - Copies of all materials handed out or displayed during meeting presentations.
        - All agenda materials provided to the board or commission.
        - Minutes for the meeting which must be published online upon approval.
        - Compilation of attendance records.

Law Director:

- Serves as legal counsel to boards and commissions but not to individual members.
- Provides opinions or attends meetings upon request, with Council Liaison notification.

LAWS AFFECTING BOARD ACTIVITIES

Restrictions and Requirements:

Board and commission members must be aware of certain restrictions and requirements affecting the office. Board and commission members must be familiar with and operate at all times within governing statutes, rules, and procedures.

Open Meetings Act:

Boards and commissions are "public bodies" for purposes of The Ohio Open Meetings Act. Public bodies in Ohio must conduct their official business in a manner that is open and accessible to the public. This ensures that City operations are transparent and that residents have the opportunity to observe decision-making in action. For further clarification or question you are encouraged to contact the Law Director or the Clerk of Council.

Notification of Meetings:

The Ohio Open Meetings Act requires that public bodies provide advance notice to the public indicating when and where each meeting will take place and, in the case of special meetings, the specific topics that the public body will discuss. Best practices encourage that boards and commissions post their meeting agendas for the ease of public access.

Minutes:

The public body must take full and accurate minutes of all meetings and make them available to the public, except in permissible executive sessions. Best practices encourage that boards and commissions post their approved minutes for the ease of public access.

Executive Sessions:

Executive sessions are closed-door sessions convened by the public body, after a roll call vote, and attended by only the members of the public body and persons they invite. A public body may hold an executive session only for a few specific purposes, which are cataloged in Section 121.22(G)(2)-(8) of the Ohio Revised Code. Rarely, if ever, will a board of commission adjourn into an executive session. Boards and commissions shall not adjourn to an executive session without prior consultation with the Law Director.

Accessibility Requirements:

To afford members of the public who have disabilities an equal opportunity to participate, meetings subject to the Ohio Open Meetings Act are to be held in facilities which are wheelchair accessible. Public notices about such meetings must include a statement that disabled members of the community who may need assistance should contact City Hall for assistance. Notices should include the name and phone number of the individual responsible for coordinating such requests.

Public Disclosure – The Ohio Public Records Act:

The Public Records Act ensures that residents have access to records that document the decisions, operations, and activities of their local government. Openness promotes better understanding and trust between the City and the Community. Some of the key requirements are:

Definition: A public record includes any document- paper, electronic (including email), audio, video, or other format- created or received in connection with official City business. Availability: All public records must be promptly prepared and made available for inspection or copying upon request, unless specifically exempted by law.

Retention: Boards and commissions must maintain records according to the City's records retention schedule.

Requests: All public records requests should be directed to the Staff Liaison of each board and commission**,** which is responsible for coordinating responses in compliance with state law. Best practice encourages that each board or commission post packets to make public access more efficient. This includes both meeting agendas and approved minutes.

Ohio Ethics:

The Ohio Ethics Law requires that new public officials and employees receive a copy of the Ohio Ethics Law related statutes within 15 days of beginning the performance of their official duties. The copy of the law must be provided by the public agency that the public official or employee serves or the appointing authority. The new public official or employee must acknowledge receipt of the law in writing.

Rules of Procedure:

Each board should have a set of rules to direct and clarify its actions, procedures and organization. Board members are expected to adhere to all procedures, rules, regulations and relevant statutes. These are the guidelines by which a board functions and they define the primary characteristics of an organization, prescribe how it should function, and include rules that are so important that they may not be changed without prior notice to members and formal vote and agreement by a majority of members. Council provides a template of such rules of procedures to assist the various boards and commissions in drafting their document.

Robert's Rules of Order:

In regard to matters that are not covered by these rules, or where these rules do not appear to give clear guidance, the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order shall govern.

Quorum:

A quorum is a majority of the members. In the absence of a quorum, the only actions that may be taken are to fix a time for adjournment, adjourn, recess or take measures to obtain a quorum (such as contacting absent members).

Order of Business:

After the presiding officer has called the meeting to order, a board generally follows the order of business specified in its rules. If a board has not adopted an order of business, the procedure below is generally followed:

1. Roll call
2. Reading and approving of minutes of previous meeting(s)
3. Unfinished or old business (matters introduced in previous meetings)
4. New business (matters initiated in present meeting)
5. Other Business
6. Adjourn

The Chair and Voting:

The Chair may vote just as any other member. Voting by secret ballot is prohibited by the open meetings law. Members must also be present in order to vote and may not abstain.

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Speaking Publicly or Testifying at Hearings:

In an effort to promote open and transparent government and to foster direct communication between Council and its Boards and Commissions, Council amended its rules in 2024. The City Council approved an amendment to the Council Rules to allow time for a representative from a Board or Commission to speak to council. This time has been allotted to allow boards and commissions to provide 10-15 minutes to present goals achieved, current projects, and input on relevant matters before Council.

Any statements made on behalf of the board or commission must be made with the approval of the board or commission. Otherwise, the member must make clear that the views expressed are personal only. Official testimony should be communicated to the board and commission in advance if possible, and forwarded to the City Council through the Council Liaison.

Effective Public Statements:

To provide effective public statements or testimony, members should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Public statements should be brief, concise and truthful.
- Avoid reading lengthy written testimony; instead, orally highlight important points in the written report.
- If others are offering similar testimony, try to coordinate information to avoid repetition.
- Avoid being overly technical.
- If you are unable to answer a question, offer to provide a written response later and always follow through.
- If you must give a personal opinion, make sure that the committee understands that you are not speaking for the board but for yourself.
- Staff members find it helpful to receive copies of written testimony prior to the hearing.

The News Media:

The news media has the important function of informing the public about local government operations. In doing so, it provides a valuable communications link with the community. It is important to maintain a truthful, cooperative and open relationship with the media without violating privacy or other citizen rights. When possible, please refer all media inquiries to the Chair of the board or commission, Council Liaison, or City Manager. The guidelines that are used by the representatives when working with the media are as follows:

- Be as open as possible and keep your focus on the business of the board or commission. Personal opinions, especially those of other people, are inappropriate. The news media is not the avenue to air dissatisfactions or carry on conflicts among board members or agency employees.
- If you do not know the answer to a question or are unsure about an issue, refer the matter to the Council liaison or City Manager.
- A “wise” board anticipates when an event in the community will stir the interest of the media. In this situation, a press release should be developed.
- In order to coordinate information, please contact the Council liaison or City Manager.

- Be aware that the comments you make in public may also have to be repeated in a court of law. Do not risk your personal integrity or that of another by thoughtless or unwarranted remarks.

Template for Use of Boards and Commissions in Establishing Their Individual Rules of Procedure

"Boards and commissions shall establish their own organization, procedure, rules and regulations subject to Council approval…" - Oberlin City Charter

Each board and commission should have a set of rules to assure the orderly conduct of its business in accordance with the laws of the State of Ohio relating to public meetings.

All board and commission members should review and be familiar with the Boards and Commissions Membership Handbook.

RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR MUNICIPAL BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES

PURPOSE:

The purpose of these rules is to establish procedures for the [insert name of board or commission] (hereinafter referred to as the "body"), to ensure the orderly conduct of its meetings and in compliance with the Ohio Open Meetings Act.

ORGANIZATION:

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair: At its first meeting of each year, the members of the body shall elect a chair and vice-chair. At that meeting, the secretary shall conduct the election of the chair, who, in turn, will conduct the election of the vice-chair.

2. Duties of the Chair and Vice-Chair: The chair, or in the absence of the chair, the vice-chair, shall preside over the meetings. In the absence of the chair and the vice-chair, a member selected by a majority of a quorum of the body shall act as chair for that meeting. The presiding member shall preserve order in the meeting and shall conduct the proceedings in accordance with these rules.

3. Authority to Represent: The chair or vice chair may represent or speak publicly about the actions of the body. No other member of the body shall have such authority unless authorized by the body. Comments regarding sensitive or legal matters shall be first approved by the City Manager. Unless authorized, any member who speaks publicly about a matter before the body shall make clear that they are speaking in a private capacity and not on behalf of the body.

AGENDAS:

1. Agenda Required: Each regular and special meeting of the body shall have an agenda, approved by the chair, with time allotted for each item of business to be considered by the body. Only those matters contained in the agenda for a special meeting may be considered.

2. Posting of Agenda: The meeting agenda shall be made available to the general public and posted on the City website at least 72 hours prior to a regular meeting.

3. Order of Business: All business shall be conducted in the same order as it appears on the agenda, except that any addition to or deletion from the agenda must be made as the first act of business at the meeting. No additions to the agenda for a special meeting shall be considered. Any other adjustment to the agenda, for example, changing the order of business, postponing or tabling actions, may be made by unanimous consent of the members present or by motion passed by a two-thirds vote of the body.

MEETINGS:

1. The body is required by law to conduct its meetings in accordance with the Ohio Open Meetings Act. This means that meetings of the body must be open to the public and minutes of those meetings shall be promptly prepared and made available for public inspection.

2. Scheduling, Location and Notice of Meetings: Regular meetings shall take place on the (_____) day of each month at, _____ a.m./p.m. or at such other time(s) as the Committee may determine but subject to notice sufficient to enable the public to determine the time and place of such regular meetings. Unless otherwise posted in advance, all meetings shall be held at (location). A special meeting may be called by the secretary upon the request of the chair or in the absence of the chair, the vice chair or upon the request of at least three members of the body. Twenty-four hours' advance notice of a special meeting shall be given to the news media that have requested notification except in the event of an emergency requiring immediate official action. In the event of an emergency, the secretary, chair, vice chair or members calling the meeting shall notify the news media that have requested notification immediately of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.

3. Quorum: A quorum of the members of the body must be present to conduct official business. A majority of the total membership of the body shall constitute a quorum. No deliberations or official action may be taken in the absence of a quorum with the exception of the following procedural steps:

a) End the meeting through a motion to adjourn

b) Recess the meeting, in an effort to obtain a quorum
c) Take measures to obtain a quorum such as rounding up members in the hall or contacting members

4. Passage of Motions: Unless a different number is required, official actions of the body shall be made by motion duly passed by the affirmative vote of at least a majority of the members of the body. The presiding officer may request a motion and may vote on all matters before the body.

5. Presence at Meeting: A member must be present to be counted for the purpose of determining the presence of a quorum either in-person or virtually, to participate in deliberations and to cast a vote. Except in the case of a conflict of interest, every member must vote on a matter before the body. No member may abstain; however, a member may recuse themselves due to a conflict of interest. A member who is precluded from voting due to a conflict of interest shall take no part in any discussions or deliberations relating to the matter. The fact of any recusal shall be reflected in the minutes.

6. Public Participation: All meetings of the body are public. The body may establish a rule to permit comments by the public that relate to matters before the body. The rule may prescribe the order and duration of public comment. Following is some suggested language for such a rule:

a) Each speaker from the public shall first be recognized by the Chair.
b) Each speaker from the public shall state their name and address.
c) Comments must be addressed to the presiding member or to the body as a whole, and not to any individual member of the body or of the public.
d) Comments shall be limited to 3 minutes and shall relate solely to matters under consideration by the body at the meeting.
e) Additional comments from the same speaker may be permitted by the consent of the presiding member only after other members of the public desiring to speak have spoken.

7. Order and Decorum: Order and decorum shall be observed by all persons present at the meeting. Neither members of the body, nor members of the public shall delay or interrupt the proceedings or the peace of the meeting or interrupt or disturb any member while speaking. Members of the body and members of the public are prohibited from making personal, impertinent, threatening, or profane remarks.

8. Enforcement of Rules: Members of the body and members of the public shall obey the orders of the chair or other presiding member. The chair may declare a recess, order the removal of any person whose conduct substantially interferes with the conduct of the meeting, or take such other action as may be appropriate.

AMENDMENT AND INTERPRETATION OF RULES:

1. Amendment to Rules: Any amendment of these rules shall first be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the members of the body and receive the approval of Council by motion, or may be initiated by Council by motion and thereafter ratified by a two-thirds vote of the members of the body.

2. Interpretation: In the absence of clear guidance by these rules, applicable portions of the most recent version of Robert's Rules of Order shall govern.

ADOPTED: ___/___/2026
Attest: _____
_____, Secretary