

Memorandum

To: Common Council

From: Becky Magestro, Chief of Staff

Date: July 21, 2026

Subject: Board and Commission Resignations and Volunteer Recruitment

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an overview of recent Board and Commission resignations, identify trends affecting volunteer recruitment and retention, and begin a discussion on opportunities to strengthen citizen participation in local government.

Background

The City of Whitewater has experienced an increase in resignations and greater difficulty recruiting residents to serve. This reflects a broader decline in civic volunteerism that municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and community groups have experienced in recent years.

Resignation Trends

Since 2024, the City has experienced 16 Board and Commission resignations across approximately 110 appointed positions, representing a cumulative turnover rate of approximately 14.5%, or an average annual turnover of about 5%. Resignations have primarily been attributed to personal and professional commitments, health or age-related concerns, relocation, attendance challenges, employment or organizational changes affecting eligibility, and, in a few cases, committee operations or Open Meetings Law concerns. Overall, most resignations have been driven by changing personal priorities and time commitments rather than dissatisfaction with City government. While the annual turnover rate is relatively manageable, even a small number of vacancies can significantly impact Board and Commission operations due to quorum requirements, the need for specialized expertise, and the increasing difficulty of recruiting qualified volunteers. Feedback from peer municipalities indicates these challenges reflect a broader trend in declining civic volunteerism rather than an issue unique to Whitewater.

Feedback from Peer Municipalities

To determine whether Whitewater's experience was unique, I contacted neighboring municipalities regarding Board and Commission recruitment and retention. The responses were overwhelmingly consistent. Communities across Wisconsin reported fewer residents volunteering for Boards, Commissions, and even elected offices, making vacancies increasingly difficult to fill. Many also cited volunteer fatigue, with the same individuals repeatedly serving while fewer new volunteers step forward. Respondents shared that personal outreach, and direct invitations remain the most successful recruitment method, as many residents are unfamiliar with the responsibilities of Board and Commission service. Several municipalities are exploring new approaches, such as adjusting meeting

schedules, combining committees, or creating citizen engagement programs to educate residents about local government and encourage future participation.

Opportunities Moving Forward

Potential strategies include increasing public awareness of Board and Commission opportunities, simplifying the application and appointment process, enhancing orientation for new members, reviewing meeting schedules and expectations, recognizing volunteer contributions, and evaluating whether current committee structures continue to meet community needs. Maintaining enough active members is also critical to ensure Boards and Commissions can achieve a quorum and conduct business efficiently. Although the City has attempted to use a "round robin" approach by asking Common Council members to temporarily fill vacancies or attend meetings when quorums are at risk, staff have found that responses are often delayed or members are understandably hesitant to commit on short notice. As vacancies become more difficult to fill, ensuring consistent attendance and maintaining quorums will continue to be an important operational challenge.

Conclusion

The City is grateful for the residents who volunteer their time and expertise to serve Whitewater. Their contributions are essential to effective local government and community engagement.

The feedback gathered from peer municipalities confirms that Whitewater's experience is part of a broader statewide trend rather than an isolated local issue. Although there is no single solution, increasing awareness of volunteer opportunities, educating residents about the role and impact of Boards and Commissions, and continuing proactive recruitment efforts can help build a stronger pipeline of future volunteers. Staff will continue working with the Common Council to identify strategies that encourage long-term civic participation and support the City's Boards and Commissions.