



COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE  
MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

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## THE ROLE OF A VOLUNTEER COMMISSION OR COMMITTEE MEMBER AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

### **Citizen Participation through Commissions and Committees**

Snoqualmie's system of Commissions and Committees is fundamental to encouraging the use of citizen talent and interest in affairs of the city, keeping our local government innovative and responsive.

Our citizens have enjoyed a long tradition of participation in city government. Through representation on Commissions and Committees, citizens are offered an important avenue to help create effective and equitable policies. Citizen involvement contributes to the success of government and the quality of life enjoyed by our families and community.

In selecting Members, the Mayor strives to create Commissions and Committees that work well together and have some knowledge in the field. Citizen's Academy participants are favored.

### **Types of Commissions and Committees**

Commissions and Committees are created by City laws and rules and sometimes, executive orders.

Each Commission and Committee is unique in its purpose, mission, and role. It is especially important that members be familiar with the governing statutes or other authorizing directives so they understand the framework within which the Commission or Committee must operate. The following are the Commissions and Committees currently existing in the city of Snoqualmie:

- Arts Commission
- Civil Service Commission
- Parks and Events Commission
- Planning Commission
- Lodging Tax Advisory Committee
- Economic Development Commission
- Human Services Committee
- Salary Commission

**Being an Effective Member.** Despite the different sizes and types of Snoqualmie Commissions and Committees, it is imperative that members recognize they are in a critical position to shape and influence decisions and actions. It is important that each member stays informed and current on issues, legislative activity, and statutes affecting their Commission or Committee.

**Attendance.** Regular attendance is essential so that decisions will represent the opinions as a whole. In addition, regular attendance enables members to keep abreast of concerns and helps ensure that issues are examined from a variety of perspectives. A person may forfeit his or her position as a result of poor attendance.

**Preparation.** Adequate preparation is another requisite for effective Commission and Committee membership. The staff liaison will provide reports, proposals, and other information to help you make informed decisions. Do not hesitate to request additional information you need to make thoughtful and appropriate decisions.

In a nutshell, effective Commission and Committee members must:

- Attend all Commission and Committee meetings.
- Be well prepared for meetings.
- Recognize that serving the public interest is the top priority.
- Recognize that the Commission and Committee must operate in an open and public manner.
- Be knowledgeable about the legislative process and issues affecting the Commission and Committee.
- Examine all available evidence before making a judgment.
- Communicate well and participate in group discussions.
- Be aware that authority to act is granted to the Commission and Committee as a whole, not to individual members.
- Exhibit a willingness to work with the group in making decisions.
- Recognize that compromise may be necessary to reach consensus.
- Not let personal feelings toward other members or staff interfere with their judgment.

**Resignations.** If you are unable to complete your term, it is important to inform the Mayor's Office, City Clerk, and the appropriate staff liaison. A letter of resignation should be sent to the Mayor indicating the date your resignation is effective and whether you are able to serve until a replacement is named.

**Commission and Committee Staff Members.** Some commission and committee staff liaisons assist with daily administrative tasks. Members must keep in mind that staff have other job responsibilities and those individual members do not direct staff.

**Staff Functions.** The primary function of the staff is to carry out the rules, policies and programs developed by the Commission or Committee. In addition, staff members notify members of pertinent issues and legislative activity. They may also arrange meetings, prepare meeting materials, compile background information, and conduct research.

**Legal Counsel.** The City employs a staff attorney. The City Attorney advises and represents the City in fulfilling official duties, issues legal opinions, and defends officials and employees for actions performed in their official capacities and in good faith.

A Commission or Committee that follows the advice of the City Attorney is immune from liability and is far less likely to find itself involved in legal problems.

**Members may request the following services from the City Attorney:**

- Assurance that decisions and actions fall within statutory authority.
- Questions about conflict of interest.
- Review of proposed regulations and revisions, and the drafting of such documents in legally correct language.
- General legal advice about actions and activities.

## LAWS AFFECTING COMMISSION & COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

### Restrictions and Requirements

As a Mayor's appointee, you must be aware of certain restrictions and requirements that may affect you during your tenure:

- Members must be familiar with and operate at all times within the governing statutes and bylaws, and state and federal laws.
- To ensure accountability, all applicable policies and procedures adopted by the Commission or Committee should be in written form.
- No member may make unilateral decisions or take action without the consent of the Commission or Committee as a whole.
- At professional or industry gatherings, or in other settings where appearance may be construed as representing the Commission or Committee, individual members must use discretion to avoid the appearance of speaking for the Commission or Committee unless specifically authorized to do so.
- Members must keep in mind that their mission is to serve the public, and that it is inappropriate to use membership to create a personal platform.
- Members are restricted by the City's ethics policy from accepting or soliciting anything of economic value as a gift, gratuity, or favor if it is given only because the member holds a responsible position with the City.
- Questions about issues should be directed to the staff support personnel, who will see that all members receive full information by the next regular meeting.
- Details of investigations, personnel files or business discussed at closed executive sessions should not be disclosed unless they are part of the public record.

**Open Public Meetings Act.** The Open Public Meetings Act applies to all Commissions and Committees. Regardless of whether the Act applies, all Commissions and Committees should comply with open meeting requirements to the extent they can do so.

**Notification of Meetings.** The Open Public Meetings Act requires that all meetings of the governing body of a public agency, as well as some other meetings on policies affecting the public, be open to the public. In addition, the public must be notified of such meetings in a timely manner.

**Public Disclosure.** The minutes of all regular meetings must be recorded, uploaded to the city website, and made available for public inspection.

**Accessibility Requirements.** To afford members of the public who have disabilities an equal opportunity to participate, meetings subject to the Open Public Meetings Act are to be held in facilities which are wheelchair accessible.

**Reasonable Accommodation of Persons with Disabilities.** In addition to the Open Public Meetings Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sets criteria for accessibility and accommodation. Under the ADA, people who have disabilities have a right to an equal opportunity for effective participation in the activities of Commissions and Committees, whether as appointed members or as members of the public.

**Accessible Locations and Communications.** Meetings and other sponsored activities should be held in wheelchair-accessible locations. Qualified sign language interpreters, materials in accessible formats such as Braille, large print and tape, and other forms of auxiliary aids for effective communications should be provided upon request.

Reasonable modifications should be made to policies or procedures, including travel reimbursement policies for members, whenever such a policy or procedure creates a barrier to the full and equal participation of a person who has a disability.

**Ethics and the Appearance of Fairness.** As a member, you are expected to uphold a high ethical standard. It is extremely important that members avoid conflicts of interest or even the appearance of conflicts of interest.

**Using a public position for private gain is improper and illegal.** Similarly, actions benefiting close relatives are prohibited. There are penalties for violations of state ethics statutes. All members should familiarize themselves with the Ethics in Public Service Act, Chapter 42.52 RCW., as well as Snoqualmie’s own ethics policy below.

**The following are examples of conflicts of interest:**

- Using confidential information for private investments.
- Accepting gifts or favors in exchange for certain rulings.
- Accepting gifts or favors in exchange for making certain purchases.
- Obtaining personal favors from employees.
- Accepting favors for disclosure of confidential information.

Members can avoid conflict of interest issues by being aware of and adhering to statutory restrictions, using good judgment, and being fair and equitable in decision-making.

## **Chapter 2.80 CODE OF ETHICS**

[2.80.010](#) Purpose.

[2.80.020](#) Definitions.

[2.80.030](#) Prohibited conduct.

[2.80.040](#) Disclosure of interest in legislative action.

[2.80.050](#) Ethics hearing officer – Position created.

[2.80.060](#) Ethics hearing officer – Powers and duties.

[2.80.070](#) Hearings.

[2.80.080](#) Recommendations of the ethics hearing officer.

[2.80.090](#) Criminal violations – Prosecuting authority – Penalties.

[2.80.100](#) Relation of chapter to Chapter 42.23 RCW.

## **COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE TRANSACTIONS**

Each Commission and Committee should have a set of bylaws to direct and clarify its actions, procedures, and organization. Members are expected to adhere to bylaws and all relevant statutes.

Bylaws are the guidelines by which a Commission or Committee functions. According to Robert's Rules of Order, bylaws define the primary characteristics of an organization, prescribe how it should function, and include rules that are so important that they may not be changed without prior notice to members and formal vote and agreement by a majority of members.

An organization's bylaws include a number of articles, such as the following:

- Name of Commission or Committee
- Mission statement
- Membership
- Officers
- Meetings
- Executive Committee (if needed)
- Committees and sub-Committees
- Parliamentary procedure, often including the name of the manual of parliamentary procedure
- Amendment procedures for making changes in the bylaws

Bylaws should include expectations as well as guidelines for members. Issues such as attendance, responsibilities and discipline should be addressed in the bylaws.

**Quorum.** A quorum is the number of members who must be present to conduct official business. If a quorum is not present, any business transaction is null and void. The quorum protects against unrepresentative actions by a small number of individuals.

**Prohibition on Elections or Ballot Measures Using Public Resources.** RCW 42.17.130 strictly forbids the use of public or agency facilities for the purpose of assisting a campaign for election of any person to any office or for the promotion or opposition to any ballot proposition unless they are activities which are a part of the normal and regular conduct of the office or agency.

**Testifying at Hearings.** Members often have an opportunity to testify at hearings conducted by legislative, local government or community committees. When providing testimony on behalf of the Commission or Committee, members should refrain from expressing personal opinions.

- Be prepared to answer questions and comments by members. If you are unable to answer a question, offer to provide a written response later and always follow through.
- If you must give a personal opinion, make sure that the Committee understands that you are not speaking for the Commission or Committee, but for yourself.
- Legislative staff members find it helpful to receive copies of written testimony prior to the hearing.

At meetings where a quorum is not present, the only actions that may be legally taken are to fix a time for adjournment, adjourn, recess, or take measures to obtain a quorum (such as contacting absent members).

### **Order of Business**

After the presiding officer has called the meeting to order, a Commission or Committee generally follows the order of business specified in its bylaws. If a Commission or Committee has not adopted an order of business, the procedure below is generally followed:

1. Reading and approving of minutes of previous meeting(s).
2. Reports of officers and standing (permanent) Committees.
3. Reports of special (select or ad hoc) Committees.
4. Special orders (matters previously assigned a special priority).
5. Unfinished business and general orders (matters introduced in previous meetings).
6. New business (matters initiated in present meeting).

### **The Chair and Voting**

If the chair is a member of the Commission or Committee, they may vote just as any other member. Voting by secret ballot or proxy is prohibited by the open meetings law.

### **Public Disclosure**

State agencies and commissions/committees are required to have available for public inspection and copying their public records, such as procedural rules and statements of general policy, and other records, written or electronic, pertaining to the Commission or Committee's business. Exemptions to disclosure are limited and identified in statute.

Records relating to the conduct of official business are subject to disclosure even if they are on a personal computer.

For additional information on disclosure requirements and exemptions from disclosure, refer to Chapter 42.56 RCW.

### **Required Training**

Whether you are a newly appointed Board or Commission member or you have been serving for several years, Washington State law requires basic open government training.

The [Open Government Trainings Act](#) (OGTA) states that every member of the governing body of a public agency must complete Open Public Meetings Act training every four years (see [RCW 42.30](#)). The Open Public Meetings Act defines a "public agency" to include "Any subagency of a public agency which is created by or pursuant to statute, ordinance, or other legislative act, including but not limited to planning commissions, library or park boards, commissions, and

agencies.” Because Snoqualmie’s volunteer commissions were all created by ordinance, they fall within the definition of “subagency” of a public agency, and therefore the OGTA requirement applies not just to the members of the city councils, as the “public agency,” but also to the members of the Planning, Parks and Events, Arts, Economic Development and Lodging Tax commissions/committees.

Therefore, the City requests that you complete the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) portion (Lesson 3) of the Open Government Training Act. The training video can be found on the Attorney General’s website at: <https://youtu.be/9yTtVGToW1A> (it’s only 16:24 minutes long!).

Once you have completed watching the video, please send an email to the City Clerk at [destrada@snoqualmiewa.gov](mailto:destrada@snoqualmiewa.gov), stating the date which you completed the training, so that your training can be logged it in our records.

**Appointed officials must take the training and provide documentation to the city clerk within 90 days of appointment.**