

City of Vassar

Board and Commission Expectations & Skill Sets

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking an interest in your local government and helping us work to achieve great things in the City of Vassar. Your appointment to a city board or commission requires no prior experience in public service; we have put together this outline to help you navigate your new role. This document will introduce you to some of the key information that you will need to serve on your board or commission.

The City of Vassar currently appoints members of the Vassar community to five different boards. These five boards and commissions advise and assist in carrying out functions of local government. They also provide a critical reservoir of knowledge and community input that inform City policy, activities, decisions, and operations.

The City of Vassar is a Council-Manager form of government. Under this system, the City Council, including the mayor, sets policy, while the City Manager is the Chief Administrator Officer who reports directly to the City Council. The City Manager is responsible for implementing policy and advising the City Council on all administrative matters such as the financial condition of the City, public safety, economic development, infrastructure, and capital improvement plans. This is somewhat like a corporation, which is governed by a board of directors, but managed by a CEO. Over 20 different types of employees (from part-time to full-time) work to deliver exceptional services to the residents.

Most boards and commissions are created by City resolution or ordinance and serve as advising bodies to the City Council or City Manager. They provide information, analysis, and recommendations to inform the City Council's and City Manager's decisions on matters pertaining to the board or commission specialized knowledge. A few boards have specific authority to make binding decisions in certain areas, such as the Zoning Board of Appeals. These bodies generally derive their decision-making authority from state laws.

Regardless of specific duties, each board and commission play an important part in City government. Appointees to boards and commissions perform a public service to their community and both an obligation and an opportunity to provide useful and appropriate input that will help shape their government. This requires a thorough understanding of their board or commission's role as well a willingness to engage constructively with other board members and staff.

These positions are strictly on a volunteer basis. Chapter 2; Article II; Division 1; Section 2-33 of the Vassar City Charter states no individual on a board or commission in the City of Vassar shall receive compensation for their time. When deciding to apply for one of these positions, keep in mind that these positions are to benefit the community more than benefit yourself. Although much of learning how to do this will happen while serving the board or commission, it is hoped that this document will provide useful introductory guidance. For information on current board and commission members, please visit the City of Vassar's website.

Application Submission

While applicants are not required to interview or appear before the City Council prior to appointments, an application can be downloaded from the City's website under the *Government* tab to be completed. Once completed, the application can be emailed or can be mailed to the City Clerk's office located at 287 E Huron Ave, Vassar, MI 48768. If needed, an application can be printed off by the City Clerk at arrival at City Hall (upon request). Applicants are kept on file for one year after submittal. We request that a separate application be submitted for each board you wish to serve on.

Applicant Selection

Appointees to the Band Board, Board Review, Downtown Development Authority, Economic Development Corporation, Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission, and Planning Commission are the Mayor's nominations that are confirmed by a majority vote of City Council. All other boards and commissions are appointed by City Council, but do not require nomination from the Mayor. City Council tries to appoint members to boards that have the interest and/or background in the boards/commission the applicant is seeking. Preference is usually given to renewing members, however, attendance is considered as a factor prior to re-appointment.

Board and Commission Selection & Information

Band Board

Purpose – The purpose of the Band Board is to advise the City Council in its efforts of the community's Summer Concert Series and determines which bands will be in the annual line-up for the community's Summer Concert Series.

Powers – The Band Board has the power to review applications for bands to perform in the Summer Concert Series, select which bands will perform for the community's annual Summer Concert Series, and delegate tasks and assignments to volunteers of the Summer Concert Series if needed.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Serve a 3-year term.
- Attend two meetings a year at 7pm at Vassar City Hall.

Apply for a position on the Band Board if you have knowledge or experience in:

- Music
- Music education
- Writing music
- Playing in bands

Board of Review

Purpose – The purpose of the Board of Review is to examine the current property tax assessment roll, to hear assessment appeals, and to correct errors on the roll. The Board of Review serves as an appeal board and can adjust individual assessments if necessary.

Powers – The Board of Review may raise or lower values on the assessment role. They may also add omitted property to the roll, exempt Principal Residences, and exempt Poverty or Disabled Veteran applicants.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Serve a 6-year term.
- Attend meetings as needed at Vassar City Hall.

Apply if you have knowledge or experience with:

- Property valuation for residential, industrial, or commercial sites.
- Assessing
- Banking
- Finance
- Accounting

Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

Purpose – The purpose of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is to act in accordance with Public Act 197 of 1975, as amended, including, but to: correct and prevent deterioration in the downtown development district, encourage historic preservation, implement development plans, and promote economic growth.

Powers – The DDA is ultimately responsible and accountable for developing programs and projects which are aimed at improving downtown Vassar. These projects include new business development, business recruitment and retention, downtown beautification, public improvements, marketing, and promotion. The board is also responsible for fostering community acceptance of and involvement in the process and ensuring private-sector commitment and participation in the revitalization effort.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Review DDA program budget and plans, evaluate program effectiveness.
- Advocate for private-sector interest in revitalization of commercial district.
- Build partnership between the community and the businesses for participation and engagement in revitalization.

- Serve a 4-year term.
- Meet the 3rd Monday of each month at 8am at Vassar City Hall.

Apply if you have knowledge or experience with:

- Business development & retention
- Graphic design
- Marketing & promotion
- Community Development
- Real estate development
- Banking
- Finance
- Accounting

Economic Development Corporation (EDC)

Purpose – The purpose of the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is to promote and enhance the City of Vassar. The Corporation actively pursues, within the goals and guidelines of the City Council, commercial and industrial business development, and investment for relocation into the City of Vassar to achieve a balanced tax base. It works with the business community in the retention and expansion of the businesses already within the City of Vassar. Finally, the EDC promotes the City of Vassar in various manners as an excellent place to live and do business.

Powers – The EDC has the power to assess business development and take action against a business in the Vassar community if it does not align with the interest of the City. The EDC also has the power to make recommendations to the Planning Commission, Downtown Development Authority, and City Council to suspend or revoke licenses, lease agreements, businesses developments, retentions, and expansions of businesses in City limits.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Make connections with businesses in the City of Vassar, including new and staples of the community.
- Promote businesses in the Vassar community.
- Serve a 3-year term.
- Attend meetings every 3rd Thursday of each month at 7pm at Vassar City Hall.

Apply if you have knowledge or experience in:

- Economics
- Economic development

- Construction
- Marketing
- Business management
- Hospitality management
- Sales
- Real estate
- Business attraction/retention

Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission

Purpose – The purpose of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission advises both the City Council and City Manager on matters related to the planning and development of recreational programming, properties, and park maintenance needs, future acquisition of properties or facilities, and offer suggestions for development of new recreational opportunities.

Powers – The Parks & Recreation Commission can approve changes to the Recreational Master Plan including a new Recreational Master Plan every five years, make changes to the capital improvement project’s budget and fee schedule, research new grant and funding opportunities, and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and/or City Council regarding purchasing and selling of property for the interest of the commission.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Must be knowledgeable of the City of Vassar Parks & Recreation Master Plan.
- Serve as a sounding board of the community, giving input and feedback to the City Manager regarding what programs are offered, what fees are charged, what policies are implemented, and what procedures are being used.
- Serve as advisors and supporters on grant writing requests and assist with lobbying granting agencies or organizations for funding.
- Serve as volunteers for programs, special events, or future parks and recreational opportunities.
- Use existing parks and recreational facilities in the Vassar community and participate in a variety of recreational programs in Vassar.
- Serve a 3-year term.
- Attend meetings the 4th Wednesday of every month at 6:30pm at Vassar City Hall.

Apply if you have knowledge or experience in:

- Forestry
- Public/nonprofit administration
- Parks and recreation
- Landscape architecture

- Recreation/physical education
- Marketing/promotion
- Event planning
- Grant writing

Planning Commission

Purpose – The role of the Planning Commission is to guide the land use, zoning, and planning process in the city. The Planning Commission is charged with planning for the future and is expected to stay up to date on current trends and issues that may affect the City of Vassar.

Powers – The Planning Commission is responsible for formalization of the Master Plan. They review and recommend changes to the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map to the City Council. The Planning Commission also reviews site plans, rezoning requests, special use requests and planned unit developments.

Member Expectations:

- Members must complete training, including orientation and annual training sessions.
- Engage in planning and zoning training, as well as continuing education.
- Have a working knowledge of local government and governing documents, such as City Code and Zoning Ordinances.
- Serve a 3-year term.
- Attend meetings every 3rd Monday of each month (see calendar for exceptions) at 6:30pm at Vassar City Hall.

Apply if you have knowledge or experience with:

- Real estate/development
- Urban planning and zoning
- Architecture/landscape architecture
- Construction/engineering
- Business attraction/retention

Process for New Appointments

Appointees who have been confirmed will receive a letter or email from the City Clerk’s office notifying them of their appointment and including contact information for the staff liaison to the board or commission, and the term start and end date. The staff liaison to your board/commission will contact you regarding any upcoming meetings and provide you with any information you may need pertaining to your appointment.

Prior to your first meeting, you should familiarize yourself with the bylaws of your board or commission and review the upcoming agenda materials. You may also wish to review materials or videos from prior meetings. See the Online Resources section below for links to access these

materials. Your staff liaison should also be able to provide you with a schedule of meetings and other pertinent information.

General Duties and Responsibilities for Appointees

- Act courteously during meetings and treat other members of the body, the public, and City staff with respect. Disagreements are inevitable, but appointees should remain civil and focus on issues rather than personal differences.
- Observe good parliamentary practice. The staff liaison's role is to run an efficient meeting while allowing for all points of view to be heard and a full discussion to take place in an orderly fashion. Assist the staff liaison by being concise in making your points and not interrupting others. The City follows Roberts Rule as such a quorum is required to have a formal meeting, while motions must be made before discussion on a topic and discussion must be related to the motion at a City Council meeting. The point of the board or committee is often to plan and takes on a more "workshop/discussion role." In these cases, an agenda must be adhered to, and discussion must be related to the agenda topic.
- Arrive to meetings on time and let yourself staff liaison know if you will be absent. Unexpected absences can cause a meeting to be cancelled if not enough members are present to establish a quorum. If a quorum is not present, the commission will be unable to conduct regular business. As a courtesy of to your fellow commissioners and the public, please provide an advanced notice of any absences. Three or more unexcused absences in a calendar year shall be grounds for removal of a board member for neglect of duty.
- Come prepared. Review proposed minutes, agenda packets, and other information ahead of time to allow for informed deliberation and discussion.
- Represent your board or commission appropriately. As an appointee, people may perceive you to speak on behalf of the City of Vassar or your board or commission outside of regular meetings. Do not speak for your board or commission unless appropriately authorized to do so. Make clear when you are speaking in your personal capacity if there is any doubt.

Governing Rules

A few key resources provide structure for operating a healthy board and commission. It is important to be knowledgeable about legislation surrounding boards and commissions.

Open Meetings Act

City boards and commissions are expected to conduct themselves according to the procedures containing the Michigan Open Meetings Act (“OMA”). This means that City boards and commissions deliberate and make all their decisions during a public meeting, potentially including a full discussion of the reasons for those decisions. Commissioners should avoid emailing, talking, or otherwise communicating with most of the members outside of a public meeting about how they will vote, reasons for voting in a particular way, or the pros and cons of an issue that may come before the commission.

Sometimes, discussion between commissioners outside of a public meeting may be necessary. For example, discussion between commissioners outside of a public meeting may be necessary when developing draft policy/idea recommendations for presentation to the full commission. In some cases, the discussions should involve a few commissioners as possible and never involve a quorum. If the matter warrants substantial discussion with multiple commissioners outside of the regular meeting schedule, a subcommittee may be appropriate, the meetings of which would be posted and open to the public.

Basic rights of the public during a meeting governed by the Open Meetings Act:

- The public can attend without a requirement to sign in or identify themselves.
- The public can address the assembly under the rules prescribed for public comment.
- The public can get a full picture of the decision-making process; assemblies avoid exchanging written notes, secret ballots, electronic messages, and telephone call during meetings.

Freedom of Information Act

In general, records of the City’s administration are subjects to disclosure under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Email communication about board or commission business are generally considered to be public records subject to disclosure under FOIA. For this reason, email correspondence regarding the board or commission’s business should generally copy the staff liaison so that the City of Vassar has a record of the correspondence. Commissioners are otherwise responsible for retaining and producing emails and other records, including text messages related to board or commission business that they have in their possession upon request by the City’s FOIA Coordinator or the City Attorney’s Office.

Local Rules Relating to Meeting Documents

Meeting Schedule & Notifications

Advanced public notice of meetings is provided, at a minimum, by physically posting a notice and listing the meeting on the City's website. Posting is typically required to be made no less than 18 hours before a meeting.

There are two types of meetings: regular meetings and special meetings. Boards and commissions schedule regular meetings at the start of each year, if applicable. When necessary, commissions may reschedule regular meetings dates by vote at a meeting throughout the year. Special meetings supplement the regular meeting schedule and often focus on specific topics. Scheduling either a regular or special meeting includes many common key points.

Key points for Scheduling Meetings:

- Avoid scheduling meetings for dates identified as regular City Council meeting days, City holidays, and/or other recommended holiday observances.
- Advanced notice of meetings is required for all meetings: regular meetings and special meetings. Work with your staff liaison to make sure these are published and distributed appropriately.

Agendas & Agenda Packets

Agendas are critical documents for keeping meetings on topic and progressing in an orderly manner. Apart from subcommittee meetings, agendas are required to be posted online for all meetings at least 18 hours ahead of each meeting. The staff liaison helps boards and commissions publish agendas online ahead of meetings.

Agenda packets are the supporting documents relating to items on the agenda and encompass any materials distributed to members to review and action. Under record retention rules, the City keeps all agendas and agenda packets created as a part of the permanent record of each meeting.

Meeting Minutes

The staff liaison prepares minutes, and the proposed minutes will be available for public inspection and for review by members of boards and commissions as well as the public within eight business days after the meeting. Boards, commissions, and committees review, correct, and approve proposed minutes at the next regular meeting.

Both regular and special meetings are documented by minutes, whenever a meeting is held. Minutes provided a record of the date, time, place, and attendance of members at a meeting along with a record of any decisions made or roll call votes conducted at a meeting. Minutes are not a transcription or a set of notes recording discussions leading up to decisions. For convenience, minutes are typically available on the City's website.

The City Manager as the Staff Liaison

Each board and commission will have a staff liaison that provides professional and administrative support. The City Manager acts as the staff liaison to all boards and commissions. The City Manager is the primary conduit for members of boards and commissions to communicate in the City's administration. The City Manager should be your first contact if you have any questions related to your board or commission. As the staff liaison, the City Manager performs a variety of roles, including:

- Serving as a channel of communication between the board/commission and other City staff.
- Creating meeting notices, preparing minutes, and creating agendas.
- Scheduling meetings and booking meeting locations.
- Maintaining board/commission records.
- Coordinating the collection and distribution of information requested by the board and/or commission.

City Clerk's Office

The City Clerk's office provides a wide range of support and oversight to ensure meetings and records relating to boards and commissions are accurate and meet applicable requirements, including:

- Maintaining rosters by updating as needed with appointments and resignations.
- Reviewing and posting meeting notices prepared by the City Manager.
- Arranging accessibility accommodations requested for accessibility at public meetings.
- Notifying the City Council of terms set to expire boards and commissions.
- Emailing all new appointees, the expiration date of the appointee's term, and other information the City Clerk deems appropriate.

Conclusion

Hopefully, the information contained in this document will assist you in preparing to serve on a city board or commission. If you have additional questions, there are many people who can help, including the City Manager's office, the City Clerk's office, the chair, and other members of your board or commission.

Online Resources

The City of Vassar's meetings will be publicly available on the City's website calendar.

<https://www.cityofvassar.org/Calendar.aspx>

Additional information is available on the Boards and Commissions page.

<https://www.cityofvassar.org/148/Boards-Commissions>