

CITY OF

Bloomington

Organizational Assessment – Boards and Commissions

Project Report / January 2022



A PART OF

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July 28, 2022

Honorable Mayor John Hamilton
City of Bloomington
410 N. Morton Street
Bloomington, IN 47404

Subject: Organizational Assessment of Boards and Commission

Dear Mayor Hamilton:

We are pleased to provide this assessment and review of the City of Bloomington's appointed Boards and Commissions. This purpose of this review was to assess the scope, structure, and resource needs of the City of Bloomington's boards and commissions, and to identify opportunities to enhance their effectiveness and value to the City and community. The recommendations in this report were intended to build upon the boards and commissions' many existing contributions and to enhance the City's community-focused approach to decision-making and operations.

The recommendations in this report will not require any additional staff positions but will require staff time to implement. Our recommendations will enhance the structure of boards and commissions by consolidating those bodies with overlapping purposes and scopes of work; ensuring that proposals for new boards or commissions are thoroughly considered; providing consistency and transparency in communication with applicants and residents; providing training on roles and responsibilities to board and commission members as well as to the City's staff liaisons providing support to them; and by assigning oversight of the entire boards and commission application process and OnBoard™ software to a single City department.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the City of Bloomington. We are confident that the recommendations in this report will provide a framework to maximize the valuable role of the City's Boards and Commissions and ensure they operate as effectively as possible.

Sincerely,



Michelle Ferguson

Vice President - Organizational Assessment

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Executive Summary

The City of Bloomington, Indiana, is committed to engaging with its residents and ensuring that decisions are made with a robust exchange of ideas from individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and areas of expertise. The City employs a number of tools to connect with residents, but one of its most prominent is its use of boards and commissions. These boards and commissions, which are generally composed of resident volunteers appointed by either the City Council or the Mayor, advise elected officials and provide policy recommendations on a diverse range of matters from conservation to parking to social justice.

These boards and commissions provide valuable perspectives that enhance City initiatives and officials' decision-making. However, as with all City initiatives, the use of boards and commissions represents a cost. The entities are a significant time commitment for volunteer participants, who generally attend one night meeting per month and assist with whatever research or initiatives in which the board or commission is engaging. They also represent an investment of staff time; each board or commission is supported by a designated staff liaison.

There can also be challenges integrating the work of boards and commissions with the broader strategic direction of the City. Members operate independently from the City and may be unaware of larger City goals or initiatives or of the initiatives of other boards or commissions. This may mean that the boards and commissions are not engaging in the work that would be most beneficial to the City overall, or that their work might overlap or conflict with the work of other entities. Members of the boards and commissions also function as informal representatives of the City, which creates the risk that their actions or messaging may not align with City values.

Boards and commissions serve an important role in the community. For these reasons, it is important to carefully evaluate the structure, purpose, and practices of boards and commissions to maximize their benefit to the community. While it is important to provide opportunities for community engagement to the decision-making process, it is also important to ensure that limited City staff capacity is not diverted from delivering other priority City programs and services.

One strategy to maximize their benefit is to address current areas of overlap in what boards and commissions focus upon. Some of the City's boards and commissions are closely related to one another, which creates complications. This report addresses overlap between the Parking Commission, Traffic Commission, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission, as well as overlap between the Environmental Commission and the Sustainability Commission. In both cases the decisions of one group impact the others and the same proposal is often brought to multiple groups for their review. The same staff also often support multiple groups, limiting their capacity for other work. Restructuring these entities into a single environmental group and a single transportation group would reduce overlap and allow the groups' members to consider environmental or traffic issues more holistically.

This report also recommends strategies to increase the transparency of City boards and commissions. Currently, different boards and commissions have different levels of communication with the public. For example, some post video recordings of their meetings and others do not. Some post meeting agendas and minutes in a timely manner while others do not keep their publicly available meeting materials up to date. These discrepancies can create confusion for the public and be a barrier to public contributions to these forums. Additionally, current board and commission members report a lack of transparency in the application process, which can potentially deter individuals from participating. The City can mitigate these issues by establishing communication standards for all boards and commissions as well as taking steps to increase the transparency of the application process, such as communicating regularly with candidates on the status of their application.

Another opportunity is to clarify the roles of both board and commission members and their City staff liaisons, and to equip members and liaisons with the resources they need to be successful. There is currently no formal onboarding process for board or commission members, and no formal training for staff liaisons. This results in a lack of clarity among both groups surrounding their obligations to the community and to each other as well as the regulations they are expected to follow. Creating formal training programs to clarify and educate members and liaisons on these roles will help equip both staff and volunteers with the skills and confidence to operate the boards and commissions as effectively as possible.

The following report provides more details on these recommendations, as listed in the table below.

Table 1: List of Report Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
Board and Commission Structure	
1	Merge the Commission on Sustainability and the Environmental Commission.
2	Merge the Parking Commission, Traffic Commission, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission.
3	Consolidate park, recreation and urban forestry related commissions under the Board of Park Commissioners.
Strategic Focus of Boards and Commissions	
4	Evaluate the business case for any potential new board or commission before its creation.
5	Require a brief annual report to the Mayor and City Council from each board and commission to ensure the work aligns with the City goals.
Communication and Transparency	
6	Require all boards and commissions to record audio or video of their meetings and to post meeting materials to the City website in a timely manner.
7	Establish a formal, transparent application process for boards and commissions that includes regular communication with applicants.
Training and Onboarding	
8	Develop a formal onboarding program for new board and commission members.
9	Define the role of staff liaisons to boards and commissions and develop a formal onboarding program.
10	Assign oversight of the board and commission process to a designated position.

Introduction

Background and Methodology

In 2020, the City of Bloomington retained the services of The Novak Consulting Group, a part of Raftelis, to conduct an assessment of the City of Bloomington’s boards and commissions. The purpose of this study was to review potential areas of overlap among various boards and commissions and to recommend an overall structure that maximizes the value of the boards and commissions to the City and to the community as a whole.

To accomplish these tasks, the project team interviewed and conducted focus groups with Chairs of 18 boards and commissions and 24 City staff liaisons in order to understand their thoughts on the efficacy of the current structure and on the workload for both staff and board and commission members. All board and commission Chairs had the opportunity to provide input. Interviews were conducted by email, over phone, or by video, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the project team reviewed and analyzed documents and materials provided by City staff, such as board and commission agendas and minutes, and the City charter.

The team also reviewed the structure and scope of boards and commissions benchmark cities. Benchmarks were chosen because they are communities in Indiana and have a population size between approximately 50,000 and 250,000. Specific benchmarks are listed in the table below.

Table 2: Benchmark Cities in Indiana

City	Population ¹
City of Bloomington	85,755
City of Fishers	95,310
City of Fort Wayne	270,402
City of Lawrence	49,462
City of South Bend	102,026

About Boards and Commissions

The membership, role, and authority of the City of Bloomington’s boards and commissions can vary significantly. Some are required under state law (“statutory”), while others are formed by the City in response to unmet needs.

Some entities have the power to make decisions or to help direct City operations. The Board of Parks Commissioners, for example, has jurisdiction over all City parks and makes decisions on the acquisition, use, and maintenance of parkland.

Other entities are purely advisory in nature. The City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission, for example, provides reports and recommendations on walkability and bikability to the Mayor and City Council but have no authority to enact any recommended policies or initiatives.

Although the scope and powers of boards and commissions vary, at their most basic level, they are volunteer bodies

¹ Source: United States Census 2019 Population Estimates Program

consisting of City residents appointed by the City’s elected officials. These entities provide an opportunity for the elected officials to engage with residents and to be exposed to a broad range of ideas and opinions. Many board and commission participants also have experience or technical expertise in the body’s area of focus, and elected officials benefit from this expertise when making policy decisions.

Boards and commissions are also directly supported by City staff. Each commission is assigned a staff liaison who is tasked with providing a wide range of support functions to board and commission volunteers. For example, they are tasked with managing the agenda and meeting minute documentation and publication processes, coordinating board and commission research, and serving as the link between volunteers and the broader City government. These duties require a significant commitment of staff time; however, the amount of staff time dedicated to these functions varies by board and commission. The following summarizes the current distribution of boards and commissions as well as estimates of staff time requirements associated with each.

Bloomington’s Boards and Commissions

As of June 2021, the City of Bloomington has nearly 50 boards and commissions, listed in the table below by topic. The table also notes which entities are required by Indiana State statute to maintain current City operations.

Table 3: City of Bloomington Boards and Commissions

Topic Area	Board/Commission	Required by Indiana Statute?
Culture and Society	Bloomington Arts Commission	No
	Commission on Aging	No
	Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs	No
	Commission on the Status of Black Males	No
	Commission on the Status of Children & Youth	No
	Commission on the Status of Women	No
	Human Rights Commission	No
	Jack Hopkins Social Services Funding Committee	No
	Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commission	No
Monroe County Domestic Violence Coalition	No	
Development Services	Board of Zoning Appeals	Yes
	Plan Commission	Yes
	Historic Preservation Commission	Yes
	Hearing Officer	No
	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Citizens Advisory Committee	No
	MPO Policy Committee	No
	MPO Technical Advisory Committee	No
Economic Development	Plat Committee	No
	Economic Development Commission	Yes
	BIDAC (Bloomington Industrial Development Advisory Commission)	Yes

Topic Area	Board/Commission	Required by Indiana Statute?
	Redevelopment Commission	Yes
	Urban Enterprise Association	Yes
	CDBG (Community Development Block Grants) Funding Citizens Advisory Committee	No
	Farmers' Market Advisory Council	No
Environment	Commission on Sustainability	No
	Environmental Commission	No
Government	Citizens Redistricting Advisory Commission	No
Housing	Housing Authority Board	No
	Housing Quality Appeals Board	No
Information Technology	Bloomington Digital Underground Advisory Committee	No
Parks and Recreation	Board of Park Commissioners	Yes
	Banneker Advisory Council	No
	Cascades Golf Course Advisory Council	No
	Environmental Resources Advisory Council	No
	Tree Commission	No
Public Works	Board of Public Works	Yes
	Animal Control Commission	No
	Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission	No
	Council for Community Accessibility	No
	Parking Commission	No
	Traffic Commission	No
Safety	Board of Public Safety	Yes
	Firefighters Pension Board	Yes
	Police Pension Board	Yes
	Public Safety Local Income Tax Committee of the Monroe County Local Income Tax Council	Yes
	Community Advisory on Public Safety Commission	No
	Dispatch Policy Board	No
Transportation	Public Transportation Corporation Board of Directors	Yes
Utilities	Utilities Service Board	No

A total of 14 of the City of Bloomington's boards and commissions are required by statute in order to maintain the City's current operations. For example, the City's Urban Enterprise Association is required by Indiana statute in order for the City to operate its Bloomington Urban Enterprise Zone, where residents and businesses receive tax incentives and grants to spur economic development. Indiana statute has specific requirements for this Association,

and if it were to be abolished, the City would no longer be able to operate its Enterprise Zone.² Because the scope and structure of these 14 entities are prescribed by statute, this report does not recommend any organizational changes. The report also does not recommend changes to any of the six county or regional entities to which the City belongs, such as the Dispatch Policy Board shared between the City of Bloomington and Monroe County. The scope and purpose of the remaining 32³ non-statutory local entities are described in the sections below.

CULTURAL BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

The City maintains 10 boards and commissions intended to help address social or cultural issues in the community. All are voluntary. One, the Monroe County Domestic Violence Coalition, is a County-wide initiative. The local entities are listed in the table below, along with their purpose. In addition, an estimate of staff liaison time for each board and commission is included as Appendix A.

Table 4: Cultural Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
Bloomington Arts Commission	Cultivates community participation in the arts through grants, advocacy, and other programs	Administers grants for the arts
Commission on Aging	Raises awareness of issues surrounding aging and cultivates programming for seniors	Advisory
Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs	Researches issues impacting the Hispanic and Latino community and works to identify solutions	Advisory
Commission on the Status of Black Males	Researches issues impacting Black males and works to identify solutions	Advisory
Commission on the Status of Children & Youth	Makes recommendations for systems and initiatives that support children and youth	Advisory
Commission on the Status of Women	Researches issues impacting women and works to identify solutions	Advisory
Human Rights Commission	Enforces the Bloomington Human Rights Ordinance	Investigates claims of employment, housing, or educational discrimination
Jack Hopkins Social Services Funding Committee	Provides funding to social service agencies to help City residents in need	Administers grant funding
Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commission	Commemorates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. through events and programming	Sponsors events and programming

The staff capacity required to support these entities varies significantly, from one to two hours per week for the Human Rights Commission to up to 40 hours per week for the Bloomington Arts Commission depending upon time of year or upcoming events. On average, staff spend approximately 14 hours per week supporting each of the boards and commissions in this category. This includes staff liaison time, agenda preparation coordination time from support personnel, and dedicated research projects resulting from board and commission initiatives.

Five of the entities are advisory, meaning that they make recommendations to City staff and officials on policy matters but have no formal decision-making authority. They generally have other roles as well, such as to advocate for issues in the community, but they have no direct control over funding, policy, or operations.

The other four entities do have some decision-making authority: the Bloomington Arts Commission awards grants to support arts in the community, the Human Rights Commission investigates reports of discrimination, the Jack

² Indiana Code § 5-28-15-13

³ One entity, the Public Safety Local Income Tax Committee of the Monroe County Local Income Tax Council is both regional and statutory.

Hopkins Social Services Funding Committee administers grant funds to social service agencies, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commission sponsors events and other initiatives.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Five boards and commissions assist the City in enforcing its planning and zoning ordinances; three of them, the Plan Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission, are required by State statute. Additionally, the City participates in three committees that support the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): the MPO Citizens Advisory Committee, Policy Committee, and Technical Advisory Committee. The other voluntary local entities assisting the City with planning, zoning, and development issues are listed in the table below.

Table 5: Planning and Development Services Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
Hearing Officer	Makes the final decision on certain variances and conditional use purposes	Decision-making authority
Plat Committee	Makes the final decision on preliminary and final subdivision requests	Decision-making authority

Both the Hearing Officer and Plat Committee require similar levels of support. Staff estimate they spend two to three hours per week, on average, on responsibilities associated with each body. Both have some level of decision-making authority, with the Hearing Officer making final decisions on certain variances and conditional use permits and the Plat Committee making the final decision on subdivision requests.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Four boards and commissions are required by State statute in order for the City to carry out its economic development initiatives: the Bloomington Industrial Development Advisory Commission, the Economic Development Commission, the Redevelopment Commission, and the Urban Enterprise Association. Additionally, the City voluntarily operates four boards and commissions related to economic development and housing, as listed in the table below.

Table 6: Economic Development and Housing Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
CDBG Funding Citizens Advisory Committee	Recommends Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for community projects	Advisory
Farmers’ Market Advisory Council	Advises the Board of Parks Commissioners on policy relating to the Farmers’ Market	Advisory
Housing Authority Board	Governs a public-corporate entity managing low-income housing programs	Manages low-income housing programs
Housing Quality Appeals Board	Hears appeals to decisions made as part of the Residential Rental Unit and Lodging Establishment Inspection Program	Decision-making authority

An estimate of staff time was only available for one of the four bodies: staff estimate that supporting the Housing Appeals Board requires approximately nine to 10 hours of work per week. Two of the bodies, the CDBG Funding Citizens Advisory Committee and the Farmers’ Market Advisory Council are purely advisory and have no policy or operational authority. Of the remaining, the Housing Authority Board is responsible for administering the City’s low-income housing programs and the Housing Quality Appeals Board hears and makes decisions on appeals to decisions made as part of the City’s rental inspection program.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PARKS AND RECREATION BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

The City is statutorily required to operate a Board of Park Commissioners tasked with overseeing City parks. Additionally, the City voluntarily operates six boards and commissions related to parks, recreation, and the environment, as listed in the table below.

Table 7: Environmental and Parks and Recreation Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
Banneker Advisory Council	Provides community feedback on management of the Banneker Community Center	Advisory
Cascades Golf Course Advisory Council	Provides community feedback on management of the Cascades Golf Course	Advisory
Commission on Sustainability	Researches and promotes sustainability initiatives to promote environmental health, economic development, and social equity	Advisory
Environmental Commission	Advises the City on how its actions may impact the environment and researches environmental topics	Advisory
Environmental Resources Advisory Council	Advises the Board of Park Commissioners on operations of City natural areas	Advisory
Tree Commission	Advises the City Landscaper and Board of Parks Commissioners on urban forestry and develops recommended forestry policies	Advisory

The time required to support these bodies varies significantly, from one to two hours per week for the Tree Commission and Commission on Sustainability to as many as 22 hours per week for the Environmental Commission. All six of these entities are advisory in nature.

PUBLIC WORKS BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

The Board of Public Works, which is required by State statute, is responsible for overseeing operations of the City of Bloomington’s Public Works Department. Additionally, the City voluntarily operates five boards and commissions related to Public Works, as listed in the table below.

Table 8: Public Works Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
Animal Control Commission	Establishes policies for humane animal control, reviews actions of the senior animal control officer, and recommends ordinances to the City	Establishment of standards for animal treatment
Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission	Researches and develops bicycle and pedestrian safety programs and advises the City on these issues	Advisory
Council for Community Accessibility	Advocates for the interests of people with disabilities	Advisory
Parking Commission	Researches parking issues and advises the City on administration and enforcement of parking regulations	Advisory
Traffic Commission	Researches and educates the public on traffic matters and advises the City on ways to improve traffic conditions	Advisory

The time commitment to support these commissions ranges from one to two hours per week for the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission to as many as 20 hours per week for the Animal Control Commission. On average, staff spend approximately 11 hours per week supporting each entity.

All of the voluntary Public Works boards and commissions are advisory in nature, with the exception of the Animal Control Commission. The Animal Control Commission has the authority to set standards for animal treatment in the City as well as to review the decisions and actions of the City’s senior animal control officer.

OTHER BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Other statutorily required boards and commissions operated by the City include the Public Transportation Corporation Board of Directors and three public safety entities: the Board of Public Safety, the Firefighters Pension Board, and the Police Pension Board. The City also participates in two regional public safety groups: the Dispatch Policy Board and the Public Safety Local Income Tax Committee. Finally, the City voluntarily operates four other boards and commissions, as listed in the table below.

Table 9: Other Boards and Commissions Not Required by Statute

Entity	Purpose	Authority
Bloomington Digital Underground Advisory Committee	Advises the City on management of the Bloomington Digital Underground fiberoptic cable system	Advisory
Citizen’s Redistricting Advisory Commission	Recommends new boundaries to divide the City of Bloomington into six council districts	Advisory
Community Advisory on Public Safety Commission	Researches the community’s perceptions and preferences on public safety issues and researches alternatives to traditional policing	Advisory
Utilities Service Board	Oversees the Utilities Department	Management of Department operations

Three of these entities are advisory in nature. The fourth, the Utilities Service Board, is responsible for managing day-to-day operations for the City’s Utilities Department and requires two to three hours per week of staff support.

ADMINISTRATION OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Responsibility for the boards and commissions process is shared across City departments in an informal manner. The City utilizes OnBoard™ software for the board and commission application and agenda process, including processing applications, maintaining membership records, and storing agendas, minutes, and other documents.

When interested in serving on a board or commission, residents submit an application and resumé online through the OnBoard system. Applications are routed for review to the correct appointing authority (Mayor or City Council) for consideration. Once appointed, the applicant is notified by the City. The OnBoard system is the location of contact information used by the City should a member need to be contacted.

Once members are appointed and notified, the City employee staff liaisons who provide support to each board or commission are expected to maintain and update the data in the OnBoard system for their board/commission, including member contact information. Staff liaisons prepare agendas and upload them to OnBoard and the City’s website. Staff liaisons serve as the primary City contact for board and commission members after appointment.

Analysis and Recommendations

The City's boards and commissions play an important civic role in the City of Bloomington. They provide a structure and framework for active residents to engage with the policy development process and provide a pathway for the City to capitalize on the diverse skill sets and civic commitment of City residents. Though these are important characteristics, there is still a need to ensure that the focus and attention of boards and commissions is well organized and coordinated and that staff capacity exists to support their mission and focus. While each of the City's advisory bodies serves an important purpose, there are opportunities to consolidate some boards and commissions to create more coordinated and strategic policy focus and ensure that its staff time is applied efficiently and effectively.

Boards and Commissions Structure

Currently, there are a number of existing boards and commissions that have overlapping or shared focus areas. For example, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission, Parking Commission, and Traffic Commission all relate to transportation issues, and the Environmental Commission and the Commission on Sustainability are focused on elements of environmental stewardship and sustainability.

This overlap creates several issues. One concern is the narrowness of scope of some of these overlapping bodies. This prevents board and commission members from considering the broader impacts of a particular recommendation or proposal. For example, the Traffic Commission may recommend a proposed street project because it will reduce traffic delays in a particular area, without considering that the proposal would also reduce available parking in the area and impact the neighborhood's walkability. This type of situation also raises the possibility of conflicting opinions or direction on a topic from multiple boards and commissions.

Overlap also impacts staff time. In cases where several boards and commissions have similar scope, the same staff are sometimes tasked with supporting multiple boards and commissions, which limits their capacity to complete other work. Some proposals must be reviewed by multiple boards and commissions. Presenting the same proposal to multiple groups creates additional work for staff, because, for each of these reviews, staff must prepare a separate agenda item and presentation. Additionally, multiple reviews increase the time it takes for a proposal to be adopted.

Overlapping scopes may also impact the ability of the City to find dedicated participants to serve on each board and commission. Serving on these bodies is a time commitment and there is a limited pool of residents within the City with the capacity to serve who also have an interest in the board or commission's particular scope. The more boards and commissions on a single topic, like the environment, the greater the need for people with both an interest in environmental issues and a willingness to serve. The City may not be able to find enough individuals able to meet that need for multiple boards and commissions, which could impact the number of vacancies on City boards and commissions.

Finally, overlapping boards and commissions may create an obstacle to public participation. For example, if an individual wishes to make a comment on an environmental issue, it may not be clear whether the comment should be directed to the Commission on Sustainability or the Environmental Commission. This lack of clarity can create confusion and deter the community from becoming involved.

The City can address these concerns by regularly reviewing the scopes of individual boards and commissions, identifying areas of overlap, and addressing these areas by merging similar entities or by further differentiating their scopes. The following recommendations identify three opportunities to merge existing boards and commissions while also improving the board and commission management and appointment process.

Recommendation 1: Merge the Commission on Sustainability and the Environmental Commission.

The purpose of the Environmental Commission, per City Code, is “to achieve and maintain such levels of environmental quality as will protect human health and safety, and to the greatest degree practicable, prevent injury to plant and animal life and property, foster the comfort and conveniences of the people, promote the economic and social development of Bloomington and facilitate the enjoyment of the natural attractions of the City of Bloomington.”⁴

The purpose of the Commission on Sustainability, per City Code is “to promote sustainable socio-environmental-economic well-being of Bloomington and all its inhabitants” by reducing use of nonrenewable natural resources and waste production while also improving liability.⁵

These two entities share the same essential goal: to improve quality of life for Bloomington residents by protecting the environment and natural resources. This can result in overlap between the scopes of work in the two commissions. For example, the Environmental Commission’s Environmental Action Plan contains several Objectives related to sustainability, including:⁶

- Promote informed energy retrofit and consumption decision-making.
- Build a renewable energy portfolio in Bloomington.
- Reduce the amount of waste going to the landfill by 15 percent.

This level of overlap is a concern, as previously discussed in the Introduction section of this report. Overlapping scopes creates the possibility for conflicting direction and could potentially deter the public from participating. Additionally, dividing environmental management responsibilities across two commissions may not be the most appropriate structure for developing effective environmental strategy. Sustainability is a subset of a broader commitment by the City of Bloomington to protect and enhance the natural environment. Sustainability is an important aspect of that commitment, but should be part of a holistic environmental strategy. The two groups do work together on some projects, but not consistently. By dividing responsibility for sustainability and for other environmental management functions among two different groups, the City may be missing out on opportunities to develop more comprehensive environmental strategies.

To address this overlap and allow for the development of more comprehensive environmental strategies, the City should amend its charter to merge the Commission on Sustainability into the Environmental Commission. This change will help consolidate responsibility and leadership on environmental issues into one area and create a natural point of contact on environmental issues for staff, the Mayor, the Council, and members of the public. To begin, the City can simply combine the two groups (resulting in a large group) so as not to remove current members or lose any technical expertise or specific representations but can move to a smaller size (as outlined in the Charter revision) over time through attrition of the members as terms expire.

⁴ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.050

⁵ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.100

⁶ Environmental Commission. “Bloomington Environmental Action Plan.” p. 11.

https://bloomington.in.gov/sites/default/files/2017-05/Bloomington_Environmental_Action_Plan.pdf

Recommendation 2: Merge the Parking Commission, Traffic Commission, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission.

The purpose of the Parking Commission, per City Code, is to “make recommendations on parking policy” and “To coordinate parking activities, to carry on educational activities in parking matters, to supervise the preparation and publication of parking reports, to receive comments and concerns having to do with parking matters, and to recommend to the common council and to appropriate city officials ways and means for achieving the city's comprehensive plan objectives through the administration of parking policies and the enforcement of parking regulations.”⁷

The purpose of the Traffic Commission, per City Code, is to “coordinate traffic activities, to carry on educational activities in traffic matters, to supervise the preparation and publication of traffic reports, to receive complaints having to do with traffic matters, and to recommend to the common council and to appropriate city officials ways and means for improving traffic conditions and the administration and enforcement of traffic regulations.”⁸

Finally, the purpose of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission, per City Code, is to “promote and encourage bicycling, walking and running in a safe and efficient manner in the City of Bloomington for the purpose of health, recreation and transportation.”⁹

While these scopes do not overlap as significantly as the Environmental and Sustainability Commissions do, each of these areas have the potential to impact the other. There is limited land and transportation infrastructure available in Bloomington, and it is up to the City to decide how to use it most effectively; more lanes in a road to reduce traffic, for example, may eliminate parking spaces, or narrow the sidewalks and reduce walkability. For this reason, proposals for changes to infrastructure or transportation policy must often be presented to multiple bodies for review and recommendation. For example, as of March 2021, the City Council is considering a proposed ordinance that would increase the number of intersections in the City where right turns at red lights are restricted.¹⁰ The question of whether or not to allow turns at red lights impacts both traffic and pedestrian safety, and so in January 2021 the same proposed ordinance was reviewed by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission on January 11¹¹ and then by the Traffic Commission two weeks later.¹² In both cases, staff were required to prepare memos and presentations to the Commissions and to attend the Commissions to answer questions. Re-submitting the same proposal to multiple groups increases approval time and reduces staff capacity for other work.

Having three Commissions with narrow scopes also limits their ability to consider issues comprehensively. The City wants to reduce traffic, ensure adequate parking, and promote walking and biking, but these goals must be balanced against each other to identify the optimal transportation structure for the City. The Traffic, Parking, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commissions each focus on a single area and thus do not have the capacity to consider this balance.

There also may not be enough City residents with both the time to attend Commission meetings and an interest in transportation issues to populate all three Commissions effectively. As of March 2021, three of the nine Parking Commission seats are vacant, three of the nine Traffic Commission seats are vacant, and two of the nine Bicycle and

⁷ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.110

⁸ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.070

⁹ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.080

¹⁰ City of Bloomington. “Common Council Legislative Packet.” March 17, 2021. p. 235.

https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/meetingFiles/download?meetingFile_id=8547

¹¹ City of Bloomington. “Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission Agenda.” January 11, 2021.

https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/meetingFiles/download?meetingFile_id=8113

¹² City of Bloomington. “Traffic Commission Agenda.” January 27, 2021.

https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/meetingFiles/download?meetingFile_id=8200

Pedestrian Safety Commission seats are vacant. This level of vacancy is a concern because it limits the capacity of the commissions for research and deliberation as well as limits the range of ideas and backgrounds among members. It also creates the risk of being unable to reach quorum at meetings. In both the Parking and Traffic Commissions, a quorum is not met if just two of the current members do not attend.

These vacancies may not be directly caused by the existence of the three commissions, but the issue could be mitigated by merging the three commissions into a single Transportation Commission addressing traffic, parking, and bicycle and pedestrian safety. Instead of filling seats on three commissions, the City would only have to fill seats on one, creating less risk of vacancies. Again, the City could begin with combining membership of all three commissions to form a single larger commission and move to a smaller size through attrition over time.

A Transportation Commission could address issues comprehensively, increasing the value of its recommendations and making it easier for the public to attend one meeting to address all aspects of transportation-related agenda items. A single commission would also reduce staff time spent supporting the current commissions and preparing presentations for multiple commissions on the same issue.

Recommendation 3: Consolidate park, recreation and urban forestry related commissions under the Board of Park Commissioners.

The City of Bloomington, like all cities in Indiana, is required to operate a Board of Park Commissioners consisting of four board members appointed by the Mayor. According to State statute, the Board of Park Commissioners approves budget revenues and expenditures, passes bond issues, acquires and improves property, adopts new programs, establishes management policy and regulations, and provides a public venue for community debate and input regarding park and recreation resources in the community. This commission has authority within that context. However, the City has also established a number of additional related boards that fall under the general rubric of parks and natural spaces.

The Environmental Resources Advisory Council advises the Board of Park Commissioners on the environmental impact of park operations within the City's natural areas. The Tree Commission advises the City Landscaper and Board of Parks Commissioners on urban forestry and develops recommended forestry policies. The Cascades Golf Course Advisory Council provides community feedback regarding the management of the Cascades golf course. The Banneker Advisory Council provides feedback regarding management of the Banneker Community Center.

Each of these advisory councils provides feedback regarding a specialized subset of general park, recreation, and natural resource management. In highly specialized focus areas such as urban forestry and sensitive environmental areas management, policy and operations are primarily driven by subject matter experts among City staff. As such, the role and responsibilities of Tree Commission and Environmental Resources Advisory Council can be effectively subsumed with the Board of Park Commissioners while still ensuring that adequate attention is paid to these important areas.

The Banneker Advisory Council and Cascades Golf Course Advisory Council are primarily special interest citizen advocacy groups. These advocacy groups can continue; however, they should be eliminated as City supported commissions and management/advocacy of these groups taken over as grass roots advocacy organizations. Oversight and management of these areas will continue under the purview of City staff and the Board of Park Commissioners.

Strategic Focus of Boards and Commissions

Boards and commissions are valuable tools for local governments, but they also represent a significant investment of time and resources, particularly time spent by City staff. Each of the City’s boards and commissions requires City staff support to operate. The type and level of support varies depending on the purpose and authority of the commission, but commonly includes staff support in writing agendas and minutes, advising the body on legal and other policy matters, and carrying out research and projects at the board or commission’s direction. Staff time is a valuable resource for a City, and the more boards and commissions that exist, the greater the time spent supporting them.

In some cases, the project team was able to obtain estimates from City of Bloomington staff about the time commitment involved in supporting each board and commission. Based on this feedback, the average board or commission requires approximately 10 hours per week in staff support, with statutory entities requiring slightly more staff time and county or regional entities requiring somewhat less, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 10: Average Board and Commission Staff Support

Board/Commission Type	Number of Entities	Average Estimated Staff Time per Week	Estimated Total Time per Week Required to Support All Entities	Number of Staff Positions Required to Support All Entities
Statutory	13	12 hours	152 hours	3.8
Regional	6	4 hours	26 hours	0.6
Local, Voluntary	30	10 hours	312 hours	7.8
Grand Total	49	10 hours	490 hours	12.2

Overall, the City devotes the labor equivalent of approximately 12 staff positions to supporting its boards and commissions. This represents a significant investment; if each position costs the City an average of \$65,000 per year for salary and benefits, the City is dedicating more than \$500,000 per year to its voluntary commissions alone. Additionally, the time that employees are spending supporting these bodies limits their capacity for other City work.

It is appropriate for staff to support board and commission operations. However, it is also important to note the investment that each board and commission requires and ensure that staff time and City resources are being used as effectively as possible to meet the City’s overall needs. For this reason, it is vital for the Mayor and Council to carefully monitor the work produced by boards and commissions and to carefully consider the business case before creating a new board or commission, as discussed in the recommendations below.

Recommendation 4: Evaluate the business case for any potential new board or commission before its creation.

Under the current framework for establishing new boards or commissions, the City Council and Mayor broadly discuss the advantages and disadvantages to forming any entity before action is taken, but there is no formal process in place for evaluating whether the entity will bring net positive value for the City and how the new entity will integrate with the existing structure and focus of boards and commissions. The Council and Mayor have ultimate authority over what bodies are created but establishing specific criteria for consideration will help ensure that all issues are considered before a new board or commission is enacted. Specifically, when the City is considering a proposal for a new board or commission it should evaluate the following:

- **Is the proposed board/commission required by State statute?** If the answer to this question is yes, then the entity must be created.

- **What is the specific purpose and scope of the proposed board/commission? How will it support City goals?** This question should be carefully defined to ensure that the board or commission would add value and that its scope is clear.
- **Is the scope of the proposed board/commission part of or closely aligned with the scope of an existing entity?** If the answer is yes, the topic should be handled by the existing entity, unless a clear case can be made for why a second board or commission is necessary.
- **What staff position or positions will be supporting the proposed board or commission? What is the estimated staff time that supporting the new board or commission will require? Is this achievable with the employees' existing capacity?** The City should carefully consider the staff commitment created by the proposed new board or commission and evaluate whether this commitment is achievable.
- **What other potential methods does the City have for getting feedback from the community on this topic? Is the creation of a board/commission the most appropriate option for receiving input?** One of the primary roles of a board or commission is to gather input from the community, but other community engagement options may exist that may provide a broader range of feedback. For example, a limited-term task force with a finite duration may be sufficient, or a Citywide or targeted survey may be sufficient to get input on a topic.

When a new board or commission is proposed, either by elected officials or staff, staff from the Clerk's Office should work with the office of the requesting official and the department(s) that would support the proposed board or commission to develop a written memo addressing each of these questions. Based on the results of the memo, the Council and Mayor should carefully evaluate the appropriate next steps.

Recommendation 5: Require a brief annual report to the Mayor and City Council to ensure the work aligns with the City goals.

The process through which boards and commissions update the Mayor and City Council on their activities is not consistent. Some entities, like the Parking Commission, are required by City ordinance to prepare an annual report to the Mayor and Council.¹³ In other cases such a report is not required, but the board or commission still voluntarily presents an annual report to the elected officials. Finally, some boards and commissions have no regular reporting schedule.

Boards and commissions generally serve at the behest of the Mayor and Council and were created to provide public input and research on City actions and initiatives. They also represent a significant investment of staff time and resources. For these reasons it is vital that the Mayor and Council understand how the boards and commissions are spending their time and have an opportunity to evaluate whether these activities effectively align with the board or commission's scope and with the City's goals. It also is a means to acknowledge and respond to the work being done by these volunteer members. Because some entities currently do not submit reports, the Mayor and Council do not have an opportunity to comprehensively review board and commission activities.

The Mayor and Council should amend the City Code to require every active board and commission to prepare a brief, summarized annual report of its activities. The reports should all be due at the same time to facilitate a comprehensive review of the entities' activities as a whole. The report should be concise, both to facilitate the Mayor and Council's review and to limit the staff time spent to prepare them. Some boards and commissions already prepare an annual report; in some cases, this is apparently a considerable effort. While it is important for a report to be done, the report itself should not require significant time and effort of members or City staff. It should convey basic information on the work being done and the future plans of the board or commission in order to inform City Council.

¹³ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.12.110

All reports should follow a standardized template to ensure that the appropriate information is being provided. At a minimum, the template report should include:

- A concise summary of the board or commission’s top activities from the previous year, including initiatives, accomplishments, and policy recommendations.
- A brief explanation on how these activities align with City goals.
- A concise summary of the board or commission’s plans for the upcoming year.

The Mayor and Council should review the reports to ensure that the boards and commissions remain an effective use of City resources, and that the board and commission activities align with City goals and with each other. These annual reviews should also be an opportunity to identify areas of potential overlap between entities and consider whether any restructuring is warranted.

Communication and Transparency

One of the primary purposes of boards and commissions is as a tool for engaging with the public. Community members who serve on boards and commissions have the opportunity to provide input on topics of importance to them, and the City gains the benefit of their opinions, expertise, and experience.

However, this form of engagement has limitations. Membership on boards and commissions is generally confined to individuals who are engaged enough to hear about board or commission openings and to seek out the application. It is also limited to those who have the available time and transportation to attend in-person meetings,¹⁴ often monthly and often at night, as well as to review meeting materials and complete other associated work. This practice excludes many individuals who may want to provide input on a topic but are either unaware of the board or commission’s existence or do not have the ability to attend meetings. Meetings are generally open to the public, so these individuals would have the opportunity to comment, but this requires them to keep track of meeting times and to have the availability and transportation to attend.

Boards and commissions still serve an important role for public engagement, but it is vital for the City to implement strategies to maximize the transparency of boards and commissions to make it as easy as possible for those who wish to participate. This includes ensuring that the public has access to timely information about the boards and commissions, that information on board and commission openings is widely disseminated, and that the application process is transparent, as discussed in the following recommendations.

Recommendation 6: Require all boards and commissions to record audio or video of their meetings and to post meeting materials to the City website in a timely manner.

Communications practices among boards and commissions vary. Some, like the Bloomington Human Rights Commission, maintain active social media pages, while others do not. Some, like the Bloomington Arts Commission, record video of their meetings, others do not. There is also no standard for when meeting materials are posted on the City’s website, and different boards and commissions’ practices vary significantly.

The City of Bloomington’s large number of boards and commissions are evidence of its commitment to public engagement, but the current board and commission communication practices limit the public’s ability to interact with these groups. If meeting agendas are not posted before meetings take place, a community member has no way of knowing what will be discussed, and therefore no way of knowing if the entity will be discussing a topic of interest to them. If no video or audio is recorded, members of the public have no way to understand the details of what is

¹⁴ Meetings have become virtual during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the previous practice was to meet in person.

being discussed without attending meetings in person, which may not be feasible for some. Without recorded video or audio, staff liaisons have no detailed record of the meeting to refer back to if questions arise about a previous meetings' discussions.

Members should not determine the communication mechanisms used; this should be a matter of City policy. The City should address these concerns by standardizing communications and transparency requirements for its boards and commissions. The City passed an ordinance in February 2021 requiring all boards and commissions to post the entity's scope, purpose, membership duties, and other information online, which is an important step ensuring transparency.¹⁵ The City should also adopt other regulations to maximize public engagement, including:

- Requiring boards and commissions to record audio or video of meetings and to post the recordings on the City website.
- Requiring boards and commissions to post an agenda for an upcoming meeting at least three business days before the meeting.
- Requiring boards and commissions to post preliminary minutes from a meeting within three weeks after the meeting.

Adopting these changes will help the public better understand the work that these boards and commissions do and allow for greater public participation. They will also help the City demonstrate its commitment to transparency and engagement and ensure that the boards and commissions are as valuable a tool as possible to enhance the well-being of the community.

Recommendation 7: Establish a formal, transparent application process for boards and commissions that includes regular communication with applicants.

The current process for filling board or commission vacancies, per City Code,¹⁶ is as follows:

At least one month before the expiration of an appointment, and immediately on the vacancy's occurrence in the case of an unexpected vacancy, an announcement shall be sent to the local media that either includes or directs the public to the information required by 2.01.010 about the board or commission [name, purpose, current membership and terms, eligibility requirements, members' duties, time commitment, compensation]. The announcement shall also include a statement on how to apply for the vacant position(s).

The announcement shall be sent to the mayor's office in the case of a mayoral appointment and to the common council office in the case of a council appointment. Upon receiving the announcement, those offices shall edit them as necessary. They shall then be sent, together with a statement on how to apply for the position, to the local media.

No appointments shall be made sooner than fifteen days after submission of the announcement to the media, unless the mayor declares to the common council that an emergency situation exists on a board or commission due to the vacancy, and the mayor recommends and common council votes unanimously to make the appointment before the fifteen days have run.

¹⁵ City of Bloomington. Ordinance 21-03. February 17, 2021.

https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/legislationFiles/download?legislationFile_id=5582

¹⁶ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.02

Historically, when a position became vacant or would soon become vacant, the board or commission and its staff liaison would be responsible for preparing this summary and submitting it to the appointing authority, which could be the Mayor or Council, for review and approval. However, in February 2021 the City Code was amended to require this information to be posted on the City website at all times.¹⁷

After the appointing authority receives the summary for a vacant position, they are responsible for sending an announcement to local media outlets with information on the position as well as directions on how to apply. City code requires the announcement to be made at least one month before the expiration of an appointment, or immediately upon an unexpected vacancy.¹⁸

Residents can apply for appointments via an online form through the City's OnBoard software that asks for details on why the resident is interested in the appointment and any qualifications they have to serve.¹⁹ However, the specific process for reviewing candidates is not defined, and the Mayor and City Council could choose to waive this application for a specific candidate. The appointing authority also chooses the level of engagement they have with a candidate. This means that the evaluation process varies; some members report applying and interviewing for their appointment while others report being offered the position without a formal application or interview process. The appointing authority is not allowed to make an appointment until at least 15 days after the vacancy announcement's release, unless the Mayor declares the need for an emergency appointment.²⁰ A process map illustrating the current application process is available as Appendix B.

There are several challenges associated with the current process. One is the strategy for advertising vacant positions. Currently, the City is only required to distribute information about the vacancy to local media sources. The information is also posted on the board and commissions page of the City website. This generally limits the individuals who will see it to those who are already engaged in local news or City government. While attracting engaged individuals is important, they may not accurately represent the scope of voices or backgrounds that would allow a board or commission to be most effective. One of the roles of a board or commission is to serve as the public's voice, but if it only represents a subset of that public, its efficacy is limited. Some City staff state that they mitigate this issue by marketing vacancies on their boards or commissions to specific individuals who they feel would bring an important perspective. This commitment to diverse voices is admirable, but it may not capture the true range of opinions and experiences that exist in a community. This practice also contributes to a perception, mentioned by many board and commission members interviewed for this review, that an individual has to "know someone" in order to be appointed.

A second concern is that there is currently no formal process to communicate with candidates about the status of their application. Candidates receive no regular updates about their application, and no information about the next steps in the process. Some individuals spoken with reported waiting many months without hearing anything before being contacted about moving forward. This process creates confusion and frustration, reflects poorly upon the City, and may dissuade individuals from applying for or participating in other government functions.

A third concern is that there is no formal process in place to manage long-standing vacancies. Vacancy information is sent to the media once, and then the appointment is kept open until however long it takes to be filled. The City does not currently track vacancy lengths, but members of boards and commissions report instances of vacancies being open for many months. It is generally the Mayor or City Council's prerogative on whether to move forward with a

¹⁷ City of Bloomington. Ordinance 21-03. February 17, 2021.

https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/legislationFiles/download?legislationFile_id=5582

¹⁸ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.02.020

¹⁹ City of Bloomington. "Apply." <https://bloomington.in.gov/onboard/applicants/apply>

²⁰ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.02.030

board or commission appointment, but long-standing vacancies limit the capacity of a board or commission to do work, restrict the range of ideas and opinions among members, and increase the risk that a meeting will not be able to reach quorum.

Finally, a fourth concern is that the majority of reappointments across all boards and commissions occur at the start of the calendar year. This results in a significant workload for staff across the City, but particularly for the City Clerk, Office of the Mayor, and City Council as they work to receive, review, and process numerous applications and bring new members onboard. The end of the calendar year also coincides with the holiday season when staff often take time out of the office, further limiting their capacity to process board and commission applications and to evaluate candidates.

The City can address these issues through some changes to the application process to ensure that it is as transparent and equitable as possible. One important step is to carefully consider how best to get the most effective membership on a particular board or commission with individuals representing a diverse range of backgrounds and opinions. One way to do this is to expand the locations where vacancies are posted beyond local media to include relevant City social media pages, community centers, or neighborhood associations to expand the audience who may see them and wish to apply. Additionally, each vacancy should be treated as an opportunity to evaluate the current membership, identify gaps in their experience or background, and develop a strategy for targeting individuals who may fill those gaps. This may mean reaching out to specific organizations for assistance in filling the vacancy, posting the vacancy on targeted social media pages, or other strategies. For example, if there is a vacancy in a specific board or commission, and the bulk of the current members are retirees, one goal may be to increase the diversity of ages on the board or commission. A strategy for reaching that goal may be to reach out to the local university about posting the vacancy on its job boards to attract participation from students. The City may also consider term limits in some cases to ensure that turnover brings new ideas and perspectives.

The City should also set up automated processes in OnBoard, the system currently used to accept board and commission applications, to automatically notify candidates via email when their application is received, and to provide regular updates about the application review process. The initial message should confirm to candidates that the City has received their application and should provide some details on next steps. It should also identify a specific contact whom the applicant can call with any questions. Additionally, the system should be automated to send follow-ups to candidates, both at regular intervals and when there has been any change in their application status. This change will increase transparency of the process and reassure candidates that their application is being considered.

The City can address the issue of long-standing vacancies by tracking the number of days a seat has been vacant and regularly reporting these vacancies to the Mayor and Council. The City should also establish a process of re-evaluating vacant positions every three months and considering strategies to move forward with filling the position. The vacancy information should be re-sent to local media and re-posted on social media, for example, and the City should also consider if there are any additional avenues to help publicize the vacancy and find a suitable candidate. In some cases, it might also be an opportunity to evaluate the qualifications and time commitment expectations for the position and to consider whether a more fundamental change to the entity's membership is required. This will help ensure that longstanding vacancies are not forgotten in favor of newer issues and increase the likelihood of suitable members of the community finding the vacancy and applying.

Finally, to mitigate impacts on staff for the filling of vacancies and reappointments, the City should consider staggering the appointment times so that the majority of member terms do not occur at the start of the year, as is the case now. By dividing up the boards and commissions and appointing them on a quarterly basis, the reappointment process is more manageable.

In summary, the City should modify its application process to:

- Define specific backgrounds, skill sets, and/or interest of members that it wishes to attract and develop a communications plan to specifically target individuals in that group (while ensuring that the vacancy application process is open to all who are interested).
- Automate messages to applicants on the status of their application.
- Track and regularly re-evaluate longstanding vacancies to develop strategies to fill them in a timely manner.
- Stagger the appointment process throughout the year.

Appendix C to this report is a process map illustrating these proposed changes. New steps are highlighted in blue.

Training and Onboarding

Previous sections of this report offer recommendations on how to improve the City's board and commission system, but it is important to note that the ultimate efficacy of a board or commission depends on members having the knowledge and support they need in order to serve in their roles effectively. Members should have a comprehensive understanding of their role and how they benefit the City and community as a whole. Staff liaisons who support the members should have the knowledge required to effectively support and guide members and ensure that they have what they need to fulfil the mandate that the Mayor and City Council has set for them. The two recommendations in this section help ensure that both members and staff liaisons are equipped with the tools they need to serve the community as effectively as possible.

Recommendation 8: Develop a formal onboarding program for new board and commission members.

There is currently no formal onboarding process for new members of boards and commissions. The level and nature of onboarding varies from entity to entity. Some members report receiving written materials, such as bylaws, while others report no written materials and a process of slowly learning over time.

There are a number of expectations on board and commission members for how they will conduct themselves as a member of the body. Some of these expectations are specific to the entity itself, such as the role that a member will play and for the time commitment they are expected to give. Other expectations are more universal. City code requires all boards and commissions to follow Roberts Rules of Order during meetings, for example.²¹ Additionally, it requires members to make a commitment to regularly attend board and commission meetings. If a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings or four meetings within a 12-month period, they will be removed from their seat.²² The State of Indiana also imposes public access mandates on certain boards and commissions with authority to take official action on behalf of the governing body,²³ and it is important for all members to understand their transparency and public access obligations under the law.

Additionally, members of boards and commissions function, in some aspects, as representatives of the City government. This affiliation can be an important tool for local governments, as members of boards and commissions can spread accurate information about government programs and advocate for government initiatives within their communities. However, the affiliation also creates risk. If a member of a board or commission says or does something offensive while acting as a representative of that board or commission, many in the community will likely associate that offensive action or opinion with the City itself.

²¹ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.08.020

²² Ibid.

²³ Indiana Code § 5.141-1.5

Such a situation happened in June 2020, when the Bloomington Farmers' Market Advisory Council released a statement during the Black Lives Matter protest that many found to be racially insensitive. The statement was released on the Advisory Council's Facebook page, which bears a logo specifically identifying the Council as being part of "City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation."²⁴ The Office of the Mayor replied to the post, writing that the statement "was not edited or endorsed by the City of Bloomington or the Parks Department."²⁵ However, several commenters expressed skepticism with this statement, with one writing, "What am I missing? Says it right there on the post: City of Bloomington, Parks and [R]ecreation."²⁶ This example illustrates how many see boards and commissions as an extension of the City government and highlights the importance of careful attention to messaging.

It is important that members of boards and commissions have a comprehensive understanding of the rules and expectations associated with their roles. If not, the City risks violations of open meeting laws, or of members disseminating inconsistent, inaccurate, or offensive messaging while acting as City representatives. The current practice of informal onboarding is not the most effective tool for delivering this understanding, because the informal training may not cover all of the topics that a board or commission member needs to know. Several members of boards and commissions interviewed for this report, for example, reported receiving no formal training on open meeting laws.

Formal onboarding training offered by the City would mitigate this issue by ensuring that every member of boards and commissions receives clear, consistent, comprehensive training on the City's expectations. The training should include an overview of the City's boards and commissions system, including which entities exist and how they relate to City government and each other. The training also should include expectations for attendance and participation, as well as on conduct and decorum among meeting members. Additionally, all members should be trained on Roberts Rules of Order, on open meeting laws, and on the City's expectations for meeting transparency and public participation.

The City should also establish specific protocols for how members of boards and commissions should communicate with the public and train members on these protocols. Examples include guidance on when a member can and cannot represent themselves as a member of their board or commission and when and how a board or commission can make use of City branding. The City may also consider additional protocols, like requiring social media posts made on board or commission pages to be first approved by City staff or requiring board or commission social media pages to include a disclaimer that the statements are those of a volunteer body and do not necessarily reflect City policy.

This training should be offered by the City and should be conducted periodically throughout the year. All members of boards and commissions should be required to participate in the training, preferably within three months of their initial appointment. This will help ensure that all members are equipped with the tools they need to serve the City effectively.

This Citywide training should also be supplemented with additional onboarding by the staff liaison for the board or commission itself. Each entity should maintain a shared electronic drive or folder with resource information for new and existing members. Information in the drive or folder should include:

- The board or commission's scope, purpose, and authority, e.g., statutory or advisory

²⁴ Farmers' Market Advisory Council. "Statement from the Broadening Inclusion Group." Facebook. June 5, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/130635957114110/photos/a.176762475834791/1573728929471465/>

²⁵ Bloomington Office of the Mayor. "Statement from the Broadening Inclusion Group." Facebook. June 5, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/130635957114110/photos/a.176762475834791/1573728929471465/>

²⁶ Swedran, Cara. Bloomington Office of the Mayor. "Statement from the Broadening Inclusion Group." Facebook. June 5, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/130635957114110/photos/a.176762475834791/1573728929471465/>

- The role and responsibilities of individual members
- The board or commission’s bylaws
- Information on recent and/or ongoing initiatives
- The meeting structure, including the process for preparing and submitting agenda items
- A glossary of commonly used terms and acronyms
- The roles and responsibilities of staff liaisons, including their names, titles, and contact information
- Any other relevant information specific to the board or commission

It should be the responsibility of staff liaisons to maintain these drives or folders, to provide access to members, and to answer any questions members might have.

Recommendation 9: Define the role of staff liaisons to boards and commissions and develop a formal onboarding program.

There is also no formal training process for liaisons, who generally reported being trained by their predecessor or learning on the job., Staff liaisons are City staff members assigned to chair meetings and assist members in undertaking their work. The role of staff liaison to a board or commission is often informal and generally only a portion of a position’s duties. In some cases, the role is assigned depending on which position or positions have capacity, rather than what is structurally appropriate. There are no formal expectations for the level of support that a staff liaison is expected to give the board or commission or guidelines as to how that support should be prioritized in relation to the liaison’s other work. In some cases, like for the three MPO advisory committees, staff liaisons expressed the belief that assignments from the board or commission take top priority and that there is little or no opportunity to push back if other work creates limited capacity.

Board and commissions members interviewed for this report had almost universally positive feedback about the City staff liaisons they work with, reporting that City staff are dedicated, knowledgeable, and provide the support that the boards and commissions need. However, staff, for their part, reported feeling at times unsure or unprepared about the role they are supposed to play. Some expressed, for example, a lack of knowledge of open meeting laws and how those laws applied to the boards and commissions they support.

This situation creates several challenges. One of the principal roles of a staff liaison should be to ensure that the board or commission is following the law, City ordinances, and its own bylaws. If, however, a liaison is not adequately trained on these regulations, they may not be able to appropriately advise and direct the board or commission in these areas, creating the risk of legal complications or other issues. Furthermore, if liaisons lack clarity on how to balance assignments from boards and commissions with their other work, they may not be working in the way best aligned with their role or with their value to the City.

In order to address these concerns, the first step is to define the role of staff liaisons. The type and extent of the work will vary from liaison to liaison—the role of supporting a decision-making body like the Plan Commission, for example, is more time-intensive than supporting an advisory body like the Tree Commission—but all liaisons should share similar duties. All liaisons should be responsible for developing and maintaining board and commission records, such as meeting agendas and minutes. All liaisons should be responsible for keeping the web page for the board and commission up to date, including posting meeting agendas and minutes in a timely manner and updating membership information as needed. All liaisons should be responsible for ensuring that the appointing authority is notified about an upcoming or unexpected vacancy as soon as possible, and for working with the board or commission to develop a plan to fill that vacancy. All liaisons should be responsible for advising and guiding the Board to ensure that State laws, City ordinances, and board or commission bylaws are followed.

After the City has defined these responsibilities for all liaisons, individual department directors should review the liaison positions within their own department. They should verify that the appropriate position is serving as liaison, as well as evaluate the workload produced by supporting each board or commission and consider whether this workload is appropriate, given the position's other duties. Additionally, they should provide specific guidance for liaisons on how to respond to board or commission requests for assistance and how to balance this assistance with the position's other duties.

After the liaisons' roles and work priorities are clarified, the next step should be for the City Clerk's Office to create a training program for staff liaisons that should be provided periodically to both onboard new liaisons and refresh existing liaisons on their responsibilities and obligations. The training should cover:

- Clarification of the role of liaisons in relation to their boards and commissions
- Standardized formats for agendas and meeting minutes
- Training on the laws and ordinances impacting boards and commission members
- Training on expectations for filling a vacancy
- Training on communication standards for boards and commissions
- Training on use of the OnBoard system

Additionally, each liaison should maintain a library of materials related to the specific board or commission that can be provided to the individual's successor in the role. No liaison should begin work without receiving files and information from the prior staff liaison. Ideally, this information would be kept in a shared drive in the appropriate department.

Recommendation 10: Assign oversight of the board and commission process to a designated position.

There is no specific department or position assigned for oversight of the board and commission system. Per the City Code, boards and commissions and their staff liaisons are responsible for keeping their information up-to-date, and the Mayor and Council are responsible for posting vacancy information and for appointing individuals to fill vacant seats. However, there is no specific position responsible for oversight or for management of the OnBoard software system used to track vacancies, applications, and other board and commission information.

This is a concern because, without a designated individual to ensure that the system is operational, it becomes easy for things to be missed. Board and commission members expressed frustration with the lack of communication during the application process, as discussed in Recommendation 7, and also with the sometimes-longstanding vacancies. Staff in the Office of the Mayor noted that contact information for board and commission members has not been kept updated and thus, when sending notices or information, many are returned in the mail, resulting in additional staff work and delays in notifying the members.

In order for the board and commission system to be managed as effectively as possible, it is appropriate to assign a specific position that takes ownership of the process. This position should be responsible for ensuring that postings for vacant positions are routed to appropriate places, that boards, commissions, and officials adhere to the requirements in City code, that boards and commissions keep their websites up to date, and that applicants are communicated with in a timely manner. The position should also be responsible for maintaining the OnBoard software system, ensuring it is up to date, and addressing any issues that arise. Finally, the position should be responsible for scheduling onboarding training for new board and commission members, as discussed in Recommendation 8.

Creating this designated position will establish a single point of contact for staff and officials to address any issues, as well as for members of the public, including applicants, to address any questions. The most appropriate location for this position is within the City Clerk's Office. The Clerk's duties include maintaining City records²⁷ and maintaining records of board and commission membership and vacancies is an extension of that responsibility. Additionally, the Clerk's Office is already responsible, per City code, for managing any proposals to change term lengths or limits to boards or commissions.²⁸ Finally, the City Clerk is a neutral party, outside of the appointing authorities of the Mayor and City Council.

²⁷ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.04.040

²⁸ City of Bloomington Municipal Code § 2.08.020

Conclusion

This purpose of this review was to assess the scope, structure, and resource needs of the City of Bloomington's boards and commissions, and to identify opportunities to enhance their effectiveness and value to the City and community. The recommendations in this report were intended to build upon the boards and commissions' many existing contributions and to enhance the City's community-focused approach to decision-making and operations. The City is to be commended to its commitment to community engagement. Members of the community are to be commended for the time and passion they have brought to their service on these entities, for the work being done, and for their commitment to make the City of Bloomington the best place possible to live, work, and play for individuals of all backgrounds.

The recommendations in this report will not require any additional staff positions or increased cost. In contrast, it recommends merging the Traffic, Parking, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commissions, as well as merging the Environment and Sustainability Commissions, and these changes may reduce the staff time spent supporting boards and commissions, freeing up some staff capacity to assist with other operational needs. Should the City Clerk be designated responsible for oversight of the boards and commissions process, staff capacity will need to be determined in that office.

This report provides a framework for the City to maximize the efficacy of its existing board and commissions as well as to evaluate the creation of potential new boards and commissions in the future. In order to be successful these recommendations will require planned, thoughtful implementation.

APPENDIX A:

**Estimated Staff Commitment for
Each Board and Commission**

Topic Area	Board/Commission	Purpose	Estimated Staff Time Commitment per Week (Hours)
Culture and Society	Bloomington Arts Commission	Cultivates community participation in the arts through grants, advocacy, and other programs	25
	Commission on Aging	Raises awareness of issues surrounding aging and cultivates programming for seniors	20
	Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs	Researches issues impacting the Hispanic and Latino community and works to identify solutions	23
	Commission on the Status of Black Males	Researches issues impacting Black males and works to identify solutions	11
	Commission on the Status of Children & Youth	Makes recommendations for systems and initiatives that support children and youth	11
	Commission on the Status of Women	Researches issues impacting women and works to identify solutions	20
	Human Rights Commission	Enforces the Bloomington Human Rights Ordinance	1
	Jack Hopkins Social Services Funding Committee	Provides funding to social service agencies to help City residents in need	Not Available
	Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commission	Commemorates the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. through events and programming	2
	Monroe County Domestic Violence Coalition	Advises the City and County on initiatives to improve domestic violence response	Not Available
Development Services	Board of Zoning Appeals	Makes the final decision on variance and conditional use requests	3
	Plan Commission	Makes policy decisions on land use and development and advises the Common Council on the City's development plans and ordinances	6
	Historic Preservation Commission	Educates the community on historic preservation and makes decisions on proposed changes to historic buildings	9
	Hearing Officer	Makes the final decision on certain variances and conditional use purposes	3
	Metropolitan Planning Organization Citizens Advisory Committee	Advises the Bloomington-Monroe County Metropolitan Planning Organization (BMCMPPO) on matters impacting the community	4
	MPO Policy Committee	Advises BMCMPPO on policies, plans, and programs	4
	MPO Technical Advisory Committee	Provides technical advice to BMCMPPO on projects and programs	4
	Plat Committee	Makes the final decision on preliminary and final subdivision requests	3
Economic Development	Economic Development Commission	Uses tools like tax abatements and economic development revenue bonds to stimulate development and redevelopment	8
	BIDAC (Bloomington Industrial Development Advisory Commission)	Oversees the City of Bloomington's two Community Redevelopment Economic Districts	Not Available
	Redevelopment Commission	Oversees the City of Bloomington's Department of Housing and Neighborhood Development	15
	Urban Enterprise Association	Oversees the Bloomington Urban Enterprise Zone	32
	CDBG Funding Citizens Advisory Committee	Recommends Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for community projects	Not Available
	Farmers' Market Advisory Council	Advises the Board of Parks Commissioners on policy relating to the Farmers' Market	Not Available
Environment	Commission on Sustainability	Researches and promotes sustainability initiatives to promote environmental health, economic development, and social equity	2
	Environmental Commission	Advises the City on how its actions may impact the environment and researches environmental topics	22

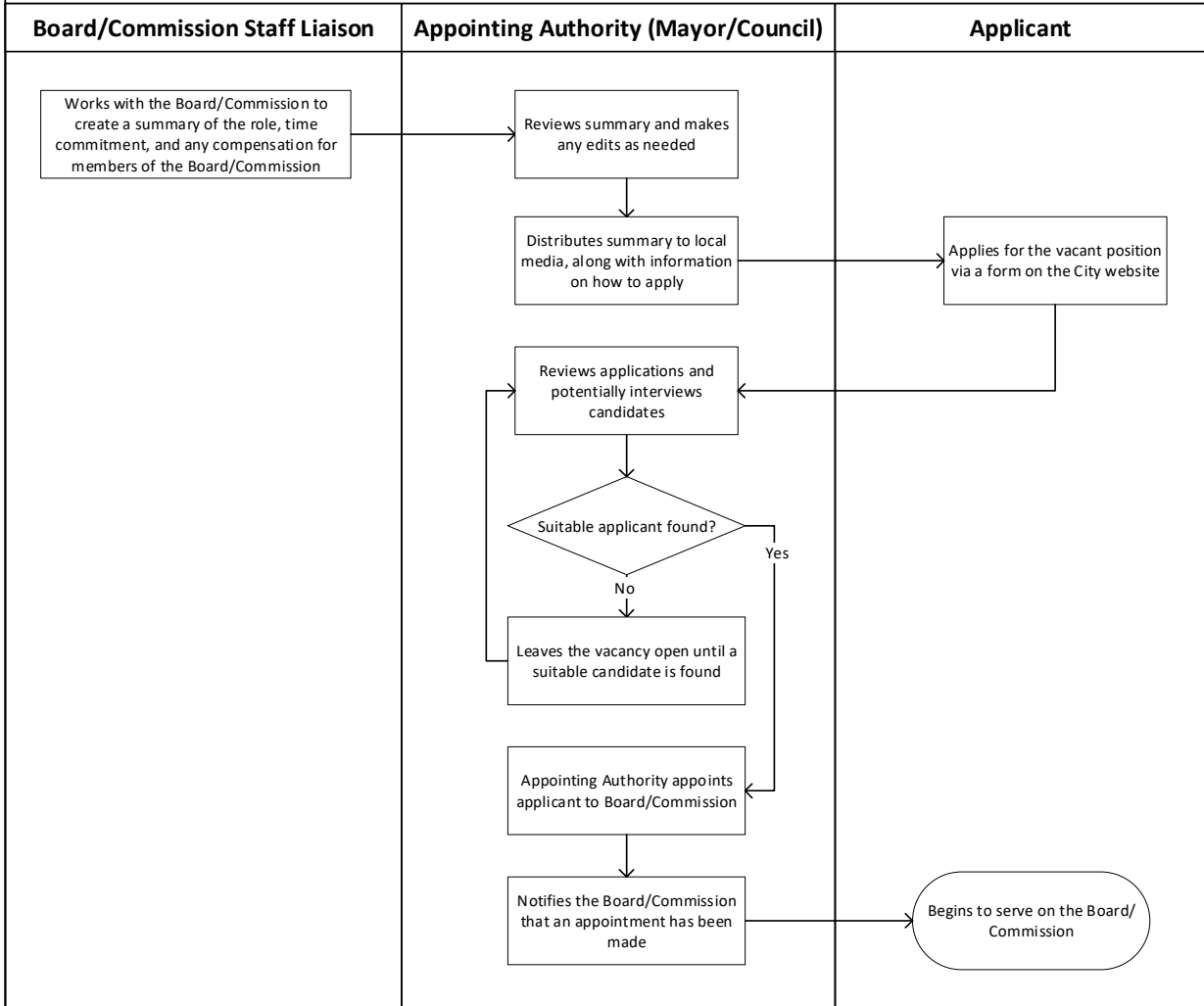
Topic Area	Board/Commission	Purpose	Estimated Staff Time Commitment per Week (Hours)
Government	Citizens Redistricting Advisory Commission	Recommends new boundaries to divide the City of Bloomington into six council districts	Not Available
Housing	Housing Authority Board	Governs a public-corporate entity managing low-income housing programs	Not Available
	Housing Quality Appeals Board	Hears appeals to decisions made as part of the Residential Rental Unit and Lodging Establishment Inspection Program	9
Information Technology	Bloomington Digital Underground Advisory Committee	Advises the City on management of the Bloomington Digital Underground fiberoptic cable system	Not Available
Parks and Recreation	Board of Park Commissioners	Sets park policy and oversees the City of Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department	15
	Banneker Advisory Council	Provides community feedback on management of the Banneker Community Center	Not Available
	Cascades Golf Course Advisory Council	Provides community feedback on management of the Cascades Golf Course	Not Available
	Environmental Resources Advisory Council	Advises the Board of Park Commissioners on operations of City natural areas	Not Available
	Tree Commission	Advises the City Landscaper and Board of Parks Commissioners on urban forestry and develops recommended forestry policies	2
Public Works	Board of Public Works	Oversees the Bloomington Public Works Department	20
	Animal Control Commission	Establishes policies for humane animal control, reviews actions of the senior animal control officer, and recommends ordinances to the City	18
	Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission	Researches and develops bicycle and pedestrian safety programs and advises the City on these issues	2
	Council for Community Accessibility	Advocates for the interests of people with disabilities	25
	Parking Commission	Researches parking issues and advises the City on administration and enforcement of parking regulations	4
	Traffic Commission	Researches and educates the public on traffic matters and advises the City on ways to improve traffic conditions	5
Safety	Board of Public Safety	Oversees the Bloomington Police and Fire Departments	7
	Firefighters Pension Board	Oversees the Firefighters Pension Fund	Not Available
	Police Pension Board	Oversees the Police Pension Fund	4
	Public Safety Local Income Tax Committee of the Monroe County Local Income Tax Council	Adopts local incomes takes rates for public safety services in Monroe County	Not Available
	Community Advisory on Public Safety Commission	Researches the community's perceptions and preferences on public safety issues and researches alternatives to traditional policing	Not Available
	Dispatch Policy Board	Oversees the City's emergency dispatch function	4
Transportation	Public Transportation Corporation Board of Directors	Manages the Bloomington Transit System	Not Available
Utilities	Utilities Service Board	Oversees the Utilities Department	3

APPENDIX B:

Current Application and Onboarding Process

City of Bloomington Boards and Commissions: Current Application and Onboarding Process

Summary must be released to the media at least one month before a vacancy, if vacancy is planned

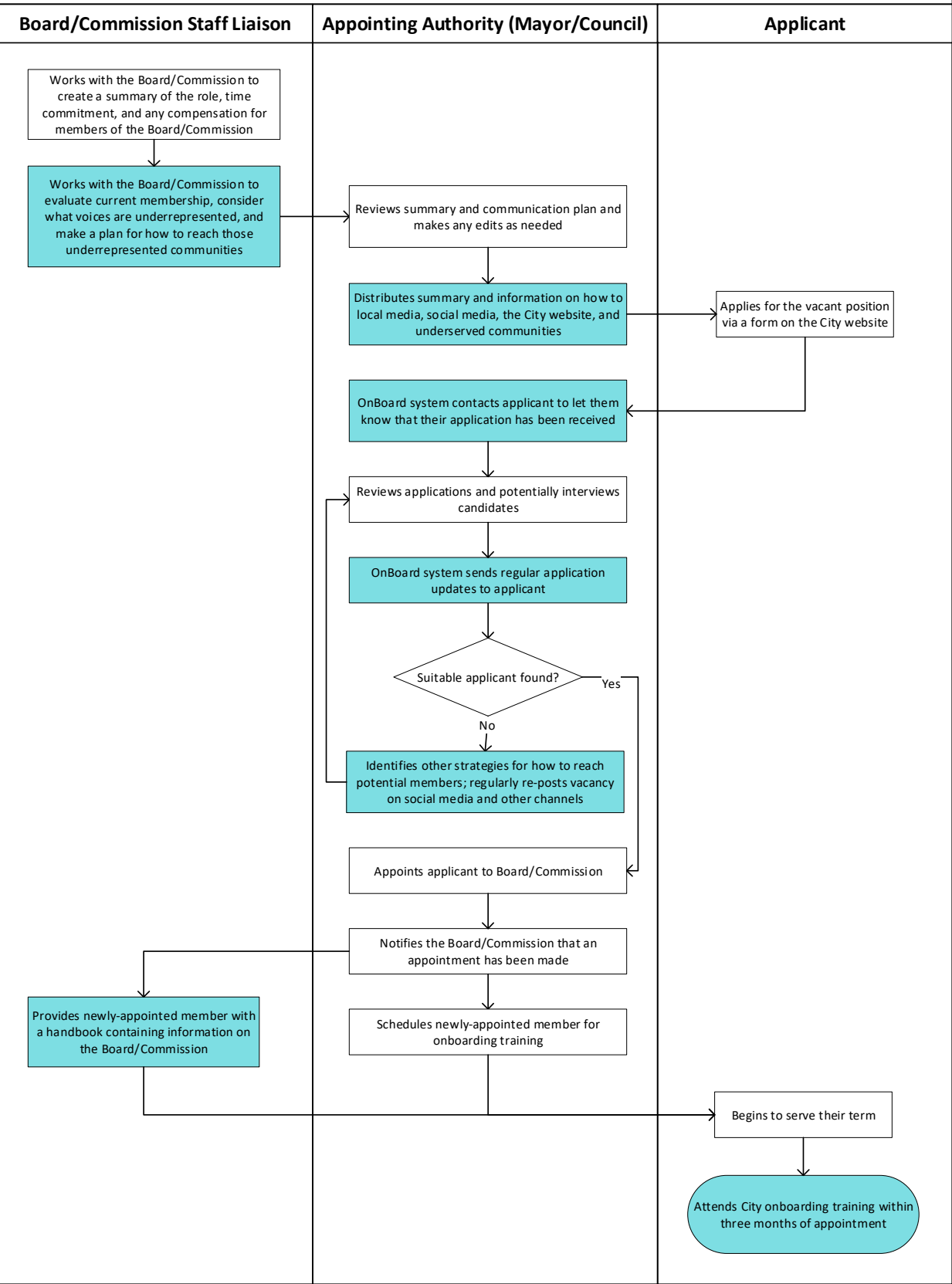


Applicant cannot be selected until at least 15 days after the vacancy was sent to the media

APPENDIX C:

Proposed Application and Onboarding Process

City of Bloomington Boards and Commissions: Proposed Application and Onboarding Process



Summary must be released to the media at least one month before a vacancy, if vacancy is planned

Applicant cannot be selected until at least 15 days after the vacancy was sent to the media