

# CITY BOARD/COMMISSION CHAIR SUPPORT GUIDE

**Purpose.** This guide provides practical tools and reminders to help chairs run smooth, respectful, and efficient meetings. Chairs do not have to manage challenges alone — staff and fellow members are partners in maintaining a healthy environment.

## 1. Before the Meeting

- Review the agenda with staff; identify any sensitive or complex items.
- Clarify time limits or discussion structure for items likely to generate debate.
- Ask staff about any anticipated issues, questions, or special requests from members.
- Have a plan for public comment (time limits, order, expectations).

## 2. Starting the Meeting Strong

- Open with a clear, calm tone.
- Briefly review ground rules (e.g., one person speaks at a time, stay on topic).
- State the purpose of the meeting and expectations for respectful conduct.

## 3. Facilitating Discussion

- Call on speakers in order and ensure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Paraphrase or summarize when discussion drifts or becomes heated.
- Gently steer members back to the agenda when off topic.
- Remind members of time limits with a neutral tone.
- Encourage quieter members to contribute.

## 4. Managing Conflict

- Keep comments focused on issues, not individuals.
- Intervene early if discussion becomes personal or disrespectful.
- Use tools such as pausing discussion, offering a cooling-off moment, or asking staff for factual clarification.
- Remember: You are facilitating, not expecting to solve every disagreement yourself.

## 5. Working With Staff

- Lean on staff for procedural guidance and background information.
- Ask staff to help set the agenda, explain policies, or clarify past decisions.
- Communicate concerns or anticipated challenges before meetings.

## 6. Ending the Meeting Well

- Recap decisions and next steps.
- Thank members for their contributions.
- Touch base with staff afterward about anything that needs follow-up.

## 7. You Are Not Alone

If discussions become routinely difficult or unproductive:

- Ask staff for facilitation support.
- Consider requesting a brief board “norms refresh” session.
- Bring concerns to the City Administrator or appropriate staff early.

