

# Planning Commission Member Guide

## City of Dillingham

### Welcome to the Planning Commission!

This guide will help you understand your role as a Planning Commission member, your responsibilities, and the procedures you'll follow when conducting city business.

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## Your Role as a Commission Member

As a Planning Commission member, you play a vital role in shaping Dillingham's future. Your position is both an honor and a responsibility to the community.

### Your Primary Functions:

- Help guide the physical development of the city
- Represent the community's interests, not just your own
- Make fair, consistent decisions based on city ordinances
- Balance property rights with community needs
- Provide recommendations to the City Council
- Serve as the city's Platting Board

### What Makes a Good Commissioner:

- Impartiality and open-mindedness
  - Willingness to listen to all sides
  - Commitment to the public good
  - Preparation for meetings (reading materials beforehand)
  - Attendance at scheduled meetings
  - Understanding of land use laws and procedures
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## **2. Commission Structure**

### **Membership**

- 7 voting members who are Dillingham residents
- Appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council
- Serve 3-year staggered terms

### **Leadership**

- Chairperson and Deputy Chair elected annually in January
- Deputy Chair acts when the Chairperson is absent

### **Quorum and Voting**

- 4 members constitute a quorum
- Actions require a majority vote of those present (minimum of 3 affirmative votes)
- Every member present must vote unless disqualified due to conflict of interest

### **Attendance**

A vacancy will be declared if a member:

- Misses 3+ consecutive regular meetings without being excused
  - Is absent from the city for 90+ days
  - Is unable to attend meetings for 90+ days
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## **3. Meetings and Procedures**

### **Meeting Schedule**

- Regular meetings held once each month
- Special meetings may be called by the Chairperson or at the request of 3 members
- All meetings are public, with minutes kept as public records

### **Meeting Format**

Typical order of business at regular meetings:

1. Call to order
2. Roll call
3. Approval of minutes
4. Approval of agenda
5. Communications
  - Communications to the Planning Commission
  - Planner's report
6. Public hearings
7. Citizen comments
8. Unfinished business
9. New business
10. Commissioner comments
11. Adjournment

### **Procedures**

- Meetings follow Robert's Rules of Order
- Formal actions are taken by resolution
- Resolutions include findings of fact that support decisions

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## 4. Key Responsibilities

The Planning Commission has several important responsibilities:

### Planning Documents

- Prepare and recommend the Comprehensive Plan
- Develop land use regulations to implement the Comprehensive Plan
- Create and update the subdivision ordinance
- Maintain the official map of the city
- Update the six-year capital improvement plan annually

### Development Review

- Review and decide on subdivision plats as the Platting Board
- Consider requests for variances
- Approve, deny, or place conditions on conditional use permits
- Review proposed community structures for consistency with plans

### Public Engagement

- Hold public hearings before making recommendations
  - Listen to citizen input and concerns
  - Balance community interests with property rights
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## 5. Decision-Making Processes

### General Decision-Making Steps

1. **Receive application or issue** for consideration
2. **Review materials** provided by staff and applicant
3. **Conduct public hearing** when required
4. **Deliberate** based on the evidence and applicable standards
5. **Make findings** that support your decision
6. **Vote** on the matter
7. **Document decision** through a formal resolution

### Making Good Decisions

- Base decisions on facts and standards in city code
- Identify clear findings that support your conclusion
- Be consistent in applying rules and standards
- Consider precedent, but evaluate each case on its own merits
- Articulate your reasoning for the public record

### Conflicts of Interest

- Follow Section 2.03.020 regarding conflict of interest voting
  - Disclose potential conflicts before discussion begins
  - If you have a substantial financial interest in a matter, you should not participate
  - When in doubt, consult with city staff
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## **6. Types of Applications You'll Review**

### **Land Use Permits**

You will not directly review general or by-right land use permits (handled by staff), but you will:

- Review conditional use applications
- Consider appeals of administrative decisions

#### **Conditional Use Process:**

1. Application submitted to Planning Department
2. Staff reviews and prepares recommendation
3. Public notice posted and mailed to neighbors within 500 feet
4. Public hearing held (within 60 days of complete application)
5. Commission decides to approve, approve with conditions, or deny
6. Decision documented in a resolution with findings of fact

### **Subdivision Plats**

As the Platting Board, you'll review and decide on subdivision proposals:

#### **Preliminary Plat Process:**

1. Subdivider meets with Planning Director (preliminary consultation)
2. Application with 12 copies submitted 15 days before meeting
3. Notice sent to adjacent property owners and agencies
4. Review for compliance with design standards and regulations
5. Commission approves, conditionally approves, or denies within 60 days

#### **Final Plat Process:**

1. Subdivider submits final plat after installing improvements or providing financial guarantee
2. Planning Commission reviews for compliance with preliminary plat approval
3. Decision made within 60 days

### **Variances**

Review requests for departures from numerical standards:

1. Applicant demonstrates hardship not self-created
2. Public hearing held
3. Commission evaluates based on variance criteria
4. Decision made based on findings

## **Vacation, Alteration, or Replat**

Process requests to alter or vacate existing plats:

1. Petition filed by state, city, utility, or property owners
2. Public hearing held
3. Commission makes decision based on merits
4. If street vacation involved, forwarded to City Council for approval

## **Land Use District Changes**

Make recommendations to City Council:

1. Change initiated by Council member or property owners
  2. Public hearing held by Planning Commission
  3. Recommendation forwarded to City Council
  4. City Council makes final decision
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# **7. Legal Considerations**

## **Due Process**

- All affected parties have the right to be heard
- Decisions must be based on facts and standards in city code
- Findings must support your conclusions

## **Ex Parte Communications**

- Avoid discussing applications outside of public meetings
- If you receive information outside a meeting, disclose it
- Make decisions based only on the record before you

## **Appeals**

- Board of Adjustment (City Council) hears appeals of your decisions
  - Stick to the standards in city code to minimize successful appeals
  - Document your reasoning clearly in findings
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## 8. Common Terms and Definitions

### Planning Terms

- **Comprehensive Plan:** The city's guiding document for development
- **Land Use District:** Zone designation controlling allowed uses (CB-Central Business, GU-General Use)
- **Conditional Use:** Use requiring special review of its location, design, and operations
- **Variance:** Permission to depart from numerical standards based on hardship
- **Nonconforming Use:** Lawful use that existed before current regulations

### Subdivision Terms

- **Subdivision:** Division of land into two or more parcels
- **Plat:** Map of a subdivision showing lots, streets, and easements
- **Abbreviated Plat:** Simple division creating 4 or fewer lots
- **Dedication:** Granting land for public use, such as streets or parks
- **Easement:** Right to use land owned by another for specific purposes

### Application Types

- **By-right Land Use:** Small, low-impact uses requiring no formal review
- **General Land Use Permit:** Basic permit for compliant uses
- **Administrative Review:** Staff review of compatible uses needing individual consideration
- **Conditional Use:** Commission review of uses with potential significant impacts

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Remember that city staff is there to help you! Don't hesitate to ask questions or request more information when needed.

This guide is meant to provide a general overview - the actual city code should always be consulted for specific requirements and procedures.

*The City of Dillingham appreciates your service!*