



**THE VILLAGE OF**  
**BROOKLYN**  
**- MICHIGAN -**

# Boards and Commissions Handbook

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Brooklyn, MI 49230

Updated: December 2025

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**Handbook Purpose**

The purpose of this handbook is to inform new board members and refresh current and reappointed board members of the processes involved in boards and commissions. The content will cover the basics of boards and commissions as well as what is expected of a board member. Additional resources are also given to

board and commission members depending on which board they are serving on. Members are encouraged to do their own research and ask questions throughout their term.

This handbook is reviewed regularly to allow for updates in procedures, processes, laws, and website changes. Important updates to the handbook will be presented to current board members to allow for consistent understanding of expectations.

## **Code of Conduct Statement**

During discussion and debate, members shall speak only after being recognized for that purpose by the Chairperson. Once recognized, a member shall limit remarks to the topic under discussion and should not be interrupted, except by a point of order (i.e., a procedural objection) raised by another member. Speakers shall address their remarks to the Chairperson, maintain a courteous tone, and avoid personal comments or attacks. Members should speak respectfully and support an environment where all members are encouraged to participate. Upon request, reasonable accommodations shall be provided for individuals requiring assistance. All members are expected to follow these guidelines to promote respectful and orderly discussion. The Chairperson may take appropriate action, at their discretion, to address behavior that disrupts the deliberative process.

## **Structure and Roles**

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Commissions**

There are two different capacities in which boards and commissions function in the public policy process: Advisory and Administrative. It is possible for a board or commission to serve in both capacities.

#### Advisory

Advisory boards provide recommendations to the Village Council based on their specific areas of focus. While the Village Council holds the authority to make final decisions on most matters, it relies on advisory boards and commissions for guidance, background information, and analysis. As an elected body, the Council has the discretion to accept advice in full, in part, or not at all.

#### Administrative

Certain boards have additional administrative responsibilities, meaning they are authorized or required by law to conduct formal reviews and make official decisions. These responsibilities are typically outlined in a charter, statute, or ordinance. It is essential that these commissions follow legal procedures and base every decision on factual evidence recorded in the official record. For example, the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals often handle such decisions.

Administrative decisions must be made based on applicable laws and the facts or testimony presented, rather than public opinion or the number of people supporting or opposing an issue. Courts can overturn decisions that lack a factual basis, and board members could even be held accountable if their rulings do not align with legal requirements.

## General Responsibilities

Members of boards and commissions have the following responsibilities:

- To attend applicable orientation and/or training.
- To attend all regularly scheduled meetings and clearly communicate when an absence is anticipated.
- To use parliamentary procedure to conduct and participate in meetings (Robert's Rules of Order).
- To hold public hearings when called for in the enabling legislation, or when otherwise necessary to provide the opportunity for public comment.
- To make recommendations to the Village Council as required by law or upon request.
- To follow the operating rules established by the board or commission.
- To review all relevant materials and come to the meetings prepared to discuss the issues.
- To work cooperatively with other commissions when there are areas of common interest or overlap in responsibilities.
- To put aside personal or special interests and serve the Village of Brooklyn in good faith.
- To abide by the provision of the Open Meetings Act.

Refer to board-specific bylaws for more details on responsibilities.

## **Board and Commission Organization**

All boards and commissions are organized to include a chairperson and a staff liaison. Some may also use sub-committees to handle special topics.

Unless otherwise stated in their bylaws, at the first meeting of each year, the board or commission will elect its officers. For all boards this will include the election of a chairperson, vice-chair, secretary and other officers as outlined in their bylaws.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members**

### Chairperson

Each board and commission should elect a chairperson at their first meeting of the calendar year. They should ensure the person elected is aware of the responsibilities that are associated with the position. The Chairperson will preside at all official meetings and generally ensures that the group reviews and acts upon the items on the agenda. The Chairperson should ensure that decisions are made in a timely manner while being careful not to limit discussion.

### Responsibilities of the Chair

- Preside at all official meetings of the board or commission.
- Consult with the Village Manager and/or staff liaison in drafting the meeting agenda.
- Attend Village Council meetings as needed to represent the board or commission.
- Serve as a model of leadership and inspire public confidence in Brooklyn's Government.

- Should speak last when the board or commission is deliberating.

The Chairperson is also the person vested with authority to:

- Call a meeting to order and propose adjournment.
- Recognize and call upon speakers.
- Call for debate and vote on motions.
- Clarify or request clarifications of motions made by members.
- Rule motions out of order.
- Interpret and enforce any meeting management bylaws or rules of procedure.
- Call members to order if they disregard rules of procedure or decorum for the meeting.

### Vice Chair

The Vice Chair assumes responsibilities of the Chairperson when the Chairperson is absent, allowing for continuity in leading meetings and upholding the principles of transparency required by the Open Meetings Act. Essentially, the Vice Chairperson acts as a backup to the Chairperson if they are unable to attend a meeting.

### Secretary

The Secretary is responsible for maintaining accurate records of public meetings, including minutes and attendance. They act as the official record-keeper of all public deliberations and decisions made by the board or commission.

### Board/Commission Members

Members serve as ambassadors of the village and represent the interests of Brooklyn at official meetings as well as outside the Village Office. As an ambassador of the village, it is important to understand that your words and actions reflect that role at all times. Serving on a board or commission is a privilege and implies a responsibility to act in the best interest of the Village of Brooklyn.

All members shall:

- Attend scheduled meetings or let the staff liaison and chairperson know they are absent.
- Prepare in advance for meetings. Read the agenda packet prior to the meeting and be familiar with issues on the agenda.
- Participate in meetings and carry out assignments.
- Talk with community members to obtain feedback on topics under consideration.
- Act and speak with honesty and integrity.
- Do not speak for the board/commission unless authorized by the action of the board/commission.

### Village Manager

The Village Manager shall be Ex-Officio member of each Village sponsored Board, Commission, Committee, or Task Force and shall have the right to participate in all the deliberations thereof but shall not have the right to vote unless specifically appointed. The Village Manager may call a Special Meeting or a Committee of any commission or board with proper notice and in accordance with the State of Michigan's Open Meeting Act.

The Village Manager can also be responsible for establishing the agendas at all regular and special meetings. At the request of at least two members, additional items can be added to the agenda of a regular meeting.

### Village Staff Liaison

Boards and commissions may also have a Village staff liaison who, in either a formal or informal capacity, can serve as the staff contact for the board or commission. The role of the staff liaison is to aid the board or commission in fulfilling their duties by providing administrative assistance through their training and experience in local government operation and their functional area.

## **Appointment and Term of Service**

### Qualifications

All Village of Brooklyn residents are eligible to serve on any of the boards. Additional requirements and circumstances may apply depending on the board. Additional details are included on the Village's website ([www.villageofbrooklyn.com](http://www.villageofbrooklyn.com)) and in the boards' respective bylaws.

### General Interests

While anyone who meets the specific qualifications listed above is welcome to apply, each board or commission may be best suited to individuals with specific interests. This is not to say that those with limited experiences in these areas cannot apply. The Village may also provide training opportunities for members.

These interests, which vary by board, include but are not limited to the following:

- Corridor Improvement Authority (CIA):
  - Economic development and revitalization.
  - Interest in improving the aesthetic and appeal of the Village's commercial corridor.
  - Supporting small businesses and local commerce.
  - Community engagement and support.
- Parks Board:
  - Outdoor recreation, environmental conservation, landscape design.
  - Creating inclusive and engaging public spaces.
  - Youth and senior programming, sports, or community events.
- Planning Commission:

- Urban planning and sustainable development.
- Land use policy, site plans, regulatory documents.
- Project management or experience in technical/trade fields, such as construction or engineering.
- Familiarity with infrastructure and development processes.

### Term of Service

Each board or commission has their own terms of service based on their bylaws and authorizing legislation.

- Corridor Improvement Authority: Three-year term
- Planning Commission: Three-year term
- Parks Board: Three-year term

### Appointment Process

- The Village Manager and Village President will review applications as positions become available. Once applications are reviewed, the President will make a recommendation to the Village Council, who will vote on the final appointment.
- If a position is not vacant at the time the application is submitted, the Village will keep it on file for one year from the submission date and applicants will be notified if they are considered for a vacant seat.

### Reappointment

The last few months of the year prior to board member term expirations, Village Staff, Village President, and respective Chairs shall begin conversations with members about renewal of their position. Decisions must be made by the November Village Council meeting at the latest, and decisions will occur at the following meeting, December at the latest.

All board members whose terms are set to expire and are interested in continuing must complete a new application and submit it to the Village Manager for the Village to have on file. Applications are processed in the same way as described in the Appointment Process above. Reappointments are not automatic.

### Resignation

Any board member that intends to resign must submit either an emailed or written resignation letter to the Village Manager, respective Chair, and Village President. If a board or commission member resigns before their term expires, a replacement member will be appointed via the process listed in the Appointment Process to serve the remainder of the term.

## Parliamentary Procedure

### Robert's Rules of Order

All boards and commissions are required to use parliamentary procedures to conduct their meetings. Board members and staff are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Robert's Rules of Order. This is of particular importance for chairpersons in their capacity as presiding officers tasked with conducting fair and efficient meetings.

Robert's Rules of Order: <http://www.rulesonline.com/index.html>

## Meetings

### Meeting Courtesy

- An agenda shall always be available for members of the audience;
- Board members shall treat the members of the public with dignity and respect;
- Board members shall refrain from displaying negative gestures or sounds when they disagree with a member of the public or another commissioner;
- Side conversations shall be avoided;
- The chairperson shall inform the audience of the time limits for speakers and should adhere to those limits;
- The chairperson shall explain the purpose of the meeting and the appropriate time to ask questions;
- The chairperson shall explain technical terms or jargon that might otherwise make it difficult for the audience to follow the deliberations;
- The chairperson shall thank participants for their attendance.

### Types of Meetings

#### Regular Meetings

All board and commission meetings will be publicly posted and conducted in accordance with state laws, including the Open Meetings Act (PA 267 of 1976). Meetings will be open to the public and shall be held in a place available to the general public. If it is known in advance that a quorum (more than half of the board or commission members) will not be present, efforts will be made to notify all members and interested parties. A notice will be posted stating that the meeting is canceled or rescheduled due to a lack of quorum.

Anyone shall be permitted to attend any meeting except as otherwise provided by state law and shall have a reasonable opportunity to be heard. Boards and commissions may limit the amount of time one individual can address the board or commission in their Rules of Procedure.

#### Public Comment

- During each public comment on the agenda, each individual will have three (3) minutes to address the Board.

- They may only address the board once under each public comment opportunity and may not yield their time to others.
- Public comment is **not** a Q&A time, those times can be established outside of the public comment.
- The public can only speak during the set times for public comment as outlined in the agenda.
- Deliberation and discussion are only for elected officials.

### Special Meetings

During a regular meeting, a board may decide to hold a Special Meeting. This allows the board to continue conducting business between regular meetings. This is common when a board wants to continue discussion of a certain topic.

### Closed Sessions

- A public body may meet in a closed meeting only for one or more of the permitted purposes specified in section 8 of the OMA. The limited purposes for which closed sessions are permitted include, among others:
  - (1) To discuss the dismissal, suspension, discipline, or performance evaluation of a public employee, officer, staff member, or individual agent – but only if the individual requests a closed hearing.
  - (2) If a public body is negotiating a labor contract, it may hold a closed session for strategy discussions, but only if the negotiating party requests it.
  - (3) Discussions about purchasing or leasing property can be held in a closed session, but only until an option to buy or lease has been secured.
  - (4) A public body may consult privately with its attorney regarding trial or settlement strategies for an ongoing lawsuit – provided that discussing it in an open meeting would negatively impact the case financially.
  - (5) If a candidate for a public position requests confidentiality, their application can be reviewed in a closed session. However, all job interviews must take place in an open meeting.
  - (6) If state or federal law prohibits the disclosure of certain information, a public body may discuss it in a closed session. However, a closed session cannot be used to discuss an attorney’s verbal opinion – only written legal memoranda are allowed.

### **Minutes (MCL 15.269 Sec.9)**

- (1) Each public body shall keep minutes of each meeting showing the date, time, place, members present, members absent, any decisions made at a meeting open to the public, and the purpose or purposes for which a closed session is held. The minutes shall include all votes taken at the meeting. The public body shall make corrections in the minutes at the next meeting after the meeting to which the minutes refer. The public body shall make corrected minutes available at or before the next subsequent meeting after correction. The corrected minutes shall show both the original entry and the correction.

- (2) Except for minutes taken during a closed session, all minutes are public records open to public inspection, and a public body shall make the minutes available at the address designated on posted public notices pursuant to the OMA (PA 276). The public body shall make copies of the minutes available to the public.

## Minutes Guidance

Meetings: Agenda and Minutes A Handbook for local officials

Wells F. Cook, Ph.D., PRP, Central Michigan University

Published by the Michigan Municipal League

<https://mml.org/pdf/resources/publications/ebooks/Meeting%20Agendas%20And%20Minutes.pdf>

## Explanation of Minutes in Closed Session

Minutes of closed session must also be taken, although they are not available for public inspection and would only be disclosed if required by a civil action. These minutes may be destroyed one year and one day after approval of the minutes of the regular meeting at which the closed session was approved. If an audio recording is made of a closed meeting, it must also be retained for one year and one day. Section 9(1) of the OMA provides that the minutes of an open meeting must include “the purpose or purposes for which a closed session is held.”

## Relationships and Interactions

### Media Relations

Local government is a major source of news for the local print, radio and television media. The Village works closely with the media to ensure accurate and thorough coverage of its issues. Generally, journalists and reporters will seek information directly from the Village Manager, Village Councilmembers, or individual department directors.

If approached by a reporter, consider these guidelines:

- **The Village Manager is the only person who is authorized to speak on behalf of the Village. No one else, including board or commission Chairpersons, has this authority. If you are asked a question that requires a response on behalf of the Village, please direct the question to the Village Manager.**
- Generally, board and commission members are discouraged from engaging in direct media contact. Media relations should be discussed by the board or commission with consensus about publicizing a project, issue, or decision.
- If the question pertains to your personal experience, you have the right to speak with the media as a private citizen. However, consider whether you are the most appropriate person to address questions about the board/commission's work. Would it be more appropriate for the reporter to speak with a Village official instead?
- If you decide to provide your opinion, make it clear that you are speaking for yourself, not on behalf of your board or commission, the Village Council or Administration.

- If you speak with a reporter, stick to the facts. Anything you say may end up in print or on TV. If you do not want to see it in person or over the airwaves, don't say it.
- Sometimes reporters get it wrong. Remember that any time you discuss an issue, you run the risk of being misquoted or misrepresented.

## **Working Successfully Together**

The Village routinely chooses to appoint individuals to a commission whose views, backgrounds, opinions and values vary widely from one another. The purpose and goal of diverse representation on boards and commissions is to ensure that the entire community has a voice in decision-making. Sometimes these differences may cause conflict during the process of deliberation and finalizing recommendations.

Nonetheless, in order to be an effective board member, each individual must:

- Work within a team framework of compromise and exchange;
- Separate people from the issues when conflict arises;
- Focus on mutual interests and shared goals;
- Look for compromises and work to understand diverse perspectives;
- Examine one's own approach to dealing with conflict and be open about concerns where there is room for compromise;
- Strive to problem-solve based on collaboration rather than simply making a decision.

Most issues will be resolved and decisions will be made through the voting and deliberation processes. It is important to recognize that as a board member, you have done your job by thoroughly examining the pros and cons of each situation. Once an issue is decided, it is equally important to accept the wishes of the majority and move on to the next issue.

## **General Liability**

The Village of Brooklyn's insurance policy covers all commission members as they engage in the policy process. Boards, commissions, and Village Council members are covered in their actions as long as they are based on standards or accepted review procedures in the ordinance they follow. However, if a board or commission makes an administrative decision that is "arbitrary and capricious" and is not based on standards of review, they will not be covered under this policy. Any individual or group decision to deviate from this policy manual may result in the individual or group's immediate removal from the board or commission and/or result in a lack of qualified coverage under the Village's general liability policy.

## **Additional Materials**

These materials should be updated on a regular basis.

Village Resources:

- Village of Brooklyn Website: [www.villageofbrooklyn.com](http://www.villageofbrooklyn.com)
- Village of Brooklyn Master Plan: <https://www.villageofbrooklyn.com/reports.html>
- Capital Improvements Plan: <https://www.villageofbrooklyn.com/reports.html>

- Village of Brooklyn Code of Ordinances: <https://www.villageofbrooklyn.com/ordinances.html>
- Zoning Ordinance: [https://library.municode.com/mi/brooklyn/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=MUCO\\_CH62ZO](https://library.municode.com/mi/brooklyn/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=MUCO_CH62ZO)

Relevant Michigan Statutes:

- General Law Village Act: <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-3-of-1895.pdf>
- Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA): <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-33-of-2008.pdf>
- Open Meetings Act (OMA): <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-act-267-of-1976.pdf>
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA): <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/mcl/pdf/mcl-Act-110-of-2006.pdf>

Michigan Association of Planning (copies available at Village Office):

- Planning and Zoning Essentials
- Site Plan Review
- Managing Risk: Making Sound Decisions
- Advanced ZBA: Beyond the Fundamentals
- Planning Commissioner's Toolkit

Michigan Municipal League (has numerous resources on a variety of municipal topics)

<https://mml.org/resources-research/>