



How to Conduct a Meeting



**MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

What you will learn:

Purpose of meetings

How to prepare for a meeting

Purpose of an agenda

Purpose of bylaws

Role and responsibility of the chairperson

Legal requirements

This summary speaks to the planning commission, but most of the tips in this tear sheet can apply to legislative bodies, zoning boards of appeals, or other municipal committees.

Planning commission business is conducted during public meetings. While subcommittees or working groups may not need to meet at a public meeting (see side bar below), meetings where decisions are made are open to the public.

The Open Meetings Act affects meeting location, notice and content. In addition, planning commission bylaws often dictate how the commission conducts its meetings. Review the bylaws carefully with staff to ensure that meetings meet legal requirements.

Preparation

Preparation is key to a well run meeting.

Begin with the agenda. Staff and/or the planning commission chair create the agenda. The agenda must be available to the public in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

A useful addition to an agenda is the time at which each item on the agenda will begin and end. As much as possible, the chair should adhere to the time schedule. A common problem is not setting time limits for discussion, resulting in overly long discussions. When this happens, you lose the attention of your fellow commissioners and participants. Therefore, setting and keeping time limits is important. If you set limits on presentations and comments, make certain everyone knows the time limit rule. Publish the time limits and any meeting management rules so participants can prepare their remarks.

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What the Law Says:

Michigan Planning Enabling Act:

A planning commission shall adopt bylaws for the transaction of business, and shall keep a public record of its resolutions, transactions, findings, and determinations.

Michigan Zoning Enabling Act:

The Zoning Board of Appeals. . . may adopt rules to govern its procedures sitting as a zoning board of appeals

The Open Meetings Act:

1. Each public body shall keep minutes of each meeting showing the date, time, place, members present, members absent, any decisions made at a meeting open to the public, and the purpose or purposes for which a closed session is held. The minutes shall include all roll call votes taken at the meeting. The public body shall make any corrections in the minutes at the next meeting after the meeting to which the minutes refer. The public body shall make corrected minutes available at or before the next subsequent meeting after correction. The corrected minutes shall show both the original entry and the correction.

Adopt bylaws or rules of procedure and follow them. Planning commissions are required to adopt bylaws (zoning boards of appeals may adopt rules of procedure). Bylaws should be comprehensive and include such topics as meeting and hearing procedures, agenda building, instructions to the secretary regarding minutes and records, voting, and other matters.

Orient public attendees. The public should be oriented at the beginning of the meeting by the chair. The chair should review the principal rules of conduct, the purpose of the meeting, and the manner in which it will be conducted. Part of any orientation should include:

- The roles of chair, commissioners, staff, public, and presenter(s).
- The basis on which decisions are made and what documents guide decisions, such as the local master plan, zoning ordinance, and state enabling legislation.
- The decisions the planning commission is authorized to make.
- Rules of conduct for meetings.
- Ethics and rules of official conduct for commissioners.

At the Meeting

A meeting must be led. The chair must move the meeting along to a successful conclusion, make certain all items on the agenda are addressed, and maintain order.

The chair convenes the meeting on time and, if possible, ends on time. This establishes the discipline for the meeting.

The chair also sets the tone of the meeting. This tone helps maintain order and respect for the process. The chair should:

- Be well briefed on all issues (he or she must do the homework).
- Project a sense of order, discipline, and dignity while remaining calm and impartial.
- Avoid taking sides on an issue while in the role of chair. The chair will typically vote last in a decision by the commission.
- Insist that everyone speak politely and in an orderly fashion; name calling, personal attacks, noisy outbreaks, and rude behavior must not be tolerated.
- Ensure that the meeting follows legal requirements.
- Ensure that decisions are based on the information before the commission.
- Ensure that decisions are well-documented and relate clearly to relevant ordinances.
- Ensure that everyone has a reasonable opportunity to be heard without dominating the proceedings.
- Ensure the meeting is objective and fair to all parties.

The chair's role is not the only important role. Being a good follower as a commissioner is also critical. Most of the same rules apply:

2. Minutes are public records open to public inspection, and a public body shall make the minutes available at the address designated on posted public notices pursuant to section 4. The public body shall make copies of the minutes available to the public at the reasonable estimated cost for printing and copying.
3. A public body shall make proposed minutes available for public inspection within 8 business days after the meeting to which the minutes refer. The public body shall make approved minutes available for public inspection within 5 business days after the meeting at which the minutes are approved by the public body.
4. A public body shall not include in or with its minutes any personally identifiable information that, if released, would prevent the public body from complying with section 444 of subpart 4 of part C of the general education provisions act, 20 USC 1232g, commonly referred to as the family educational rights and privacy act of 1974.

- Be well prepared.
- Comment through the chair. Ask to be recognized by the chair by saying; “Mr. Chair or Madame Chair?” Once recognized, then share opinions.
- Substantiate opinions based on the planning documents and data.
- Deliberate in the open. Avoid side conversations with nearby commissioners.

Recording the Actions

Planning commission meetings must be recorded. Minutes must be made available to commissioners and the public in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The decisions that the commission makes must be clearly written and properly substantiated.

Debriefing

Often there is a point toward the end of the meeting for commissioner comments. This provides a helpful forum to debrief after a meeting. This serves as a check for the commission on how well they achieved their goals and what actions they need to take to improve their meetings.

Not all planning commission meetings are consensus-building meetings. There are times when decisions will be made that do not please everyone. Decisions must be made in the best interest of the community as a whole

and in accordance with adopted standards. Planning commissioners must be prepared for the controversy and the occasional lack of consensus.

What About Other Types of Meetings?

Working Groups. Sometimes two or three commissioners will agree to work on an ordinance revision and then bring it back to the entire commission for review and discussion. Check with your attorney, but typically since no decision is being made at the working group and the number of commissioners is less than a quorum, these working group meetings do not need to be posted like a planning commission meeting.

Community Engagement. For major projects or proposals, well-facilitated community engagement is necessary to allow for genuine problem solving. Often the planning commission meeting or hearing is too late in the process to get substantial public input. To resolve complex planning and development issues, public involvement has to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner. Otherwise, the public may feel that its voice is being ignored.

This tear sheet was developed by the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP) for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). The Michigan Association of Planning is a 501 c 3 organization, dedicated to promoting sound community planning that benefits the residents of Michigan. MAP was established in 1945 to achieve a desired quality of life through comprehensive community planning that includes opportunities for a variety of lifestyles and housing, employment, commercial activities, and cultural and recreational amenities.

