

REPORT ON BOARD AND COMMISSION REFORM

Special Committee on Council Processes

I. Executive Summary

This report outlines recommendations of the Bloomington Common Council's Special Committee on Council Processes following a comprehensive review of the [City of Bloomington Organizational Assessment – Boards and Commissions \(Organizational Assessment\)](#). The Committee requests that the Council accept this report and implement the Committee's proposed reforms in 2024.

The Committee's most significant recommendation is to establish a designated position within the Office of the City Clerk to oversee the City's board and commission system. The Committee recommends that the development of this position and its duties be led by the City Clerk in consultation with the City Council (likely through the Committee) and the Office of the Mayor. Implementing this recommendation will likely require new funding or resources for the Office of the City Clerk, and the Committee recommends that the Clerk incorporate this proposal into the office's 2025 budget proposal.

The Committee generally supports the Organizational Assessment's recommendations in the categories of training and onboarding, communication and transparency, and strategic focus. Most of these recommendations should be coordinated and overseen by the new designated position in the Office of the City Clerk with assistance from the City Council, the Office of the Mayor, the Legal Department, the ITS Department, and staff liaisons and their departmental directors.

The Committee does not make a final recommendation on the Organizational Assessment's proposal to combine and eliminate several boards and commissions. The Committee believes that any proposed implementation of these changes should be led by the incoming Mayoral Administration in collaboration with the City Council and other relevant stakeholders.

II. Committee Recommendations from the Organizational Assessment of Boards and Commissions

In January 2022, the Novak Consulting Group delivered a report to Mayor John Hamilton, which was prepared based on a scope of work developed by the Mayor's Administration. The City Council established the Special Committee on Council Processes (Committee) in 2023. The Committee identified several areas of priority: board and commission reform; updates to Title 2 (including board and commission changes) and council processes; improvements to public engagement; and operationalizing equity in the legislative process. While acknowledging these priorities are synergistic, the Committee decided to prioritize board and commission reform in 2023.

The full Organizational Assessment is attached to this report, and it provided the framework for the Committee's task of assessing the state of the City's boards and commissions and potential reforms. The stated purpose of the Organizational Assessment 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.” Neither the City Council nor the City Clerk were involved in defining the Novak Consulting Group’s scope of work, even though both are intimately involved with the City’s board and commission system.

While the Committee found the Organizational Assessment a helpful guide for assessing some challenges with the City’s board and commission system, it defined its own priorities to guide its review, including:

- Improved public policy and governance
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in governance and policymaking
- Community empowerment
- Education of residents and commissioners, including how to affect public policymaking
- Governmental collaboration, including between different branches of City government, among boards & commissions, and across governmental units (e.g., City-County)
- Administrative and fiscal efficiency
- Consistency and formalization of board and commission processes
- Positive experiences for staff liaisons, board members, and commissioners

The Organizational Assessment provided ten formal recommendations organized into four categories:

Table 1 – Recommendations from the Organizational Assessment

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.

The Committee reviewed and assessed the ten recommendations in consultation with Clerk Nicole Bolden, the Mayor's Office, and multiple City staff. It also heard feedback from members of the public who attended Committee meetings. As the Committee progressed in its work, it concluded that recommendation 10, to assign oversight of the board and commission process to a designated person, was the most critical recommendation in the Organizational Assessment. Since many of the other proposed recommendations would benefit from such a position, the Committee presents its conclusions and recommendations regarding the Organizational Assessment's recommendations in reverse order.

The Committee also developed an outline, entitled Scope of Work, to help structure thoughts and discussion points throughout its various meetings, primarily related to: oversight of the board and commission system; onboarding, training, and ongoing support needs for both staff liaisons and commissioners; and anticipated updates to Bloomington Municipal Code. The Scope of Work outline is attached to this report.

A. Training and Onboarding

This section of the Organizational Assessment focused on improved efficacy of boards and commissions through education and process improvement. The Committee supports and recommends implementation of the three recommendations contained in this section. While some steps have already been taken to improve onboarding and training of staff liaisons (Recommendation 9) and onboarding of board and commissioner appointees (Recommendation 8), both should ultimately be coordinated and overseen by designated staff in the Office of the City Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and City Council.

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

The Committee strongly agrees with the need for a designated position to oversee and administer the City's boards and commissions, as well as the desirability for the position to reside in the City Clerk's Office. Clerk Bolden is receptive to this approach if appropriately resourced. Whether this will ultimately require a new full-time employee, an updated job description for an existing position, or duties distributed across multiple positions in the Clerk's Office is not yet known. For the purposes of this report, the Committee uses the term Deputy Clerk for Boards and Commissions (or Deputy Clerk) to refer to the proposed position.

The Committee recommends that the Clerk lead implementation of Recommendation 10, in consultation with the City Council and Mayoral Administration, ideally within the first half of 2024 so that new or updated role(s) and any needed resources are included in the proposed 2025 City budget. The Committee identified that many of the inconsistencies observed across board and commission practices could be addressed if a designated position was responsible for oversight and accountability. Additionally, central administration of the application and appointment process, onboarding, training, and reporting (broadly reflected in Recommendations 5 – 9) should improve consistency and overall quality of the City's board and commission system.

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

The Committee generally agrees with this recommendation and believes the Deputy Clerk should oversee its implementation. Staff liaison roles are not currently well defined or cataloged, and practices vary widely. As noted, department directors are well positioned to help define roles and responsibilities of staff liaisons (e.g., whether the correct staff member is in the role of liaison, whether the workload is appropriate, etc.). However, the new Deputy Clerk should coordinate and document this assessment from department directors and seek to increase consistency of staff liaison responsibilities.

Training materials should be developed in consultation with relevant City staff; for instance, the City Legal Department should lead training related to the Open Door Law and other legal requirements. Some of the more detailed suggestions contained in the Organizational Assessment may vary based on future assessment by the Deputy Clerk (e.g., the most suitable person to update the OnBoard system). The Deputy Clerk should document the staff liaison training process and make training materials available for review and feedback from the City Council and Mayor.

The City Legal Department has recently developed some and is continuing to develop more training materials for staff liaisons, which should be utilized in 2024 and ultimately incorporated into the onboarding program administered by the Deputy Clerk.

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

The Committee generally agrees with this recommendation and believes the Deputy Clerk should lead and oversee its implementation. As noted in the Organizational Assessment, there is currently no formal onboarding process for board members and commissioners. For all generally applicable provisions (e.g., a primer on Robert's Rules of Order; requirements of the Open Door Law, including with respect to any formal working groups or committees; any relevant code of conduct or related guidance for acting as a representative of City government; etc.), a uniform training and set of materials should be developed. The general training should be delivered several times throughout the year, possibly quarterly, for all new commissioners.

Each board or commission's staff liaison should be responsible for developing onboarding materials and guidance specific to their board or commission. Some staff liaisons have already done so, but the practice should be uniform, and these materials should be overseen and cataloged by the Deputy Clerk to ensure accountability and for review by the City Council and/or Mayor. The Organizational Assessment contains additional guidance for both general and commission-specific onboarding materials.

B. Communication and Transparency

This section of the Organizational Assessment recommends changes to improve public engagement through boards and commissions, both for those appointed and for the public. The Committee supports and recommends implementation of these recommendations as outlined below.

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

The Committee generally agrees with this recommendation and believes the Deputy Clerk should lead and oversee its implementation. Most of the Organizational Assessment's recommendation involves improving consistency, transparency, and equity of the whole application process. It also recommends strategies for managing frequent or long-standing vacancies and for recruiting applicants. New outreach strategies, including with the help of current board members and commissioners, staff liaisons, and community groups, could help improve diversity and inclusion of the City's boards and commissions.

To address the very heavy workload caused by almost all appointments happening on the same time cycle, the Organizational Assessment recommends staggering appointments on a quarterly basis across (and not within) boards and commissions. The Committee believes this would greatly assist the City Council, Office of the Mayor, and the City Clerk's Office. It would also lead to steadier workflows for the new Deputy Clerk position. Mayoral appointments should be coordinated directly with the Deputy Clerk to address challenges that occur when the interviews, appointments, and re-appointments by the Mayor's Office and the City Council are not coordinated.

Automating some of these recommendations could vastly improve consistency and efficiency, which may require new functionality from the Onboard system. In developing recommended changes, the Deputy Clerk should work with the Mayor's Office, City Council, and ITS department to assess options, including augmenting the Onboard system in-house or utilizing third-party software solutions.

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.

The Committee agrees with the goals of this recommendation but believes deeper assessment will be required to assess feasibility and desirability of all details included in the recommendation. The Committee recommends that the Deputy Clerk lead a deeper assessment regarding this proposal in collaboration with the Mayor's Office, City Council, and ITS.

The Committee agrees with the recommendation of standardizing communications and transparency requirements, and it believes the Deputy Clerk should ensure accountability and consistency across boards and commissions with a goal of improving public engagement. Practices to further explore may include the timing and format for posting agenda, meeting materials, meeting minutes, and any audio or video recordings. The Deputy Clerk's assessment should include whether or how to change or augment

the City's current practice of contracting with Community Access Television Services (CATS) for video recordings.

One member of the public suggested making meeting transcripts available. However, the City Clerk expressed reservations about requiring any board or commission to follow more stringent requirements than the City Council, further noting that Robert's Rules favors a record of what was done at a meeting over direct transcripts or narrative-style meeting minutes. The training and onboarding recommendations (8 and 9) can help to achieve consistency, as current practices vary widely.

C. Strategic Focus of Boards and Commissions

This section of the Organizational Assessment recommends changes to ensure that boards and commissions are monitored and evaluated to maximize their value and carefully steward limited City resources. The Committee partially supports and recommends implementation of these recommendations as outlined below.

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

The Committee generally agrees with this recommendation, though annual reports are likely not needed in all cases. Many boards and commissions currently have annual reporting requirements listed in Bloomington Municipal Code (BMC), but the Committee generally agreed that a more intentional and comprehensive approach is needed. The Deputy Clerk should ensure consistency and accountability in reporting.

The Committee reviewed the list of boards and commissions from the Organizational Assessment, identifying current reporting requirements and recommending new reporting requirements. The Committee also noted that even without reporting requirements, some commissions (e.g., the Arts Commission) have nevertheless reported at their own initiative.

Depending on the nature of the commission's work, the Committee identified two potential categories of reports: an Activities report and a Trends report. The former is well suited to most advisory commissions created by BMC (e.g., the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Commission). The latter is typically better suited to statutory boards like the Board of Zoning Appeals, where a summary of activities would provide little value but the identification of trends—which might lead to policy changes or updates to BMC—could have significant value.

Finally, the City Council may not have the authority (or sole authority) to require a report in all cases (e.g., with volunteer bodies like the Council for Community Accessibility or for interlocal bodies like the Dispatch Policy Board). The Committee recommends that annual reports should be the responsibility of the board or commission itself, led by its chair, and not the staff liaison.

The Committee's review of boards and commissions and recommendations for reporting requirements are attached to this report. Implementation will require an update to BMC and collaboration with Council staff or the Deputy Clerk to help communicate and administer new or updated reporting requirements. The Committee developed a draft template for reporting (attached), which would provide a simple and consistent approach and help facilitate compliance with reporting requirements. The Committee agreed this would serve as a "floor" for reporting and that boards or commissions would be welcome to submit additional materials. (NB: this draft is illustrative and not yet in a final form for adoption, which would come through changes to BMC.)

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

The Committee does not agree with the narrow frame of this recommendation. Through extensive discussion, including input from numerous members of the public, the Committee noted that a "business case" analysis is reductive and inappropriate given that boards and commissions are governmental bodies with a public purpose. The Committee is generally supportive of utilizing criteria to assess the use case of a new board or commission, which could include questions identified in the Organizational Assessment. The Mayor's Office was more supportive of this recommendation, noting concerns about balancing staff support time against other duties.

This recommendation did not include how to assess or evolve the working processes of existing commissions, and the Committee believes establishing a process to do so would be helpful. Staff liaisons and their departmental directors are well positioned to propose and make recommendations for such updates, and the Committee would welcome a systematic approach to this from the Mayor's Office. As a first step, the Committee directed Council staff to contact boards and commissions created by BMC to ask whether they recommend updating the code language defining their purpose, scope, and membership to reflect current practices or evolving priorities. This question could also be included in the annual reporting template recommended above.

D. Board and Commission Structure

This section of the Organizational Assessment recommends the consolidation or elimination of several boards and commissions. While the Committee discussed the merits of these recommendations, it ultimately decided that any such changes were premature given recommendations five through ten in the Organizational Assessment. Brief summaries of the Committee's views are included for the three recommendations in this section.

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

The Committee did not take a final position on this recommendation. The commissions contained in this recommendation are mostly within the Mayor's Administration and do not have Council appointments. The exceptions are the Tree Commission and the Council ex-officio seat on the Environmental Resources

Advisory Council. The Organizational Assessment recommends that their duties be administered by City staff and the Board of Parks Commissioners or otherwise shifted to non-governmental advocacy groups. The Committee recommends that any proposed changes be coordinated with the relevant boards and commissions, and in the case of the Tree Commission, also coordinated with the City Council.

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

The Committee did not take a final position on this recommendation. Noting the interrelated nature of these commissions' purviews, the Organizational Assessment recommended these commissions be combined into a single Transportation Commission. This change could address potentially conflicting policy guidance from multiple transportation-related commissions, as well as reduce staff workload of taking the same policy proposal to multiple commissions for feedback. The Committee would evaluate any future proposal from the Mayoral Administration to implement this recommendation, and such proposal should be developed in consultation with the existing commissions, City Council, and Office of the City Clerk.

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

The Committee did not take a final position on this recommendation. The Committee noted that the Organizational Assessment misapprehended the concept of sustainability, reducing it to an environmental and natural resources focus and thus concluding that the Environmental Commission and Commission on Sustainability (BCOS) share the same basic goal. However, while environmental sustainability is a part of the notion of sustainability, so too are economic and social issues, which this recommendation does not address. A current BCOS commissioner also noted that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been adopted as a guiding framework by BCOS, include 17 focus areas, only a few of which are environmentally focused. The Committee would evaluate any future proposal from the Mayoral Administration to implement this recommendation, and such proposal should be developed in consultation with the existing commissions, City Council, and Office of the City Clerk.

III. Conclusion and Next Steps

The Committee requests that the City Council adopt this report to help guide board and commission reform efforts in 2024 and beyond. While 2024 will see five new councilmembers and a new mayor, the Committee hopes that the endorsement of this report by the current Council, which has decades of collective experience working with the City's boards and commission, will serve as meaningful guidance.

The Committee recommends that it continue meeting to advance these reforms on behalf of the City Council in 2024, including coordinating with the new Mayoral Administration, developing proposed changes to BMC Title 2, and supporting the City Clerk in the development of the proposed Deputy Clerk for Boards and Commissions position.

Report on Board and Commission Reform
Approved by the Special Committee on Council Processes
December 8, 2023

Note: Your signature below indicates approval of this Report.

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