



Volunteer Boards and Commissions

Orientation Manual



Photo by: Alex Bungler

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ORIENTATION MANUAL OBJECTIVES

After reviewing this handbook, you should be able to agree with the following statement:

**"I am aware of my role as a volunteer on my assigned
Volunteer Board and/or Commission."**

OLMSTED COUNTY VOLUNTEER BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

Olmsted County Parks Commission	Olmsted County Zoning Board of Adjustment
Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB)	Planning Advisory Commission
Environmental Commission	Public Health Services Advisory Board
Human Rights Commission	Sheriff's Civil Services Commission
Legal Assistance of Olmsted County	Volunteers Drivers
Youth Commission	

WELCOME

On behalf of the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners, I would like to welcome and thank you for volunteering to serve on one of our Boards or Commissions.

Olmsted County has involved volunteers for decades. Community members serve on mediation panels, as library volunteers, on boards and commissions, as victim advocates, in probation, and as advocates for families in the courts and out of the courts. Community members involved as volunteers in Olmsted County have numerous opportunities to serve and to create a safer, more cohesive community.

While an opportunity to participate in Board or Commission orientation will be provided, this guide provides you with a written source of essential information and should be reviewed annually. As a new member appointed to a Volunteer Board/Commission, you will be invited to participate in an orientation session conducted by County staff from the department most closely linked to your Volunteer Board/Commission. This orientation session will include a review of the Volunteer Board/Commission responsibilities as assigned by the County Board or as specified by state law and a review of the procedures of the Volunteer Board/Commission.

For the purpose of these guidelines, a Volunteer Board/Commission is defined as one of the County's standing Boards appointed by the County Board of Commissioners. Most Volunteer Boards/Commissions are advisory to the Board; however, a few have statutory responsibilities. Most of the current Volunteer Boards/Commissions were created by County ordinance and a description of their responsibilities and duties can be accessed electronically through the County's web site at www.olmstedcounty.gov. The staff liaison or support staff assigned to your Volunteer Board/Commission can provide a copy of your Volunteer Boards/Commissions' enabling legislation.

Again, welcome and thanks for your willingness to serve your community!

Sincerely,

Olmsted County Board



EARLY OLMSTED COUNTY HISTORY

For thousands of years, native people have traversed and settled in our general area. Ancient trails have developed into roads and highways. These people came from Upper Mississippi cultures, from the Northern Woodlands and Western Prairies. In the last few hundred years, the specific tribes most frequently in our area were the Dakota (Sioux), Anishinaabe (Ojibway), and Winnebago. Even today, these tribes live on reservations and settlements in the general area and many live and work in local urban areas including Rochester.

Minnesota's history is rich in the romance of the colorful explorers who came seeking a Northwest Passage to the Pacific. First to arrive were the French in 1660 - Father Louis Hennepin and Pierre LeSueur. Later Jonathan Carver and other English explorers paddled their birch bark canoes to Minnesota - either up the Mississippi River or across Lake Superior.

For almost two centuries after Father Louis Hennepin paddled his canoe up the Mississippi, few white men saw the rolling plains and deep valleys of what is now southeastern Minnesota. Under a treaty concluded in 1853, the Dakota Indians relinquished this area to the territory of Minnesota and then came the surveyors, laying out county, township and section lines.

Perhaps the first white settler in Olmsted County was Hirman Thompson, who staked his claim near the village of Dover in 1853. Soon prairie schooners rumbled into the Zumbro River Valley bringing the great-grandparents of some of our current county residents.

On February 20, 1855 - two years after the white man made his first permanent settlements here

- the Territorial Legislative created Olmsted County from 660 square miles of land then a part of Winona, Fillmore, and Wabasha Counties. That same year this county sent its first representatives to the legislature.

Our county was named after David Olmsted, who first came to Minnesota in 1848. He was elected a member of the first Territorial council and in 1854 was elected the first Mayor of St. Paul.

Olmsted was a newspaper publisher, fur trader, friend of the Native Americans and a man known for his honesty and integrity. He never lived in the county that was named in his honor.

George Head, a pioneer resident of this county, named our county seat after Rochester, New York, which had once been his home town. On July 12, 1854, George, his wife, his brother, Jonathan, and their father laid claim to land that now forms part of Rochester's business district. It was here that they built a log cabin known as Head's Tavern that may have been Rochester's first place of business.

When George Head arrived, Rochester was a crossroads camping spot for the wagon trains that rolled into southeastern Minnesota. Two years later the new village had 50 inhabitants, and four years after Head arrived Rochester had a population of 1,500.



About a year after George Head staked his claim, the Olmsted County Commissioners held their first meeting at the village of Oronoco on the banks of the Zumbro River.

In 1857, prospectors saw gold flecks in the Zumbro River near Oronoco and a gold rush followed but it ended abruptly in the spring of 1858, and life at Oronoco settled down to a slower pace.

The Commissioners established the county seat at Rochester and, from 1858 to 1866, met in a large two-story frame structure built by Charles Lindsley and leased to the County.

From this building the Commissioners moved into spacious quarters in a brick building surmounted by a dome. The new courthouse looked like a state capitol, and was a prominent feature of Rochester's landscape for almost a century. It was replaced in 1958 by the building that is now the Mayo Clinic's Ozmun East Building.



In 1863, Doctor William Worrall Mayo arrived in Rochester to become examining surgeon of federal draftees during the Civil War. More than 1,200 Olmsted County men left Minnesota to fight in the war from 1861 to 1864. Following that war, the resident of Olmsted settled down once again to farming the land.

However, in 1883, a war of a different kind struck the village of Rochester. On August 21st of that year, the swirling winds of the "Great Tornado" swept through Rochester killing 26 persons and destroying much of the north side of town. including the original dome of the courthouse. Later, the Lady of Justice (Themis) was rebuilt and placed on the magnificent courthouse.

In the wake of that terrifying experience, Sister Mary Alfred, a Franciscan Sister teaching in Rochester, approached Rochester's "county doctor" to discuss the need for a hospital. The Sisters of St. Francis offered to build and maintain a hospital if the good doctor would provide the medical staff.

Thus the humanitarian spirit of a Franciscan Sister combined with the professional dedication of a small town physician named William Worrall Mayo set in motion a force that today has become one of the world's foremost centers of medical care.



Dr. William Mayo's sons, William J. and Charles H., grew up in Rochester and helped Dr. Mayo in his medical work. When they had completed their formal medical education, William and Charles joined their father in the practice of medicine. Other doctors joined the Mayo's, and the medical team developed scientific laboratories to test and refine their medical knowledge. A world-famed institution, the Mayo Clinic stands in the heart of the community.

Migration to Minnesota reached its peak in 1885 and the green valleys and flowing streams of this southeaster area of the state received more settlers than any other portion of the territory.

Mayo Clinic purchased the courthouse at 515 2nd St. SW when Olmsted County moved to its present location. The building is now known as the Ozmun Building. The new Government Center was constructed at 151 4th St. SE and was dedicated June 30, 1993. In addition to the Government Center, many other buildings in Olmsted County are the location of offices staffed by county employees who provide services to residents.



Photo by: Alex Bunger

151 4th Street SE
Rochester, MN
55904
507-328-6000
www.olmstedcounty.gov

OLMSTED COUNTY STRATEGY

Olmsted County's mission is to provide the foundation of a vibrant community. Our vision is to deliver excellence every day. We strive to fulfill our goals to:

- **Assure Safe and Healthy Communities:** We keep the community safe and provide pathways to health, housing, and well-being.
- **Be Good Stewards of Our Built and Natural Environments:** We provide excellent transportation, land use and recreation; protect air, water, and soil quality; and manage waste effectively,
- **Maintain Foundations of Democracy:** We provide fair property valuation and administer fair elections; provide access to documents of record; and provide access to remedy through the judicial system.
- **Provide Operational Excellence:** We develop our employees; use public resources wisely; and plan, adapt and respond effectively.

We use many strategies to perform the work but also to monitor our progress and performance and share key information with the public.

OLMSTED COUNTY SCORECARD

This scorecard was first created in 2019 and is administrated by our Executive Management Team. They will review the results of the measures on this scorecard and suggest an evolution of the scorecard over time to guide the county's long-term priorities. Beginning in 2021, each department will also have a scorecard that mirrors the countywide scorecard.



Olmsted County Strategy Scorecard 2020

Mission:

To Provide the Foundation of a Vibrant Community

Vision:

A Dynamic, World-class County Delivering Excellence Every Day

Values:

Integrity

Innovation

Pro-Activity

Respect

Reliability

Goals:

Assure Safe and Healthy Communities

Keep the community safe
Provide pathways to health, housing and well-being

Provide Operational Excellence

Develop our employees
Use public resources wisely
Plan, adapt and respond effectively

Be Good Stewards of Our Built and Natural Environments

Provide excellent transportation, land use and recreation
Protect air, water and soil quality and manage waste effectively

Maintain Foundations of Democracy

Provide fair property valuation and elections
Provide access to documents of record and the judicial system

Measures of Success

Resident Quality of Life

Program Effectiveness | Resident Satisfaction | Customer Service

Measures	Baseline	Target	Description of Measure
Resident-reported satisfaction with county services	61pts.	65pts.	Average rating was between good and excellent on a 100-point scale. Data are 2019 and are collected every three years.
Resident-reported quality of life, from household survey	73pts.	75pts.	Average rating was between good and excellent on a 100-point scale. Data are 2019 and are collected every three years.

Financial Stewardship

Planful and Sustainable Finances

Measures	Baseline	Target	Description of Measure
Cash balance as a percent of operating revenues (AAA credit rating factor)	54%	50%	Governmental Funds ability to meet financial obligations. U.S. counties median is about 37%.
Unrestricted fund balance as a percent of operating revenues (AAA credit rating factor)	44%	42.5%	Financial position of Governmental Funds unrestricted balances available for use. Midpoint of State Auditor's recommendation is 42.5% and U.S. counties median is about 32%.
Levy ranking per capita	55 th	Lower Half	Olmsted County's rank among Minnesota's 87 counties (one is highest)

Internal Processes

Data-Driven Decisions | Efficient and Effective Processes | Effective Communications

Measures	Baseline	Target	Description of Measure
County departments with completed scorecard	0%	100%	County departments that have completed a strategy scorecard.
Resident and business services online	116	146	Applicable services that can be started or completed online (target is 71% of total).

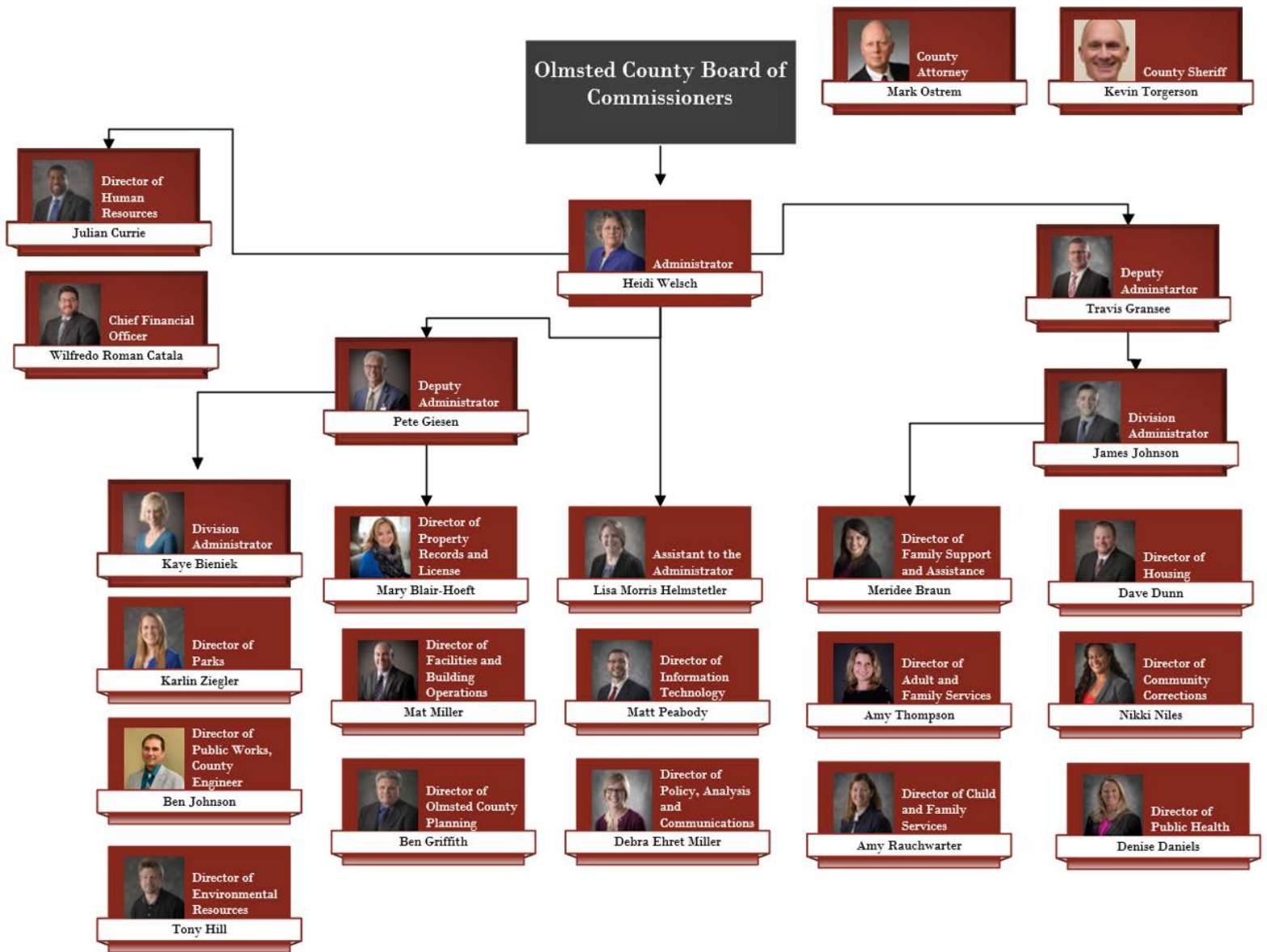
Organizational Capacity

Effective Technology Use | Skilled and Diverse Staff

Measures	Baseline	Target	Description of Measure
Employee turnover	8.6%	8-12%	Employee turnover in 2018, including retirements. Target is typical for industry.
Staff race/ethnicity reflective of community	7.5%	13.0%	Non-White staff in 2019. Target is percent of the county's non-White population ages 25-64 in 2018. (source: U.S. Census)

OLMSTED COUNTY

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



OLMSTED COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



For more information about the Board of Commissioner visit our page [Olmsted County Board of Commissioners](#)

VOLUNTEER BOARDS/COMMISSIONS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR MISSION

Volunteer Boards/Commissions serve an important role in democratic local government. Volunteer Boards/Commissions' are an excellent mechanism for gathering constructive input from residents, putting to use the talents of individual residents, and bringing a resident perspective to local government activities and projects.

Service on a Volunteer Board/Commission familiarizes you with your community and develops potential community leaders, while giving you a chance to help address community needs and make recommendations for possible solutions. Finally Volunteer Boards/Commissions provide a way to practice the spirit of giving and philanthropy, a way to serve your fellow resident.

As a volunteer member of a Volunteer Board/Commission, you have the opportunity to influence important decisions about government policies, about the distribution of community resources, and about the provision of services to residents. The quality and effectiveness of your input can affect the whole community.

A Volunteer Board/Commission obligation, generally, is to make informed resident recommendations to the County Board and to assist the Board in making good decisions for the community. Each Volunteer Board/Commission has a specific scope of assigned responsibilities identified in their enabling ordinance or resolution.

The County Board, not the Volunteer Boards/Commissions, is ultimately responsible to the resident. The Volunteer Boards/Commissions should recognize that, with a few exceptions, their roles generally are to advise the County Board of Commissioners. In most cases, the decision to implement the Volunteer Boards/Commission's recommendations will be made by staff or by the County Board. The role of Volunteer Boards/Commissions members as an advisory group is important to the well-being of the community. Even though the Volunteer Boards/Commissions job is different from staff's job and the County Board's job, it is a very important part of a democratic local government.

Volunteer Board/Commission members should recognize that the County Board's area of concern is much broader than the Volunteer Board/Commission and, in some cases; Volunteer Board/Commission recommendations will not be implemented.

VOLUNTEER BOARDS/COMMISSIONS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR MISSION - *CONTINUED*

It is important that an advisory Volunteer Boards/Commissions' work reflects the perspective of the community as a whole and not only the opinions of the appointed members. Effective Volunteer Board/Commission work depends on the members' understanding of the community's goals. The members of Volunteer Boards and Commissions add value by providing a forum for the concerns of community members and by providing their expertise and perspectives to the work of the Board and staff.

Commission Members Terms of Service: Generally, each member shall be appointed for a term of three years and shall serve until his/her successor is appointed. Terms will be staggered to maintain continuity. No member shall be appointed for more than six consecutive years. Commission members wishing to serve a second term shall verbally express their interest to the staff supporting the Commission and Deputy County Administrator and, with their approval and approval of the County Board may continue to serve a second term without re-application.

Chair and Vice Chair Terms of Service: Members shall elect a Chair and Vice Chair. The elected officers shall serve for one year or for successive terms if reelected. Elected officers may serve no more than 2 consecutive years in the elected position.

NOTE: Part of the role of Volunteer Boards/Commissions involved in receiving public testimony is to maintain an atmosphere that is comfortable for people not accustomed to public speaking to express their points of view. This entails not only welcoming speakers in ways that are not intimidating, but also controlling crowd response to permit minority points of view to be expressed.



Photo by: Alex Bunger

VOLUNTEER BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Important Volunteer Board/Commission member duties and responsibilities include:

- ❖ To meet, as necessary, to accomplish the Volunteer Board/Commission assigned duties.
- ❖ To perform other responsibilities as required by the enabling legislation of a Volunteer Board/Commission.
- ❖ To hold public meetings and hearings, as may be required, and in conformance with the Open Meetings Act.
- ❖ To provide reports to the Board of Commissioners pertaining to actions taken throughout the year.
- ❖ To make recommendations relative to needed policies, ordinances, and programs to achieve the County's goals.
- ❖ To act responsibly and professionally with respect to information obtained as a Volunteer Board/Commission member.
- ❖ If requested, to cooperate with the County's designated custodian of data to make the Volunteer Board/Commission's public data as defined by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act open for public inspection.
- ❖ To review all relevant background information provided in preparation for regular or special meetings or work sessions of the Volunteer Board/Commission.
- ❖ To refrain from any action this constitutes a conflict of interest.

Relationship with the County Board of Commissioners

At least one County Board Commissioner will be assigned to serve as liaison to each Volunteer Board/Commission. These assignments will change annually and will be made in a manner determined by the Board.

Relationship with County Staff

Throughout their terms, Volunteer Board/Commission members will work closely with the associated department director, staff liaison, and occasionally, the County Administrator. A close working relationship between the Volunteer Board/Commission and its associated department is important for success, but it should be clear that the Volunteer Boards/Commissions work with the departments, not for the departments, and vice-versa.

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A good partnership between staff and the Volunteer Boards and/or Commission members has historically been an effective and productive relationship. A Volunteer Board/Commission may ask specific departments through their assigned staff liaison to provide information necessary for the Volunteer Board/Commission members to make informed decisions.

Department representatives designated as ex-officio members are expected to attend all Volunteer Board/Commission meetings and participate in Volunteer Board/Commission discussions, provide background information, and may advocate positions on potential Volunteer Board/Commission actions. The ex-officio staff representative(s) are non-voting members of the Volunteer Board/ Commission. For some Volunteer Board/Commissions, the Chairperson and the Department Director prepare a brief description of the Volunteer Board/Commission accomplishments and plans for the future as part of their annual report to the County Board.

Relationship with the Community

One duty of Volunteer Boards/Commissions is to provide public information for and to receive public comments from individuals or groups interested in its area of responsibility. Volunteer Boards/Commissions can use a variety of techniques to involve and inform the public

TO ACT PROFESSIONALLY AND BE RESPECTFUL OF VIEWS EXPRESSED BY OTHERS.

Relationship with the Media

Volunteer Boards/Commissions must recognize that local government is a source of news for the local media. In this connection:

- ❖ Consider all public statements in light of how they would appear in the media.
- ❖ Add a recommendation to direct inquiries to County Staff or Chairperson.



LEGAL OBLIGATIONS OF ADVISORY BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

As an advisory board member, it is important to remember that you have legal responsibilities.

Minnesota Open Meeting Law: Advisory boards are considered “public bodies” under Minnesota law. As a result, you must ensure that your board or commission operates in compliance with the Open Meeting Law found in Chapter 13D of the Minnesota Statutes.

Purposes: The Minnesota Supreme Court has indicated there are three purposes of the open meeting law:

- ❖ To prohibit actions being taken at a secret meeting where it is impossible for the interested public to become fully informed about a public board’s decisions or to detect improper influences
- ❖ To assure the public’s right to be informed
- ❖ To afford the public an opportunity to present its views to the public body

Requirements: Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law essentially requires three things:

1. Notice must be provided for all meetings,
2. Meetings must be open to the public, unless the subject being discussed clearly falls into a defined exception to the Open Meeting Law and
3. Minutes must be created for each meeting.

A “**meeting**” is defined as including not only formal gatherings of the board but also **any occasion where a “quorum” (usually a majority) of the board/Commission members comes together and discusses board/commission issues in person or by electronic means, whether or not action is taken or contemplated.** This definition also applies where board subcommittees are concerned as well. Therefore, if three members of a five-member board/commission subcommittee come together and discuss board/commission matters, the Open Meeting Laws requirement must be complied with. This is true whether you are in a social setting or in a formal meeting. It is important to be aware of this fact when you find yourself with other members, whatever the situation. Serial meetings of less than a quorum held with the intent to avoid the law may be found to be in violation of the law.

Exceptions to the Law: A meeting may be closed for reasons including, but not limited to, attorney-client privilege, for the purposes of labor negotiations, employee evaluations, and discussion of security issues and certain property transactions. Whether a meeting session may legally be closed should be verified by staff prior to scheduling the meeting.

Legal Obligations of Advisory Boards/Commissions - *CONTINUED*

Notice of Meetings: Advisory boards/commissions must give notice of the time, place and agenda for any regular, special or emergency meeting. This notice is normally executed by the staff serving the Board or Commission.

Minnesota statutes and in some cases county ordinances do dictate public hearing notice requirements, including publication, mailed notices, and the minimum notice period prior to the meeting, for some actions.

Where not specified in law, public notice must be reasonably calculated to give actual notice to interested persons and the media who have asked in writing to be notified of meetings and general notice to the public at large.

Advisory boards/ commissions wishing to provide adequate notice should strive to provide as much notice as possible to ensure that those wishing to attend have ample opportunity — a week to 10 days for example.

At least 3 days' notice to members of the governing body, the public and media is required for any **special meeting**, unless the meeting is considered an emergency meeting. Appropriate notice is required for emergency meetings and should include phone calls and/or e-mails to media and other interested parties. Notice for emergency meetings must also cite the emergency.

A meeting notice must include a list of the principal subjects to be considered at the meeting. This list should be specific enough to permit residents to recognize matters of interest. However, discussion of subjects not on the agenda may be permitted in some cases at the meeting. Members should ask guidance from Department staff if this issue arises.

Note that when a meeting is adjourned, discussion of matters related to the meeting must cease. Continued discussion of such matters outside a convened meeting is a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

Minutes: Written, sound, video or digital recording of minutes are required for all meetings.

The law says minutes must be made available within a "reasonable time" after each meeting, but does not specify the time. Where Minnesota Law or county ordinances specify the means and length of time to retain minutes, those directives must be complied with. Where not specified in law the time frame for producing the minutes should not exceed three weeks, unless otherwise specified, minutes must be preserved for a "reasonable time," generally interpreted to be at

Legal Obligations of Advisory Boards/Commissions - *CONTINUED*

least one year. Minutes of County advisory boards and commissions are subject to county records retention schedules approved by the State Archivist.

Minutes are an important public record, and must indicate:

- ☐ Members present, whether in person or remotely when permitted by law
- ☐ All motions, proposals, resolutions, orders, ordinances and measures proposed and their disposition.
- ☐ The result of all votes by name of each member (except for public bodies consisting of more than 25 members). No secret ballots are allowed.
- ☐ The substance of discussion on any matter.
- ☐ A reference to any document discussed at the meeting.

Minutes are not required to be a verbatim transcript and the meeting does not have to be tape recorded unless specified by law. The minutes are a public record and may not be withheld from the public merely because they will not be approved until the next meeting; unapproved minutes should, however, be noted as such.

Violations: Most claims that the Open Meetings Law has been violated will be made against the public body itself. However, claims may be brought against individual public officials (including volunteer board members); public officials may be sued personally for Open Meeting Law violations. In most of these circumstances, the county will provide a legal defense of a public official who has acted in good faith. However, if it appears that a public official has intentionally acted in violation of the law, the County will not assist with defense of any claims. If a board or commission member is found to have intentionally violated the Open Meeting Law three or more times while serving as a member of a county volunteer board or commission, a court can order the board or commission member to forfeit their right to serve for the remainder of their term. The Court can also award reasonable costs, disbursements and attorney's fees of up to \$13,000 as a penalty if it finds a violation of the Open Meeting Law to be intentional. More details on this issue can be found in Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.06.

ETHICS REQUIREMENTS AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Advisory board members are considered "public" and/or "local" officials and must act consistently with Minnesota's law. **Under Minnesota Status Section**

471.895 which prohibits certain gifts by interested person to local officials, "Local official" means an elected or appointed official of a county or city or of an agency, authority, or instrumentality of a county or city.

General Rules of ethical conduct:

1. Avoid Conflicts of Interest and Receiving Gifts

- ❖ Treat all people appearing before your board or commission equally, no special favors for friends or family.
- ❖ Do not use your County position to obtain a financial gain or avoid a loss. This means you should not direct county business to where you have a financial interest and you should not solicit private clients or work through your county position. This applies to you, your relatives, members of household or your businesses.
- ❖ Accepting gifts is generally prohibited. No advisory board member may accept a "gift" from an "interested person". A gift is "money, real or personal property, a service, loan, a forbearance or forgiveness of indebtedness or a promise of future employment that is given or received without the giver receiving consideration of equal or greater value in return". An "interested person" is a "person or representative of a person or association with a direct financial interest in a decision a local official is authorized to make".
- ❖ There are some exceptions to this general rule, including but not limited to, a plaque or memento recognizing service or a charitable cause, a trinket or memento costing \$5 or less, or food or beverages given at a reception away from the recipient's place of work where the recipient is making a speech or answering questions as part of a program.
- ❖ Conflicts of interest may arise in many different settings, considering zoning applications, or license applications, or a request for action of some type to a board or commission where the board or commission member knows the requester well and feels that because of this past association, he/she could not be objective when considering the request.

ETHICS REQUIREMENTS AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS - CONTINUED

- ❖ A conflict of interest may also exist if a decision or recommendation could potentially affect the finances of the Board/Commission member or the finances of a family member and thus make it difficult for the board member to be fair and impartial when considering the decision or recommendation. See Minnesota Statutes Section 471.87 for additional details.
- ❖ If a conflict of interest exists, the Board/Commission member should declare this fact at a meeting where the issue is to be discussed and should refrain from discussing or voting on the matter.
- ❖ The laws surrounding conflicts of interest also contain certain exceptions that may apply. If you are unsure whether or not a conflict exists, you should contact the staff person assisting your advisory board Board/Commission and the staff may contact the Olmsted County Attorney's Office to get further direction on how this matter should be handled. No Personal Use of County Property
- ❖ Do not borrow or take property or supplies for personal or non-county use.
- ❖ Exception: Olmsted County's Information Management Policy allows limited personal use of county computer equipment when used for Board/Commission business.
- ❖ Do not use county property for personal gain or outside business.
- ❖ Follow Confidential Rules and Laws
- ❖ Know which information you handle is confidential by law.
- ❖ Do not disclose confidential information without authorization.
- ❖ Do not "tip off" anyone with confidential information.
- ❖ Report Rule Violations to Board/Commission Staff Liaison

Resources for Information: The Open Meetings Laws and the ethics laws assure that Minnesota's system of government operates properly. Fortunately, it is not difficult to comply with these laws. The first step is knowing what is required. You will receive more detailed information from staff supporting the advisory Board/Commission. For now, knowing that these laws exist should help you identify potential issues that may arise. If you ever have any questions, please contact your staff person for answers and if necessary, they can get additional advice from the Olmsted County Attorney's Office. This will allow you to focus on the important service you are providing to the County.

ETHICS REQUIREMENTS AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS - *CONTINUED*

A. Legal Protection for Volunteers

Olmsted County is considered to be a "municipality" along with other public entities and may be subject to legal action for the torts of its officers, employees and agents, including volunteers under Chapter 466 of the Minnesota Statutes. A "tort" is any breach of a legal duty which results in injury to a specific person or persons for which the law provides a remedy. "Injury" can include such things as financial loss, damage to reputation or emotional injury, as well as physical injury and property damage. Typically, under Chapter 466, the action or suit will be brought only against the County, though a claim may also be brought against the individual volunteer. If a claim is brought against a volunteer, the volunteer, upon written request, is entitled to indemnification (protection from the cost of any judgment) and legal defense for any tort committed while in the performance of the volunteer's duties while serving on a County Board/Commission, subject to certain limits. This is true unless the act or omission complained of amounted to malfeasance in office (which is considered to be some type of wrongful or illegal act), willful or wanton neglect of duty, or criminal activity.

B. Being an Effective Board Member

Members are appointed to County Boards/Commission to represent the public at large. Many times appointments are made to reflect a geographic interest, an area of expertise, or to represent a special interest group or professional association. Keep this in mind as you become acquainted with your fellow board members. Remember each member brings an important point of view. Listening to differing points of view produces good policies and procedures and fair solutions to problems. If you are unsure of the Board/Commission's mission or the item under discussion, you may ask questions and seek information until you have a clear answer and good understanding of the expectations. It is vital that all members come to meetings prepared. It is important that you read all reports, proposals and other documents prepared or distributed by staff or Board/Commission officers prior to meetings.

C. Expectations for Conduct

General fitness for duty and attendance standards:

Volunteers shall not attend meetings while "under the influence" of alcohol or chemicals or prescribed by a physician. Attending meetings while under the influence of alcohol or chemicals may be grounds for dismissal of the volunteer from the county board or commission at the discretion of the Olmsted County Board.

Volunteers shall educate themselves about the effects of any prescription of nonprescription medications by obtaining information from health care providers, pharmacists, medication packages and brochures, or other authoritative sources in advance of performing volunteer duties.

MEETINGS

Members of a group Board/Commission have a responsibility for the content and product of meetings they attend. They should come prepared to take ownership for their contribution and the end result of the meeting. Meetings do matter.

Attendance: Regular meeting attendance is important. Members should be aware of specific attendance requirements of their board and always notify staff or the Board/Commission chair if unable to attend a meeting.

Stipend: **Board/Commission members may receive a** meeting stipend or expense reimbursement, which will be paid in accordance with policies of the County Board of Commissioners for each board or committee meeting attended. Payments are made in January for the preceding year. Board members can decline to receive such payments if they so choose.

Ground Rules: Every group is encouraged to establish ground rules on how meetings will run, how members will interact and what kind of behavior is acceptable. Because each member is an individual, each has a different way of accomplishing tasks. At times, these different ways can cause friction between members and slow down the process of the group as a whole.

Each member is expected to respect these rules, which usually prevents misunderstandings and disagreements.

Member Roles: By participating as a member of a Board/Commission, each person makes a unique contribution through his or her presence alone, but some members may assume additional roles. Each role that people select has guidelines that help ensure success. The following are general guidelines that may vary with the requirements or needs of each Board/Commission.

Member Responsibilities

- ❖ Arranges adequate time to carry out responsibilities as a member.
- ❖ Comes to meetings prepared.
- ❖ Listens to other members and follows the ground rules of the Board/Commission.
- ❖ Participates in decision making processes.
- ❖ Serves on appropriate sub-committees.

MEETINGS - CONTINUED

Staff Support for Advisory Boards: Most County volunteer Boards/Commissions are managed by County staff within a department affiliated with the business of that Board/Commission. **The primary role of staff is to carry out the rules, policies and programs developed by the board. Staff also brings to the Board/Commission's attention issues of importance, assists the Chair with agenda development, and compiles background information for the Board /Commission to study.**

Support Staff Responsibilities includes:

The Support Staff's role is to coordinate meetings for the Advisory Boards/Commissions and support the Board/Commission Chair and Department Director. Responsibilities include:

- ❖ Schedule and post meetings per Minnesota Open Meeting Law requirements.
- ❖ Provide meals or refreshments, if needed. Check with the Department Director if unsure.
- ❖ Draft and distribute agenda using PrimeGov after receiving agenda topics and approval of agenda content from the Board/Commission Chair and Department Director.
- ❖ Prepare minutes in PrimeGov. Agendas will be available by link within Outlook meeting invitations.
 - Note: minutes will be available in PrimeGov within three days for review and update.
- ❖ All agendas, minutes and meeting recordings are electronically stored in PrimeGov.
- ❖ Provide technology support if issues arise including in PrimeGov.
- ❖ Update vacancies in PrimeGov. Administration will advertise.
- ❖ Request advertising of open vacancies
- ❖ Submits a resolution in PrimeGov for Advisory Board/Commission reappointments.
- ❖ New members will meet with Clara Sifuentes for Advisory Board/Commission orientations.
- ❖ Works with Department Director and attorney's office to resolve questions regarding Open Meeting Law, Robert Rules of Order, etc.

Chairperson Responsibilities

- ❖ Attends all meetings.

Board/Commission members shall be permitted two unexcused absences for each year of Board/Commission service. If a Board/Commission member incurs three unexcused absences within one year, this matter shall be referred to a Deputy County Administrator on behalf of the Board/Commission for further action which may include removal from the Board/Commission.
- ❖ Meets with Department Director and/or Department Board/Commission staff liaison or applicable Executive Committee to consult, identify agenda topics and plans that accomplish the committee goals.
- ❖ Prepare for meetings by reviewing agenda and supporting materials in advance.
- ❖ Advisory Board/Commission Chair leads the meetings in partnership with the Department Director.

MEETINGS - CONTINUED

- ❖ Encourages full participation and open discussion during meetings.
- ❖ Assures specific Advisory Board/Commission by-laws, Minnesota Open Meeting Law, and Robert's Rules of Order procedures are observed.
- ❖ Assures meeting is called and held in accordance with the work of the Board/Committee priorities.
- ❖ Keeps discussions orderly, focused, efficient, and fair.
- ❖ Signs correspondence on behalf of the Board/Commission following approval by the Department Director.
- ❖ Represents the Board/ Commission appropriately at all times, mindful of the distinction between serving as Chair of the Board/Commission on behalf of the County when required to do so and engaging in activities in the community as private citizen when not serving as a representative of the County. See Commission Member Conduct on Advisory Board/Commission Bylaws.

Facilitator Responsibilities (if the Chair is not serving in this role)

- ❖ Guides the Board/Commission through the agenda.
- ❖ Remains neutral in regard to content of the meeting.
- ❖ Encourages each member to participate fully.
- ❖ Keeps energy positive and focused.
- ❖ Suggests methods to enable the Board/Commission to clearly solve the problem so that everyone agrees with the outcome.
- ❖ Works with the Chair and staff on meeting logistics.

Your group may use a facilitator if one is available and (optional)

- ❖ There is a difference in opinion on the direction of the Board/Commission.
- ❖ Productivity is lacking and goals are not being accomplished.
- ❖ Goals are not clearly defined.
- ❖ The Board/Commission is newly formed or has changed in membership.
- ❖ The organization Board/Commission experiences a lack of direction.
- ❖ The Board/Commission is involved in strategic planning.
- ❖ The Chair is not delegating.
- ❖ The Board/Commission is dominated by one or two individuals.
- ❖ Board/Commission members are not participating in discussions.

MEETINGS - CONTINUED

Three to five ground rules are sufficient for most members. Some examples of ground rules include:

- ❖ **Attendance:** Members should place a high priority on meetings, talk about what would be legitimate reasons for missing a meeting, and establish a procedure for informing the Chair of a member's absence from a scheduled meeting.
- ❖ **Promptness:** Meetings should start and end ontime.
- ❖ **Meeting place and time:** Specify a regular meeting time and place, and establish a procedure for notifying members of meetings.
- ❖ **Participation:** Everyone's viewpoint is valuable. Every member can make a unique contribution; therefore, emphasize the importance of both speaking freely and listening attentively.
- ❖ **Basic conversational courtesies:** Listen attentively and respectfully to others, do not interrupt, one conversation at a time, and so forth.
- ❖ **Other norms or ground rules** that can be decided ahead of time by the group such as acceptable language, humor, jargon, etc.
- ❖ **Use of Social Media:** Use of social media during meetings to post or comment on meeting topics is discouraged as it can detract from members fully listening to and participating in meeting discussions. Any use of social media during meetings which does occur is only permitted where information is exchanged with all members of the general public as required by Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.065.

Olmsted County Rules of Order: There is no Minnesota Law that requires Olmsted County Board of Commissioners, or Volunteer Board/Commissions to conduct meetings using the Robert's Rules of Order to conduct meeting using the Robert's Rules of Order. However, use of Robert's Rules of Order is encouraged to help insure that meetings run smoothly and that issues which arise are handled in an impartial manner.

Decision Making: Just as the functions of Olmsted County's advisory boards are different, so are the ways in which each Board/Commission reaches a decision. After a discussion, some may vote; others may prioritize and select the decision which emerged as a priority; and still others may use consensus as a way to reach a decision.

It is important that volunteer Board/Commission members are aware of the type of decision-making processes their Board/Commission uses and to become familiar with them (for some bodies in particular, different methods are appropriate for different commission functions). Consensus as a decision-making process is explained in this information because fewer people are familiar with it than with the other processes used by boards. For information on other decision-making methods to be used by your Board/Commission, contact your staff support person

What is Consensus? In many cases a Board/Commission's goal should be to reach decisions that best reflect the thinking of all members. This is called "reaching consensus". It is easy to be confused about what consensus is and is not:

Consensus is...

- Finding a proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it to some degree; no member opposes it.

Consensus is not...

- A unanimous vote - consensus may not represent everyone's first priorities.
- A majority vote - in a majority vote, only the majority gets something they are happy with; people in the minority may get something they do not want at all, which is not what consensus is all about.
- Everyone has unhappily agreed to go along with the decision.

Consensus requires...

- Time.
- Active participation of all group members
- Skills in communication: listening, conflict resolution, discussion facilitation.
- Creative thinking and open-mindedness.

To reach consensus, the Board/Commission must let each member participate fully in the decision. This may mean going through several rounds of the outlined process for the group. And when the decision is reached, it is unlikely everyone will be completely satisfied with the decision, but everyone can live with it.

Steps in the consensus decision-making process:

- Describe and define the problem, situation or issue that needs a decision. If complicated, hand out in written form beforehand.
- Brainstorm a list of alternatives without judging, discussing or rejecting any ideas. To encourage participation, take only one idea from each person.
- Review, change, consolidate, rewrite and set priorities through group discussion.
- Make a consensus decision. When a solution is reached, make sure it is written on a flip chart or other visual tool so everyone can see it.
- Implement the decision: who will do what, when, and how.
 - Board/Commission will evaluate and revise the results later if necessary.

REMINDERS

- All participants arrive prepared.
- There are clear ground rules that all agree to honor.
- Agenda is written and shared in advance of the meeting.
- Physical environment is comfortable.
- Start and end at the times agreed on by the group.
- All participants contribute.
- Outcome is clear to all.
- Work to be accomplished is defined and assigned.

Ann Schaubert, Oregon State University Extension Service

NOTES

