

What is APA?

The American Planning Association (APA) elevates and unites a diverse planning profession as it helps communities, their leaders and residents anticipate and meet the needs of a changing world.

APA's Vision is to lead the way to equitable, thriving communities by creating unique insights, as well as innovative and practical approaches that enable the planning community to anticipate and successfully adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing world.

APA's 40,000+ members are planners, commissioners, public officials, educators, students, and engaged citizens who are committed to creating vital communities. Four in 10 APA members have obtained required education, professional experience and passed a rigorous exam to become certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).

The AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct guides and inspires ethical decision-making and protects AICP-certified planners when faced with controversial or difficult choices.

If you'd like to know more about APA, visit www.planning.org.

The Planning Officials Program provides fundamental onboarding and training materials for those who serve as appointed planning and zoning officials for their communities.

The program provides general information, insights, and sound practices applicable to zoning entitlement for most every community. However, it is essential to know that each state has unique and specific requirements for planning and zoning.

Throughout the videos we use terms to describe these officials and their actions that might differ from what is used in your state. Though the terms may differ, the lessons are universal.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” training for planning officials; make sure to check local state codes or state enabling legislation for relevancy to your community.

If there are any questions about what is appropriate or legal in your community or state, please contact your local staff or municipal officials.

Procedural Requirements



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American Planning Association

Creating Great Communities for All

Open Meetings Act **a.k.a. Sunshine Laws**

Make sure you know what your state requirements are.

Purpose of Open Meetings Act

- Government operates publicly
- Hold government accountable
- Public access to information/hearings
- Opportunity to participate in the process
- Must be aware of the open meeting requirements for your state



What is a Meeting?

- Quorum– check what that number is for your state
- Discussing public business
- Examples include:
 - Dinner/Show
 - Sporting Event
 - Emails/Reply to All
 - Texting/Chatting



Conflict of Interest

What is a Conflict of Interest?

- You have a financial stake in the property or project
- When the applicant is a corporation, you own a stake in that company
- Ask staff or local attorney



How to Handle Conflicts

- Explain reason for recusal
- Leave the room during discussion on that topic
- If you have questions - ask Staff



Ex Parte Communications

What is Ex Parte Communications?

Contact between
Commissioners and
applicant, opponents
or supporters outside
public hearings

Ex Parte Communications

- In-person contact
- Phone calls
- Emails
- Social media
- Text messages
- Written materials



Steps to Avoid Ex Parte

- Avoid any long conversations
- Encourage participation in the process
 - Attend in-person
 - Submit written comments
 - Refer them to Staff
- It's OK to be direct
- Be aware of how it looks
- Always consult staff or local attorney with questions





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