

Submission from Mike Koplinka-Loehr regarding the Ch. 7 code amendment for Town of Lansing "BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES": Wed. 3/20/24

Happy spring and **thank you** for the thoughtfulness which you've put into the considerations about the best governance of town affairs with respect to providing "guidance to" and management of Boards, Commissions and Committees, with the goal of providing "more accountability, continuity, productivity, and transparency to and for committee operations."

I have chaired well over 1,000 meetings in my elected public life: formal standing committees, advisory boards, citizen forums, as well as the full Tompkins County Legislature and so I seek to give some perspective regarding the addition of this new section for Article II "Town Board Operating Rules," § 7-20 "Procedural Rules of the Lansing Town Board."

Rules of the road are valuable, like rules for driving a car, and so I'm passionate about how such operating rules will impact local citizens. I find these rules which are at one point dispensing with Roberts Rules in general (with a process to employ them when requested,) and then at another point 'cherry picking' some rules (like a motion to 'call the question', or the ability to amend an amendment,) for the smooth flowing of a board meeting, which is of course your prerogative, will require all new members of the Town Board – and citizens - to be briefed on the rules of course, since it's an amalgam.

Section 4 outlines "Committees, Commissions, Councils, and Related Working Groups" and separates **four** "Statutory and Governmental Bodies" from **six** other "Standing and General Committees" and then **two** present "Project and Working Groups", all with differing rules.

In paragraphs A and B: the idea that "Members of statutory and governmental bodies may not serve upon any other statutory and governmental body or upon the town board," seems to defeat the purpose of liaisons between committee: Why wouldn't it be wise for someone from the CAC be a connection to the Planning Board? Or have a liaison from the Planning Board to Zoning? Would important collaborative discussions happen in a vacuum or by self-initiative to attend the other meeting to brief them on something, instead of having a regular line of established communication and reporting? These are legitimate perspectives being offered between statutory and governmental bodies that have important perspectives, not a bias, and certainly not a conflict of interest in legal terms.

In paragraph E, (and the same language followed for committees,) the idea that a "Statutory and governmental body" is "prohibited from creating their own committees and subcommittees," without approval of the Town Board undermines the effective functioning of such bodies. Subcommittees form all the time and are needed to keep a "Statutory and governmental body" functioning well. Let the bodies do their work effectively, please don't handicap them with undue regulations and processes which frustrate well meaning people to move forward with a mission or an overall group charge for being in the first place.

I find paragraph K. simply too harsh and controlling, "No member of the public or speaker shall engage in any demonstration, booing, hand clapping or otherwise disrupt the formality of a town board meeting." Let's be honest, humans will be humans and we should allow some

slack for at least some clapping, and if it gets out of hand, the chair can suggest restraint or to 'hold any clapping until then end,' or something similar.

Paragraph L. is simply unclear re: who sets the interview schedule and chooses the candidates. There are many "may" statements: "the Town board may," "the head of the department ... may participate," "the board in question may..." and "Prior to appointment the town board shall refer the name and application materials of each candidate to the applicable body that has a vacancy for comment and advice as to such appointment." Who takes the lead? Who makes the final decision? Who makes recommendations? Citizens need to know the 'rules' and be handled with respect, and this seems to be a set-up for confusion and mishandling of applicants through an undefined process. Personally, I believe the "committee, commission and/or Board" should be the place which starts the process.

For Sect 7-32: "Standing and General Committees, in Para. B. complete control of recruitment is taken from those committees, which places an undue burden on the Town Board and allows no such assistance from the very group with the expertise. One-year appointments seems too narrow. How about 3-year-terms with cascading appointments, and thus for a 9-person body, there would be 3-vacancies per year? As you well know, it can take a full year for a person to 'get up to speed' about their role and duties and sense of agency in participating.

In para. C: it makes no sense: *if* they are only 1-year appointments, to then have the Town Board appoint a chair/vice chair after Jan. 1, since everyone needs to be reappointed, there would never be a way for a committee to have chosen their leaders. This seems like every volunteer is up in the air between December and January of a calendar year. This is not a way to show respect for volunteer expertise.

Re: para. G: can a committee call for community input via a community forum, or have a speaker on a topic for a community meeting, related to their charge? This kind of thing is unclear regarding 'policy-setting,' but without this power, many committees would be less effective in getting information from the public and getting information out to the public, which is part of their roles.

Under section 7-33: Project and Working Groups: (2 are named in para. H,) - can't the Town board create a working group mid-year? Para. A says that it's not OK, that is has to be devised and thought about each January at the Organizational meeting. Issues come up that require expertise of some of the 11,000 Town residents which Town Board members may not have, and it doesn't make sense to handicap yourselves by the calendar year designation.

The issue of removal of participants by the Town board at any moment from any of these groups, seems to strike at an issue in getting volunteers in the first place. "Without cause" means arbitrary and capricious and sets a chilling standard I believe. Is there any avenue for a mediation, a discussion, due process rights under the US constitution and a citizen volunteer?

Overall I find these rules constraining and have the potential for unintentionally closing off well-meaning volunteers from assisting the Town in its' operations: whether it stops some potential volunteers to even submit their candidacy for consideration due to these strictures in this proposed amendment, or once they are appointed and operate under the constraints, they lose

heart and motivation for assisting. The Town would not just lose their expertise and energy, (which we desperately need,) but ultimately those people will converse with others about their experience which could lead to lower enthusiasm from other future potential citizen volunteers.

Finally, communication is so important to the functioning of a Town, information to the public and feedback from the public. It takes diligence and skill to manage both directions. There should be assistance for all of these bodies in communicating with the public, not hindrances. Under operating rules regarding recruitment, screening, appointment, effectively serving and promoting - the goals of the committees and bodies should be encouraged, especially in these times of discouragement about government in general, and I hope the Town of Lansing governance will open avenues for serving with distinction and not unawarely discourage participation of the public in our transparent local government, on behalf of future generations.

If I can be of service in crafting some balancing language to meet the overall goals stated, I am glad to help on a temporary 'working group' basis.