



# BOARDS & COMMISSIONS HANDBOOK



Prepared by the Office of the City Clerk  
Updated February 2023





City of Riverside, California  
Office of the Mayor  
**PATRICIA LOCK DAWSON**



**Dear Esteemed Commissioner:**

Service on city boards and commissions is important work, and your service to Riverside makes a difference each day. Through deliberations on issues ranging from land use, to traffic, to budgeting, and more, you offer invaluable insight to me and the City Council. For that, I am grateful.

As a former City Commissioner myself, I know firsthand the hours of preparation, dedication, and execution needed to effectively serve the vast and diverse needs of our city. Thank you for offering your expertise and knowledge to help Riverside thrive as a home, business location, entertainment opportunity, and place of learning—supported by our outstanding and welcoming neighborhoods.

On behalf of myself and the City Council, I thank you for your service and hope that you will find all the information within this handbook to be a valued resource for successfully executing the tasks before you. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead as we partner in the creation of an even brighter future for Riverside—together.

Sincerely,

**Patricia Lock Dawson**  
Mayor, City of Riverside





CITY OF  
RIVERSIDE







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## Introduction

Welcome to the City of Riverside Government!

The Mayor and City Council, and all supporting staff, hope that this Board & Commission Handbook will answer many of your questions and provide you with fundamental information related to the responsibilities of the City's various Boards and Commissions.

Serving on one of the City advisory bodies is a fascinating and rewarding experience. Boards and Commissions are charged with formulating new ideas, information gathering, receiving public testimony and comments, analyzing complex issues, and making recommendations on specific projects and broad policies - all toward helping the City Council make better-informed decisions. Boards and Commissions help ensure broad access to City government so that it can be as responsive as possible to the needs of the people.



As you may realize, it isn't always easy. Issues are often more complex than anticipated, public opinion can be sharply divided, questions may overlap, and sometimes the province of one body may also be the territory of another.

Much of the information in this Handbook comes from a variety of City policy documents, such as the City's Charter, Municipal Code, Financial Plan (or budget), and City Council Policies and Procedures. In addition, State law governs certain responsibilities of Board/Commission members. The material presented is intended to: 1) give interested persons an understanding of why the City's Boards and Commissions have been established and how they function within the overall governmental framework; and 2) summarize the roles, relationships, and responsibilities of each Board/Commission member. The Handbook is divided into five sections:

- Section 1: Board and Commission Basics**
- Section 2: How City Government Works**
- Section 3: How Boards and Commissions Work**
- Section 4: The Sunshine Ordinance and Brown Act**
- Section 5: Tips for Being an Effective Member and Chair of a Board/Commission**

Thank you for your interest in serving on one of our citizen Boards and Commissions and volunteering your time and skills to enhance our community.



## Section 1. Board and Commission Basics

### A. Background

Riverside has a long history of involving its citizens in the business of their City government. Advisory Boards and Commissions provide an opportunity for interested residents to participate in the governing of their community under guidelines and procedures established by the City Council. Boards and Commissions can improve the quality of City government by providing the City Council with resources to make better-informed decisions. Because of the nature of various advisory bodies, they can serve as the “eyes and ears” of the City Council for issues and matters that otherwise might not receive the attention they deserve. Other benefits of Boards and Commissions include improvement in the lines of communication between the public and the City Council, greater opportunities for discussion of public issues, and more citizen involvement in City government.



There is considerable variety in the purpose or charge of these bodies. Some are required by State law, the City's Charter or Municipal Code and are directed to guide certain City activities such as community planning or financial matters. Others have been created by the City Council to serve Riverside's unique needs.

However, the authority of a Board or Commission will depend upon its specific purpose. Some have been delegated specific authority to approve or deny projects. Decisions made by certain Boards or Commissions may be appealed to the City Council. The City Council may not always accept the recommendation of a Board or Commission because of

additional information available or a need to balance the recommendation with policy or community priorities.

Generally, Boards and Commissions are empowered only to make recommendations to the City Council or to City staff, unless specifically authorized by law or the City Council to do otherwise. There are instances when the decisions of the City Council do not coincide with the recommendations of the advisory body, but please know that even in these instances the advisory body has played an important role in the decision-making process.

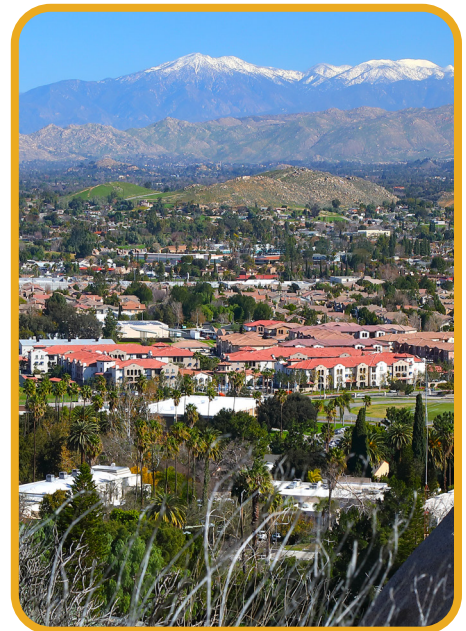
Lastly, there should be two-way communication so that Boards and Commissions are aware of the long-term goals the City Council has adopted, and the Board or Commission is able to present new ideas to the City Council. Board and Commission members are encouraged to attend City Council meetings.

## B. Opportunities for Service

There are some Boards and Commissions that are established by the Riverside City Charter which identifies the bodies authority and span of control. Others are governed by the Riverside Municipal Code.

**Interested individuals may apply for appointment to any of the following City advisory bodies:**

- Commission on Aging (RMC 2.64)
- Airport Commission (RMC 2.60)
- Budget Engagement Commission (RMC 2.90)
- Community Police Review Commission (Charter Sec. 810)
- Cultural Heritage Board (RMC 20.15)
- Commission on Disabilities (RMC 2.66)
- Commission of the Deaf (RMC 2.100)
- Board of Ethics (RMC 2.80)
- Human Relations Commission (RMC 2.16)
- Human Resources Board (Charter Sec. 807)
- Board of Library Trustees (Charter Sec. 808)
- Museum of Riverside Board (RMC 2.12)
- Park and Recreation Commission (Charter Sec. 809)
- Planning Commission (Charter Sec. 806)
- Board of Public Utilities (Charter Sec. 1201-02)
- Transportation Board (RMC 2.62)
- Charter Review Committee (Charter Sec. 1403)\*
- Historic Preservation Fund Committee (RMC 20.30)\*
- Riverside Youth Council\*



## C. Membership Qualifications & Appointment Process

The City of Riverside encourages the participation of a wide variety of its citizens through service on a Board or Commission. Unless specified, there is no special education, training, or background required for an appointment. Individuals must be 18-years of age and a registered voter, except Youth members. Only individuals who reside within the City limits are eligible to serve on a Board or Commission.

**Basic elements of the appointment process are as follows:**

1. Each person seeking appointment to a Board or Commission should file an online application with the Office of the City Clerk. Applications are accepted yearround.
  - Reappointments requires formal action by the City Council.
2. Appointed members should read and become familiar with the contents of this handbook.



3. Selected applicants shall be screened some even interviewed by the Mayor and City Council. The Mayor and City Council will vote to appoint the Board/Commission member. City Council may, at their discretion, waive interviews for those applicants who have been interviewed previously.
4. Applicants not appointed will be so advised and their applications held for no less than two years for consideration in the event of a future unscheduled vacancy.

#### **D. Oath of Office**

Following appointment, the appointee may be sworn in during a City Council, Board, or Commission meeting by the City Clerk or designee, who will administer the Oath of Office. The Oath may also be administered in the Office of the City Clerk.

#### **E. Orientation**

After the appointments are made by the Mayor and City Council, new appointees will be given a resource manual including a variety of introductory references to assist them in becoming more fully knowledgeable about City government. The department serving as staff support to a particular Board or Commission will coordinate and conduct an orientation with new appointees. Before or during that orientation, support staff will provide relevant documentation and background information about the specific Board/Commission upon which the new appointee shall serve.

Within 90 days of taking office, new appointees will be provided a training session that will clarify the Riverside Code of Ethics and Conduct, Sunshine Ordinance, Conflict of Interest, and the Brown Act. The City Clerk will coordinate these sessions with assistance from the City Manager and City Attorney. (RMC 2.78.040)

As a general policy, an applicant shall not be appointed to serve on more than one Board or Commission except that a member may also serve on one technical or special-purpose committee at the same time. (Technical and special purpose committees are formed to address defined specific subject matters. They frequently require members with specific areas of expertise.)

#### **F. Term of Office**

The term of office for each appointee to a Board/Commission shall be four years. Appointments shall be made for fixed terms commencing March 1. When a mid-term vacancy occurs, the appointment shall be for the remainder of the term of the person vacating the office. A partial term of more than one year shall be considered a full term.

#### **G. Removal from Office**

No appointment shall create tenure or any other property right in the person appointed. Members of Boards and Commissions serve at the pleasure of the City Council and may be removed without cause at any time by at least five affirmative votes of the City Council, with the Mayor entitled to vote.

## H. Vacancies

Seats become vacant in two ways; they either expire at the end of the second term or an “unscheduled” vacancy occurs when a member resigns or is removed during a term. The City Clerk’s Office will advertise in accordance with statutory requirements and a subsequent appointment shall be made consistent with the provisions set forth in Section C, above.

It is the responsibility of the Board/Commission member to inform the City Clerk’s Office of a change of address, specifically for those members appointed to a ward specific seat.

If a Board/Commission member absents himself/herself from three consecutive regular meetings, unless by permission via vote by the Board/Commission members, the position is considered vacant and eligible for a new appointment by the City Council and Mayor.

## I. Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The duties of a Board/Commission member shall be performed in good faith and in a manner which the member believes to be in the best interest of the City.

It is improper for any member of a Board/Commission to utilize, for personal financial gain or in an otherwise self-dealing manner, any information which is received by reason of said membership and is not a matter of public record.

### 1. Code of Ethics and Conduct



#### **The purpose of the Code**

The Code of Ethics and Conduct strives to achieve fair, ethical, and accountable local government for the City of Riverside.



#### **What is contained in the Code?**

The Code adopts a set of core values that constitute guiding principles for the conduct of public officials and specific prohibited conduct. Complaints may be filed for violations of the prohibited conduct only. Further, the Code sets forth hearing and appeal procedures, enforcement and sanction provisions, and monitoring and oversight requirements.



#### **What do the core values contained in the Code strive for?**

- To create a government that is trusted by everyone.
- To make decisions that are unbiased, fair, and honest.
- To ensure that everyone is treated with respect and in a just and fair manner.
- To create a community that affirms the value of diversity.
- To ensure that all public decisions are well informed, independent, and in the best interests of the City of Riverside.
- To maintain a nonpartisan and civic-minded local government.
- To ensure that all public officials are adequately prepared for the duties of their office.
- To ensure that appointed members of boards, commissions, and committees attend regularly scheduled meetings.





### What conduct is prohibited?

- Use of official title or position for personal gain.
- Use or divulgence of confidential or privileged information.
- Use of City resources for non-city purposes.
- Advocacy of private interests of third parties in certain circumstances.
- Violation of Government Code Sections 87100 et seq., (Conflict of Interest).
- Certain Political Activity (Coercion of City employees to participate in election activities).
- Display of campaign materials in or on City vehicles.
- Knowingly assisting another public official in violating this Code of Ethics and Conduct.
- Negotiation for employment with any party having a matter pending.
- Ex parte contact in quasi-judicial matters.
- Attempts to coerce official duties.
- Violations of Federal, State, or local law.



### Who is covered by the Code?

The Mayor, members of the City Council, members of boards, commissions, and committees appointed by the Mayor and/or City Council, including any ad hoc committees, and members of committees appointed by individual members of the City Council, the Mayor, the City Manager, or by Department Heads are subject to the Code.



### When does the Code apply?

The Code applies to the Mayor and members of the City Council at all times during their term of office as elected officials. The Code applies to members of boards, commissions, and committees only while they are acting in their official capacities or affecting the discharge of their duties.



### Where do I find a copy of the Code?

The Code of Ethics and Conduct is posted online at **RiversideCA.gov** on the City Clerk's web page. You may also obtain a copy by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (95) 826-5557 or [City\\_clerk@riversideca.gov](mailto:City_clerk@riversideca.gov).



### What role does the public play in implementation of the Code?

Annually, all Boards and Commissions, the Board of Ethics, and the City Council Inclusiveness, Community, Engagement, and Governmental Processes Committee review the Code of Ethics for consideration of recommendations to the City Council at a public hearing. Contact the City Clerk's Office or visit **EngageRiverside.com** for information on meeting schedules. The City Council encourages residents to participate in these public meetings and discussion of recommendations to improve the effectiveness and implementation of the Code.

## 2. Conflicts of Interest

The Political Reform Act of 1974, as amended (Government Code Sections 81000-91014) and the City's Conflict of Interest Code; (Resolution No. 23655) require certain elected and appointed officials and designated employees to disclose certain personal financial holdings. Most of the City's Boards and Commissions are solely advisory, meaning that final decisions are made by the City Council, and therefore are not required to file Statements of Economic Interest (Form 700).

However, because the following Boards and Commissions have limited decision-making authority, they are required to file the Conflict of Interest, Form 700 with the Office of the City Clerk:

- Airport Commission
- Cultural Heritage Board
- Board of Library Trustees
- Parks and Recreation Commission
- Planning Commission
- Board of Public Utilities
- Transportation Board
- Budget Engagement Commission



Filing dates for Form 700 are as follows:

- Assuming Office Statement – Must be filed within 30 days of taking office.
  - Annual Statements – Must be filed by April 1st of each year.
  - Leaving Office Statement – Must be filed within 30 days of leaving office.
3. All Board/Commission members are required by law (AB 1234, Chapter 700) to complete two hours of Ethics and California's Ralph M. Brown Act training. For newly elected and appointed officials, the requirement is to receive this training within one year of assuming office and renew this training within two years of receiving the first training. The necessary training will be arranged by the City Clerk's Office.
  4. Individual Board/Commission members should avoid making public comments on Council actions or public policies that might appear to represent the official position of their Board/Commission. Board/Commission actions, with the voting of each member, are conveyed to the City Council in the form of official minutes or by resolution. The Chair of a Board/Commission is the spokesperson for the Board/Commission.
  5. Questions regarding possible ethical issues or conflicts of interest should be reviewed with the Chair, City Attorney, or City Clerk, as appropriate under the circumstances, in advance of the subject meeting or discussion.

## J. Awards and Recognition

The City Council values and appreciates each citizen who volunteers his/her time and energy to serving the City on a Board/Commission. An annual appreciation event hosted by the Mayor is one way in which appreciation may be expressed for all Board/Commission members who serve at least one year. When a member terminates service on a Board/Commission, the City Council will recognize that member's contribution to the City through an appropriate expression of appreciation. If that Board/Commission wishes to make its own presentation to an outgoing member, the Chair shall communicate with the City Clerk to avoid duplication of awards.



## Section 2. How City Government Works

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### A. Charter City

Riverside was incorporated on October 11, 1883, and adopted its Charter in 1907. The City currently has a Council-Manager form of government. Under California law, cities that adopt their own charter may adopt their own procedures for matters that are considered “local municipal affairs.” The California Constitution grants charter cities the power to make and enforce all ordinances and resolutions with respect to local municipal affairs.

The City Charter operates as the City’s “constitution.” Just as the California Constitution controls the actions of the State, the City’s Charter dictates certain actions of the City. The City Charter is reviewed and amended every eight years by a volunteer committee (which is the same as a Board or Commission, as referenced herein) called the Charter Review Committee. The Charter Review Committee recommends amendments to the City Council and upon approval are placed on the ballot for final approval by election.

### B. Mayor and City Council

The City of Riverside is governed by a seven-member City Council, elected from wards, and a Mayor elected from the city at large. All elected officials serve four-year terms to oversee the City operations and to guide the future development of the City. Councilmember terms are staggered so that a measure of continuity is maintained in the transition from one Council to the next.

The Mayor is the presiding officer at all meetings of the City Council and has a voice in its proceedings but only votes to break a City Council tie-vote or to appoint/remove a member of a Board or Commission. The Mayor is the official head of the City for all ceremonial purposes. The Mayor has the primary but not exclusive responsibility for interpreting the policies, programs, and needs of the City Government.

The City Council designates on a rotation basis the role of Mayor Pro Tempore to serve and assume the duties in the absence of the Mayor.

The City Council also serves as the Board of Directors for the Successor Agency to the Former Redevelopment Agency of the City of Riverside, the Riverside Public Financing Authority, the Housing Authority, and the Riverside Parking Authority.

The City Council has the power to make and enforce all laws and regulations relating to municipal affairs, subject to the limitations of the United States and California Constitutions, and certain State statutes.

Final decisions on City taxes, fees, budgets, policies including the General Plan and land use issues, and other matters are made by the City Council.

Regular City Council meetings are held every Tuesday, except the 5th Tuesday each month in the Art Pick Council Chamber at City Hall (except summer schedule in July - September). In addition, special meetings and workshops are held from time to time as the need arises. The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the City Council.



## Mayor and City Council

Back Row (Left to Right)

Ronaldo Fierro, Erin Edwards, Gaby Plascencia

Front Row (Left to Right)

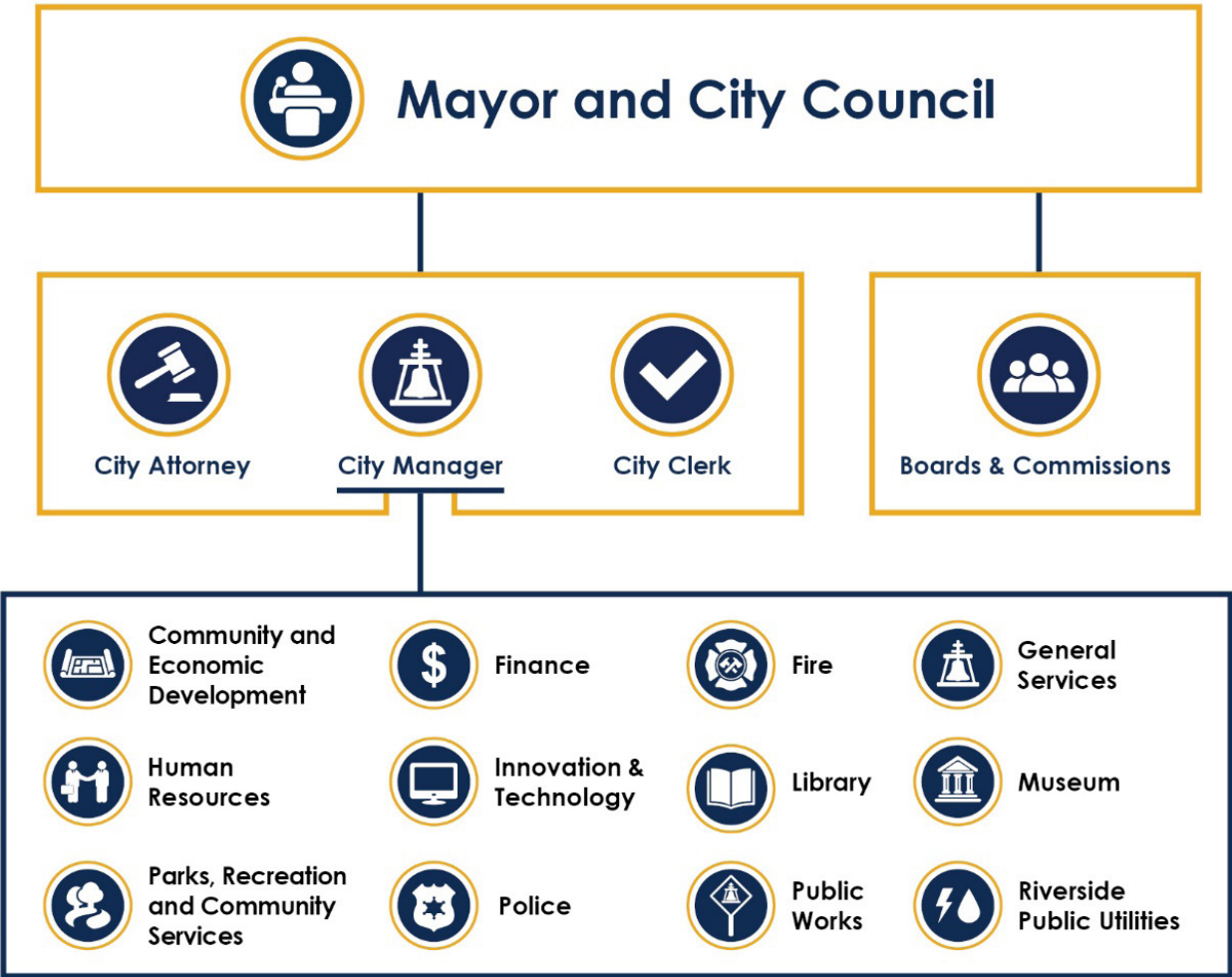
Chuck Conder, Jim Perry, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson,  
Steve Hemenway, Clarissa Cervantes

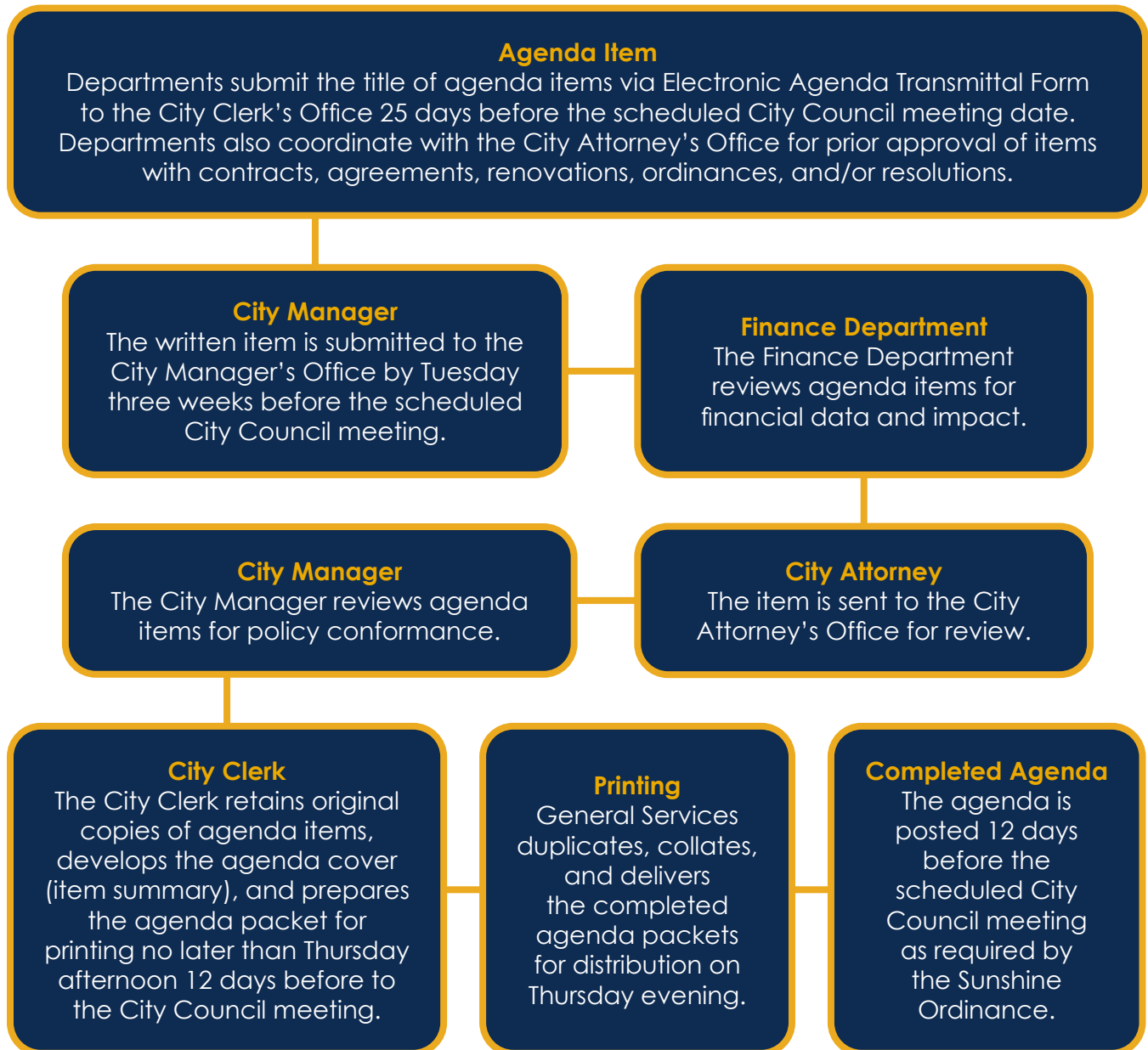


C. Council-Appointed Officers and City Organization

As shown on the Organizational Chart, the City Council is ultimately responsible to the citizens for the operation and well-being of the City. To carry out these responsibilities, the Council relies on three Charter Officers:

- 1. **City Manager:** The City Manager is appointed by and directly responsible to the City Council for all City activities. The City Manager is the Chief Administrative Officer of the City and all department heads report to the City Manager's Office.
- 2. **City Attorney:** The City Attorney provides legal services and advice to the City Council, the City Manager, departmental staff, Boards and Commissions and other City agencies or officials. The City Attorney represents the City in court, prepares ordinances, resolutions, and other legal documents, and prosecutes cases involving violations of City laws. The City Attorney is appointed by and is directly responsible to the City Council.
- 3. **City Clerk:** The City Clerk is responsible for recording and maintaining the full and true record of all proceedings of the City Council. The City Clerk has charge of all City elections. The City Clerk is appointed by and directly responsible to the City Council for all official records of the City.



**D. City Council Agenda Process**

## Section 3. How Boards and Commissions Work

### A. Rules and Regulations

**Bylaws:** Each Board/Commission has approved internal rules that set forth procedures, purpose, specific functions, meetings, officers, budget, etc. (Charter Sec. 804). The Bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting of the Board/Commission by majority vote of the members present, provided that notice of such amendment was submitted in accordance with RMC Title 4 (Sunshine Ordinance) and the Brown Act.

#### 1. **Parliamentary Procedures:**

All Board and Commission meetings shall be conducted in accordance with internal rules and regulations. Rosenberg's Rules of Order or Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised, may also be adopted as a general guide in conducting meetings. Questions should be directed to the assigned professional City staff. A quorum of a Board or Commission shall be a majority of the number of positions on that Board or Commission.



2. **Meetings & Events:** All regular meetings shall be held at the established time and place set for that body - typically in Art Pick Council Chamber at City Hall. However, some Boards and Commissions may meet at various locations around the City to improve meeting access and community participation. The City Council may hold an event from time to time to recognize Board and Commission members.

### B. Continuity of Work and New Ideas

1. **Continuity:** There should be a pattern for continuing the work of every Board and Commission in order that the needs of the community are served in a thoughtful yet expeditious manner. Board/Commission Chairs and the assigned professional staff are the responsible parties for establishing an even flow of work. New members to Boards and Commissions are expected to familiarize themselves with the workload. Normally, it will take new members a bit of time to develop a full understanding of their new work and confidence in their decision-making abilities. Staff members are available to answer any questions.
2. **New Ideas:** Board/Commission members should view themselves as an extension of the abilities of the City Council and staff to see and hear matters of importance in the community. Sometimes old policies and established ways of doing things can be changed. Fresh ideas are welcomed. How does the process of developing a new "idea" work?
  - a. Test the idea on friends; are reactions favorable?
  - b. Bring the idea to your Board/Commission under the portion of your agenda where individual member comments on items not on the agenda are entertained. If fellow members react favorably; the idea should be formalized in written form.



- c. At this point, the “cost” of the idea in terms of staff time and dollars must be evaluated. If staff determine the cost to be minor and the impact on City operations to be negligible, the idea can be agendized, discussed publicly and a final decision can be made for a recommendation to the City Council.
- d. Should the “cost” in staff time and money be deemed significant, then the City Council should be properly informed, and budgeting and staff time approved before further action is taken by the Board/Commission.

A good time for advancing new ideas is during the City Budgeting Workshops, when Boards, Commissions, and citizens are actively encouraged to offer such suggestions to the City Council, as most of the resource decisions are made at that time.

### C. Communications

1. **Written Reports:** Boards and Commissions are occasionally requested to make special reports or recommendations to the City Council on specific subjects. The City Council may make this request in writing, with specific direction as to the approach, scope, and schedule for the study desired. These recommendations often play a major role in assisting the City Council to reach a final decision on important issues.

Commission agendas must be made available to the public at least 12 days prior to conducting a meeting. Therefore, agenda topics should be submitted to staff at least 25 days prior to the scheduled meeting date. No matter may be acted upon unless it is on the agenda.

- a. Any recommendation or report from a Board/Commission is required to be in written form. If the matter is to appear on the City Council agenda, the report must be submitted to the City Clerk within required submission timeframes prior to the City Council meeting at which the report is to be considered. This report becomes part of the record and is forwarded to each Council Member for review in advance of public consideration.
- b. Some Boards/Commissions may receive study or action requests from citizens or groups. These requests should also be presented in writing to the Board/Commission, which will then determine if the committee wishes to pursue that particular issue. The Board/Commission shall advise the City Council of the request and the body's determination for action.



2. **Goals/Budget:** Each Board/Commission shall prepare proposed major City Goals and Objectives in a manner established by the City Manager and in alignment with the City Council established goals. The Board/Commission Chair may be asked to speak to specific projects or issues when the City Council conducts its goal setting in study session. The City Manager will notify the Chair of time and place of such City Council review. More detailed budget proposals will be made through Board/Commission staff, consistent with the budget schedule and process.
3. **Statements:** A Board/Commission does not have authority to speak for the City. If the body wishes to recommend that a statement be made, such as a letter written to state a position, it shall be submitted to and receive approval of the City Council, Mayor and/or City Manager.

In public statements or interactions, individual Board/Commission members should present views and recommendations representing the Board/Commission as a body and not personal individual views. Members expressing views not approved by the majority of a Board/Commission should clearly express that their opinions reflect their personal perspective as a "private citizen". Individual opinions must be identified as such. Public statements should not include promises that may be construed to be binding on the Board/Commission, City Council, or staff. When making a public statement, if applicable, members should indicate that Board/Commission actions are recommendations, and that final action will be taken by the City Council. Board/Commission members may be selected on the basis of representing defined groups; however, each member should represent the overall "public good," not an exclusive group, or special interest.

4. **Public Forums and Surveys:** A Board/Commission shall not sponsor or co-sponsor a public forum, meeting, or survey without the prior approval of the City Council, Mayor and/or City Manager.
5. **Personal Testimony:** If a member of a Board/Commission appears before the Council (or another Board/Commission) in a capacity other than as representative of his/her body, it should be explained in advance that any statements made are not to be construed as representing the opinions or recommendations of the Board/Commission.
6. **Changes:** Changes in a member's address or telephone number, and the names of new officers, shall be submitted to the City Clerk and Board/Commission Staff liaison as soon as possible.
7. **Report to Council:** Each Board/Commission submits to the City Council a report describing its activities and evaluating its progress for the prior year.

#### **D. Role of City Staff Persons and Board/Commission Members**

Staff liaisons assist Boards/Commissions in the conduct of public meetings ensuring that the business listed on the agenda is addressed. Board/Commission members should have sufficient information to reach decisions based upon a clear explanation of the issues involved.

Staff liaisons handle administrative duties, prepare meeting agendas, and record the minutes. Board/Commission members may not direct Staff to initiate programs, conduct major studies, or establish official policy without the approval of the City Council.

The professional staff supporting a Board/Commission prepares agenda reports providing a brief background of the issue, a list of alternatives, recommendations, and appropriate backup material, as necessary. On occasions, that staff will also provide presentations, basic support, and technical advice for the Board/Commission.

Professional staff support and provide assistance, but Boards and Commissions do not have supervisory authority over City staff. While they may work closely with the Board/Commission, professional staff members remain responsible to their immediate supervisors and ultimately to the City Manager. The Board/Commission members are responsible for the functions of the Board/Commission and the Chair is responsible for committee compliance with the policies outlined in this handbook.

#### Role of Staff Liaison

- Attend all meetings of the Commission
- Prepare agendas in collaboration with the Chair
- Work with the Commission in the development of a work plan for the coming year and a summary of accomplishments for the previous year
- Ensure agendas and reports are posted in compliance with State law and City protocols
- Prepare action minutes for approval by the Commission
- Serve as the liaison between the Commission and City staff
- Communicate directions from the City Council to the Commission
- Submit all budget requests from Commissions to cover costs associated with workplan

#### Role of Professional Staff

- Research and prepare reports for the Commission, as is consistent with the work plan and/or Council
- Prepare reports from the Commission to the Council, ensuring that reports represent the majority view of the Commission
- Stay apprised of new laws and City protocols related to their assigned Commission or Commissions generally

Board/Commission members should feel free to contact the Staff liaison for inquiries and/or support purposes. It should be understood, however, that **Board/Commission members are responsible for all Commission work.** Staff liaisons will provide direction, guidance, as well as clerical and/or organizational or administrative support to Board/Commissions on an as needed basis.

It is important that recommendations the Boards and Commissions wish to communicate to the City Council are made through adopted or approved Council agenda procedures. Staff members shall assist the Board/Commission Chair to ensure appropriate legal review or City and State legislation is complied with.



## E. Community Outreach



Boards/Commissions are intended to provide **easy access to the operations of government**. As such, many Boards/Commissions may have meetings in community centers around the City. In addition, all Board/Commission meetings are broadcast live via the City web page, where the recording of the meeting will be available for review after the meeting.

In addition, Boards/Commissions may take advantage of other community outreach avenues such as the City public access channel, newsletters, and other media resources.

## F. Absences, Leaves of Absence, and Resignations

1. **Attendance:** If a Board/Commission member fails, for any reason, to attend three consecutive regular meetings without cause, that member shall automatically be considered for replacement. The Chair of the Board/Commission shall inform the City Council, through the City Clerk, of such a situation, explaining any extenuating circumstances resulting in the absences.
2. **Absences and vacancies:** If a member of a Board/Commission absents himself/herself from three consecutive regular meetings of such Board/ Commission, unless by permission of such Board/Commission expressed in its official minutes, or is convicted of a crime of moral turpitude, or ceases to be a qualified elector of the City, the office shall become vacant and shall be so declared by the City Council.

The City Clerk provides the City Council with Board/Commission quarterly attendance reports (Resolution 23618(f).b).

3. **Leaves of Absence:** Leaves of absence are not granted to Board/Commission members except under very unusual circumstances and when authorized in advance by such Board/Commission and expressed in its official minutes.
4. **Resignation:** In the event a member finds it necessary to resign from a Board/Commission, a letter of resignation stating the effective date of the resignation shall be immediately directed to the City Council through the City Clerk, with a copy forwarded to the Chair of the Board/Commission.

## G. Functional Review

1. **Election:** Each Board/Commission, after the last day in February of each year, shall elect a Chair as the presiding officer.
2. **Terms of Office:** The term of office for a Chair or Vice Chair shall be one year, commencing upon election. No person shall serve as Chair or Vice Chair for more than two consecutive terms except if noted under specific Board/Commission rules.
3. **Agenda Packet Distribution:** Agenda packets are emailed to Board/Commission members when the items are available to the public. The full agenda packet is available online at the City website.
4. **Access to City Hall & Parking:** The Staff liaison provides Board/Commission members with a parking pass and information on accessing City Hall or other authorized buildings, if necessary.
5. **Video Recordings of Meetings and Availability:** Live streaming and video recordings of Board/Commission meetings are available on the City website. Archived records and meeting minutes are available via the City Clerk's Office.

6. **Communication with other Board/Commission members:**

The association with other Board/Commission members is very important when you serve on a Board/Commission. Before talking about relationships, it may be well to point out a few facts about Board/Commission members. Board/Commission members come from various backgrounds - education, occupational, religious, social, economic, physical, and cultural - and differences do exist. It is important to recognize that the reasons for serving on a Board/Commission will vary and perhaps some will have a special interest. Each member will contribute in his/her own way and is an important part of the decision-making process. Do not expect every member to give of his/her time, talent, and knowledge to the same degree. Some will give more, and others will give less, but in the end, the community will benefit. Bearing this in mind, the following may serve as a guideline:



1. Always respect other individuals' viewpoints even though they may be opposite of your own.
2. Allow the other individual to articulate his/her own views and then attempt to make an objective evaluation of those views.
3. Evaluation of other members' viewpoints should be based on what is best for the total community and for all concerned.
4. There will be times when disagreement among the Board/Commission is apparent; strive to minimize whenever possible.
5. Be open and honest at all times.
6. Existing Board/Commission members have a responsibility to recognize new Board/Commission members and see that they are made welcome and become oriented.

## 7. Communication with Council Members:

The purpose of Boards and Commissions is to expand the opportunity for citizen input and participation, study issues, and make recommendations to the City Council. As an advisor to the City Council, Board/Commission members must be continually aware that the decisions formed by the City Council, even after receiving and evaluating the recommendations from the various advisory bodies, are not easily made.

The City Council possesses the ultimate political and legal responsibility for the conduct of local government and the overall welfare of the community. It is important to recognize that not all of the recommendations made by the various Boards/Commissions will be accepted by the City Council. Council actions which vary from Board/Commission recommendations do not imply a lack of confidence or disinterest in the advisory bodies' decisions. Councilmembers must weigh the advice provided by advisory bodies against a broader scope of considerations as they reach the decisions for which they are responsible.



- i. The Board or Commission should assist the City Council in developing community trust in the advisory Board/Commission system; and
- ii. The Board/Commission should be sensitive to City priorities and know when to take a stand.

## Section 4. Sunshine Ordinance and the Brown Act

### A. Overview

The City of Riverside Municipal Code Title 4, known as the "Sunshine Ordinance" establishes agenda management and publication requirements which provide a longer review period of the material prior to a public meeting than state law requires.

In addition, the State Legislature has declared that the actions of public bodies be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly. California's Ralph M. Brown Act (found in Government Code Sections 54950 through 54961) is also known as the "open meeting law".



Requirements of the Sunshine Ordinance assure proper public notice and access to meetings of elected bodies and includes advisory bodies to elected bodies. As such, the Sunshine Ordinance **applies to all Boards and Commissions.**

The requirements of the City's Sunshine Ordinance and the Brown Act can be very technical and therefore all newly appointed Board and Commission members are required to attend and understand the material presented in a mandatory workshop by the City Attorney's Office.



### Important Features of the Brown Act:

1. A meeting is defined as any congregation of a majority of members of a Board/Commission at the same time and location including to hear, discuss, deliberate, decide, or take action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board/Commission.
2. All communication among members of a Board/Commission fall under the Brown Act, regardless of whether the communication is in person, on the telephone, in circulated writing, in social media or on other electronic platforms. Members **may not respond directly** to any communication from another Member on an internet based social media platform regarding a matter within their subject matter jurisdiction.

It is important to understand that the Sunshine Ordinance and Brown Act generally prohibit any action or discussion of items not on the posted agenda. The posting requirements for Board/Commission agendas:

- Regular Meetings - 12 days in advance
  - Special Meetings - 5 days in advance
  - The agenda must advise the public of the meeting and the matters to be transacted or discussed.
  - The agenda must state the meeting time and place.
  - Each item of business to be transacted must be briefly described.
  - Adjourned Meetings – a regular or special meeting may be adjourned to a specific time and place (usually to continue a public hearing or other business). A special notice is required and should be posted within 24 hours of adjournment.
3. Prohibited communication among members of a Board/Commission includes communication in a series or chain, and any concerted plan to engage in collective deliberation on public business through a series of letters, telephone calls or e-mails that are passed among members of the Board/Commission.

### B. Brown Act Provides for Public Comments

The Brown Act mandates that regular meeting agendas allow for two types of public comment periods. The first is a general audience comment period, where the public can comment on any item of interest that is within subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency and that is not listed on the posted agenda. This general audience comment period may come at any time during a meeting (GC§54954.3).



The second type of public comment period is the specific comment period pertaining to items on the Board/Commission's agenda. The Brown Act requires that the Board/Commission allow these specific comment periods on agenda items to occur prior to or during the Board/Commission's consideration of that item (GC§54954.3), including consent calendar items.

Public comment is an important feature of all public meetings under the Brown Act. Although the public may make comments that you may wish to address, comments by Board/Commission members is limited when the subject is not on the agenda. Board/Commission members may request the topic and/or issue be placed on a future agenda for later consideration.

**Public Comments at Special Meetings:** The Brown Act requires that agendas for special meetings provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak about any item listed on the agenda prior to the Board/Commission's consideration of that item (GC§54954.3). Therefore, for special meetings, Boards/Commissions must allow public comments for items on the agenda, however (unlike regular meetings), a public comment period for items not on the agenda is not required.

**Limitations on Length and Content of Public's Comments:** The Brown Act allows a legislative body to adopt reasonable regulations limiting total amount of time allocated for public testimony. In Riverside, the typical time limit for speakers is three (3) minutes.

It is not permissible to prohibit public criticism of policies, procedures, programs, or services of the City or acts or omissions of the City (GC§54954.3(c)). This does not mean that a member of the public may speak on "anything." If the topic is not within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board/Commission, the Chair should remind the speaker to direct comments to only those subjects within the Board/Commission's purview.

## C. Common Questions about the Brown Act

The following is intended to give Board/Commission members a broad understanding of the Brown Act. Please consult with the Staff liaison, the City Clerk, or the City Attorney for more specifics.

### 1. What are serial meetings?

A serial meeting is a series of communications amongst a majority of the members, outside of a meeting, to engage in collective deliberation on public business through a series of letters, telephone calls, emails, that pass from one member of the Board/Commission to the next and excluding the public. Serial meetings are strictly prohibited by the Brown Act.

Even though a majority of members never gather in a room at the same time, a Brown Act violation may occur if ideas are exchanged among the majority by going through any person acting as an intermediary (including staff), and/or through the use of a technological devices, such as a telephone answering machine, computer email, social media or voice mail.

### 2. What are some examples of serial meetings?

The most common example of a serial meeting is when "Member A" calls "Member B" and then "Member B" calls "Member C," and so on to share ideas among a majority of the Board/Commission members.

Another example: A member of a five-member Board/Commission receives a letter regarding City business and writes a note on that letter that says, "I agree," and then provides a copy of the letter to two other members.

Email can also be troublesome. Here's an example of how easy it can be to unintentionally conduct a serial meeting: A staff member sends out via email a document in draft form for review by the Board/Commission prior to a meeting.

"Member A" recommends to staff a revision and copies fellow Board/Commission members. "Member B" disagrees with the proposed change and others begin to "weigh in" on the subject.

### **3. *This seems restrictive... aren't there any exceptions?***

Of course, prohibition against serial meetings does not prohibit all communication between individuals regarding City business. The Brown Act only prohibits use of serial meetings to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. This does not prohibit a staff person from "briefing" members provided that the briefing is limited to furnishing information, and the staff person does not solicit opinions concerning an appropriate course of action for the City and then share them among the members.

### **4. *What's a Quorum?***

A quorum is the majority (half the members plus 1) of the total number of established members of the Board/Commission. A quorum must be present for any business discussion or action to take place. A quorum must be present for the duration of a meeting. If a member leaves during the meeting, resulting in the lack of a quorum, no further business may be conducted, and the meeting must be adjourned. Establishing and maintaining a quorum is why your attendance at all meetings is important.

### **5. *What are some exceptions to the Brown Act?***

Board/Commission members may attend and/or participate in the following as long as a majority of the members do not discuss amongst themselves matters that are within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Board/Commission:

- Informational or educational workshops or conferences
- Community meetings, such as town hall meetings, workshops, forums, etc. not sponsored by the Board/Commission
- A meeting of another body of the local agency
- Social or ceremonial events.

### **6. *Can a Board/Commission conduct a retreat?***

"Team building" or "goal setting" retreats may be held, but they must be held within the City, be properly noticed, and be open to the public.





## Section 5. Tips for Being an Effective Board/Commission Member

### A. Understanding Your Role and Scope of Responsibility

After appointment by the City Council, the City Clerk will present new Board/Commission members with a useful binder of information about the City, which includes this handbook. In addition, the City staff member designated to serve in support of your Board/Commission will schedule an orientation appointment with you. This is your chance to learn more about City government and the scope of responsibility of the Board/Commission to which you have been appointed. In addition to reading this handbook (which will answer many of your questions), start preparing for your new role by:

1. **Reviewing** the City's Mission Statement, Organizational Values, and your Board or Commission bylaws.
2. **Reading** the other information provided to you about the City and your specific Board/Commission. Keep the binder handy for easy reference and review.
3. **Getting to know** fellow Board/Commission members and staff. Learn the history and "language" of your Board/Commission. Ask about upcoming issues.
4. **Consider meeting** with the Chair of your Board/Commission and/or a Council Liaison to learn more about your role and to understand expectations. This will help you focus in on the "big picture" and how you fit in.
5. **Becoming familiar** with basic meeting management and diplomatic decision-making procedures.
6. **Attending** training programs and workshops offered to you by the City.

## B. Prepare Ahead for Meetings

Most citizens understand when they apply to serve on a Board/Commission that they will be making a commitment of time to attend meetings, but many are often surprised by the amount of time it takes to prepare properly for a meeting. Being prepared is key to making good decisions and will strengthen the value of your Board/Commission's recommendations.

1. **Do your homework!** This involves setting enough time aside to review thoroughly and consider the entire agenda packet.
2. When you receive your agenda packet, **read it carefully.** Be prepared to discuss fully, evaluate, and act on all matters scheduled for consideration. Think about:
  - i. The number of items.
  - ii. Those items that may be controversial.
  - iii. Difficult procedural items.
  - iv. Issues you know little about.
3. **Visit any sites or facilities** that will help you understand the issues.
4. Start **a list of questions** for staff.
5. **Call or meet with staff before the meeting to learn more, if need be.** Getting more information ahead of time may make your decision-making easier and help move the meeting. Your questions may also alert staff to issues that others may also be pondering. Advance knowledge assists staff with preparing oral reports and adequately addressing the issues during the meeting. Don't try to do a "gotcha" moment with City staff at your Board or Commission meeting. City staff works very hard to provide thorough and accurate reports to their Boards and Commissions, and would appreciate a "heads up" as to an error or mistake in a report. This also makes for a more productive meeting.
6. Show up **on time and be ready to work.** (It's also helpful to be well rested!)



### C. Develop Positive Relationships

Being selected by the City Council to serve on a Board/Commission is a high honor and provides a unique opportunity for genuine public service. Open, honest, and supportive relationships with the City Council, with City staff and fellow members of your Board/Commission will ensure your success and effectiveness.

1. The proper channel to contact City staff on items of consideration is through the designated City staff person providing support to your Board/Commission.
2. Demonstrate respect to your fellow Board/Commission members by being a good listener, by communicating honestly, and by being dependable.
3. Adopt a positive attitude and become a problem-solver.
4. If you have a new idea, propose it to the group as a whole. (See also Section 3.C.2, Continuity of Work and New Ideas.)
5. If friction develops, individuals should make every attempt to clarify differences and make certain that clear communication is taking place. The public meeting should not be used to express anger or disagreement.
6. If differences cannot be resolved, consider consulting with the appropriate individual(s) next in line of the "chain of command": 1) Board/Commission Chair, 2) City Clerk, and 3) City Manager or Council Assistant.
7. Show respect towards viewpoints and allow others adequate time to present their views fully before making comments.
8. Be open and honest.
9. Welcome new members and help them become acquainted with their duties.
10. Strive to minimize political action among members.



### D. Encourage and Honor Public Participation

Some Board/Commission meetings are well attended by the public and others are not. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinions.

Some members of the public are quite used to speaking before a public body, but most are not. Individuals may address the Board/Commission to either present an issue or concern, or to speak for or against an item.





This may be the first time they have ever done this, and they may find the experience intimidating. Anxiety can be expressed in a variety of ways, including aggressiveness or forgetfulness, so be patient and remember to:

1. Be fair and consistent.
2. Pay attention to all speakers and actively listen to what they are saying.
3. Ask questions for clarification but avoid debate or "cross-examining."
4. Be sure that your body language is not sending mixed or negative messages.
5. Also refer to Section H: Special Tips for the Chair.

### E. Respect Individual Viewpoints

Although it may seem like this tip could simply go unsaid, it is important to remember it (especially when you feel very strongly about a matter): Treat fellow members of your Board/Commission, staff, and the public with respect and courtesy at all times.

1. Ask the Chair for permission to speak.
2. Allow others time to present their views fully.
3. Actively listen and seek to understand.
4. Avoid interrupting others.
5. Be open to new ideas.
6. Explore alternatives.
7. When necessary, agree to disagree.



### F. Communicate Effectively

Board/Commission members serve as a communications link between the community, staff, and City Council. You provide a channel for citizen expression. Not only is it important for you to listen carefully to others, but you also need to be able to communicate effectively what you are hearing and thinking.

1. Take notes to remind yourself of questions you want to ask or important comments you wish to make.
2. Be direct, open, and forthright.
3. Provide rationale for opinions or recommendations.
4. Stay on topic.
5. Take your charge seriously but maintain composure and keep your sense of humor.
6. When speaking to the public and/or press, be sure you are representing the majority views of your individual Board/Commission. Personal opinions should be clearly identified as such.
7. Speak clearly and be sure people can hear you.
8. If you wish to communicate using electronic mail (email), use the tool wisely. It is easy to unintentionally violate the Brown Act, so certain caution must be exercised when using email. (See Section 4(c), Common Questions about the Brown Act.)



## G. Public Outreach

Board/Commission members are encouraged to reach out and engage the public by attending community events or meetings, especially those within the topic area of their appointed Board/Commission.

Share information about the activities of the Board/Commission with others, explaining and helping the public understand the Board/Commission activities. You may wish to share information on social media to help get the word out.

**When speaking as a private individual and making public statements, members should refrain from making statements contrary to the adopted position of the Board/Commission.**

## H. Special Tips for the Chair

The Chair's main role is to provide the Board/Commission with group direction and to set the tone for meetings. The Chair must balance being strong enough to move the meeting along and democratic enough to involve all members in the meeting.

An Effective Chair:

1. **Explains the public participation process** to the audience. (For example: "The commission will hear first from staff who will present the staff report. Commission questions to staff will follow and then the floor will be open to the public, who may comment on the matter. Following public comment, the matter will come back to the commission for our deliberation and action.")
2. **Announces each item** before discussion begins.
3. Is **even-handed and fair** to all participants.
4. **Observes specified time limits**, three minutes per speaker unless special circumstances exist.
5. **Protects members and staff** from verbal attacks.
6. **Solicits opinions, feelings, and positions** from all members.
7. Encourages the generation of **alternative solutions**.
8. Protects **new thoughts** from being rejected prior to fair evaluation.
9. **Discourages finger pointing and blame-oriented** statements or questions.
10. Keeps the discussion **focused on the issue**.
11. **Delays evaluation and analysis of alternatives** until all are on the table.
12. Guides the process of **screening alternatives** and **selecting the solution**.
13. Attempts to **obtain consensus**.
14. **Moves the meeting along** and does not let the Board/Commission drift off the subject at hand.

## I. Managing Difficult Meetings



Here are some additional tips for managing any meeting, but particularly the difficult ones:

1. Encourage the designation of a spokesperson for any groups.
2. Ask staff to make sure there are plenty of extra agendas and staff reports.
3. Establish and announce rules before the meeting begins.
4. Introduce each item and possible actions.
5. Try not to waste time on routine items.
6. Encourage speakers to address the Board/Commission and not the audience.
7. Discourage clapping and shouting.
8. Use recesses to help diffuse hostility.
9. Adhere to speaker time limits.
10. Use speaker cards/slips.
11. Make sure that all Board/Commission members are addressing each other, through you, and not the audience.
12. Consider continuing an item for further discussion if it appears consensus may not be reached.

## J. Community Engagement

Community engagement is defined as the range of opportunities for public involvement in the decision-making process, relationship building, and community strengthening. Community engagement is achieved when the community is and feels a part of a process. Effective community engagement requires a shared understanding between community members and City staff and a collaborative process that connects City Staff with the community in a mutually beneficial way by the sharing of new ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise, and experience.

Following the community engagement process, report the results and outcomes of the community engagement activity back to the community. This should be done in a timely, accessible, and informative manner so that participants understand how their involvement influenced the process, and the outcomes or decisions. If the community engagement process is lengthy, it is important that we regularly report on the project's development to ensure that the community remain involved and engaged.

Community engagement processes support the delivery of all outcome areas identified in the Envision Riverside 2025 Strategic Plan cross-cutting threads including Community Trust, Equity, Fiscal Responsibility, Innovation, as well as Sustainability and Resiliency.

**Thank you!**









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For more information, visit

**[RiversideCA.gov/CityClerk](https://www.RiversideCA.gov/CityClerk)**