

Proposal to Update the Appointment Process for City Boards and Commissions

Date: January 5, 2026

To: The Citizens of the City of Wilsonville, Members of the City Council, Members of all City Boards and Commissions, City of Wilsonville Executive Staff, the City Attorney for the City of Wilsonville

From: Councilor Adam Cunningham

Subject: Enhancing Transparency, Equity, Trust, and Effectiveness in the Appointment of Members to City Boards and Commissions

Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a comprehensive update to the city's current process for appointing members to boards and commissions. The recommended changes aim to introduce greater objectivity, standardization, and accountability into the selection process. By implementing clearly defined criteria, structured interviews, scoring mechanisms, background checks, and expert involvement, we can ensure that appointments are merit-based, inclusive, and aligned with the city's strategic goals and the mission statement of the City Council. These reforms will promote diversity, reduce potential biases, and enhance the overall quality of service provided by our boards and commissions.

Background

Currently, the appointment process for city boards and commissions relies on non-standardized interviews conducted by only one person. Opportunities exist to strengthen the process by incorporating more rigorous, transparent, and equitable practices which will help build universal trust in the city's government. Recent discussions within the community and among stakeholders have highlighted the need for a more structured approach to ensure that appointees are selected based on relevant expertise and qualifications, while minimizing subjective influences.

Proposed Updates to the Appointment Process

To address these opportunities, I propose the following key enhancements to the appointment process. These changes will apply to all city boards and commissions, with adaptations as needed for specific bodies.

1. Clearly Defined Objective Criteria for Each Board or Commission

- Establish and document specific, measurable criteria tailored to the unique mandate and responsibilities of each board or commission.
- Examples of criteria may include relevant professional experience, educational background, demonstrated expertise in the subject area, community involvement, and alignment with city values.
- These criteria will be developed in collaboration with board chairs, staff experts, and the Human Resources (HR) department, and made publicly available on the city's website to promote transparency and encourage diverse applications.

2. Specific HR-Reviewed and Approved Questions for Each Board or Commission

- Develop a set of standardized interview questions customized for each board or commission, focusing on the defined objective criteria.
- All questions will undergo review and approval by the HR department to ensure compliance with legal standards, including anti-discrimination laws, and to promote fairness.
- Questions will be designed to elicit responses that demonstrate applicants' qualifications, problem-solving abilities, and commitment to public service, while avoiding any that could introduce bias.

3. Scoring Rubric Based on Objective Criteria and Specific Questions

- Implement a standardized scoring rubric that assigns numerical values to responses based on the predefined criteria and interview questions.
- The rubric will include clear descriptors for each score level (e.g., 1-5 scale) to ensure consistency in evaluation.
- Aggregate scores will guide recommendations for appointments, providing a data-driven basis for decisions and facilitating appeals or reviews if needed.

4. Interviews Conducted by Three-Person Panels

- All interviews will be conducted by a balanced three-person panel to ensure diverse perspectives and reduce individual biases.
- Panel composition will include:
 - The Mayor (or their designee) as a representative of elected leadership.
 - The Chair, Vice-Chair, or a senior member of the relevant board or commission to provide domain-specific insights.
 - A staff expert with relevant expertise (e.g., Finance Director for budget-related boards or the Community Development Director for planning-related boards).
- Panels will receive training on unbiased interviewing techniques, and interviews will be documented to maintain accountability.

5. Background Checks for Each Applicant

- Require comprehensive background checks for all applicants advancing to the interview stage, conducted in partnership with HR and appropriate external vendors.
- Checks will include criminal history, reference verification, and any other relevant screenings, while adhering to privacy laws and ensuring that results are used solely to assess suitability for public service roles.
- Applicants will be informed of this requirement upfront to maintain transparency.

6. Notification to Non-Selected Applicants

- Notify all applicants who were not selected for appointment within 48 hours of the City Council's final approval of appointments.
- Notifications will be sent via email or the applicant's preferred method of contact, providing courteous acknowledgment of their application, a brief explanation of the selection process, and encouragement for future opportunities.
- This step will be managed by designated staff to ensure timeliness, consistency, and compliance with communication protocols.

Benefits of the Proposed Changes

Adopting these updates will yield several key benefits:

- **Increased Transparency and Accountability:** Publicly available criteria and rubrics will build trust in the process and allow for greater community oversight.

- **Enhanced Equity and Diversity:** Objective standards and diverse panels will help mitigate biases, encouraging applications from underrepresented groups.
- **Improved Quality of Appointments:** Structured evaluations will ensure that selected members possess the necessary skills and expertise to contribute effectively.
- **Efficiency and Consistency:** Standardization will streamline the process for staff and applicants, reducing variability across different boards.
- **Legal and Ethical Compliance:** HR involvement and background checks will safeguard against risks and align with best practices in public administration.
- **Positive Applicant Experience:** Timely notifications to non-selected applicants will demonstrate respect for their time and effort, fostering goodwill and potentially increasing future applicant pools.

Implementation Plan

To implement this process, the city council would need to direct staff to create resolution language for the council to vote on. I ask that city council direct staff to draft the resolution based on the proposed updates listed above.

Once the resolution is approved, and to ensure a smooth transition, I recommend the following phased approach:

1. **Phase 1 (Months 1-3):** Form a working group comprising council members, HR representatives, board chairs, and staff experts to develop criteria, questions, and rubrics for each board or commission.
2. **Phase 2 (Months 4-6):** Pilot the new process during the next board appointment process, incorporating feedback for refinements.
3. **Phase 3 (Month 7 Onward):** Roll out the updated process citywide, with ongoing training for panels and annual reviews to assess effectiveness.
4. **Resources Needed:** Minimal additional budget for background checks and training; leverage existing HR and staff resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This proposal represents a forward-thinking step toward modernizing our appointment process, fostering a more inclusive and effective governance structure for our city. I urge the City Council to consider and adopt these changes at the earliest opportunity. I am available to discuss this proposal in detail, provide additional data, or collaborate on any modifications.

Sincerely,

Adam Cunningham

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