



ADVISORY BODY HANDBOOK – NOVEMBER 2018

An Introduction to Citizen Involvement in Yolo County Government

Welcome Yolo County Advisory Body Member! You join many people who serve as volunteer members of Yolo County advisory bodies. Advisory bodies provide a valuable service to the community by presenting the concerns and viewpoints of county residents and others on a variety of issues. The purpose of this handbook is to familiarize you with Yolo County policies and procedures as they relate to service on county advisory bodies.

Understanding Advisory Bodies

To understand how any advisory body functions, you need to know what an advisory-type body is, how it is structured, and how it differs from a governing board. The general purpose of an advisory body is to broaden the scope of information that goes into the decision-making process. The members of the body (a.k.a. committee, board, council, commission) come from the community and represent a cross-section of interests and perspectives. Their role is to advise and make recommendations, but with limitations.

Advisory bodies should not be confused with governing boards. A governing board is the legal entity and decision-making authority for an organization. Rather than provide advice, the governing board has the authority to establish policy. Advisory body members must understand that their role is to advise and they should not undertake activities which seem to establish policy.

The purpose, membership, and function of each advisory body is outlined in the law, resolution, or minute order which established it. Some are created by County action as mandated by State or federal law.

Although each body has a different mission, and may function a little differently as directed by the bylaws, statute, or chapter for that particular group, there are many similarities and common responsibilities and expectations for all Yolo County advisory bodies. The material in this handbook is intended to assist advisory body members in becoming acquainted with the general expectations, functions, and decision-making processes of Yolo County advisory bodies.

Expectations for Advisory Body Members

It is expected that:

- All members will make an effort to attend all scheduled advisory body meetings.
- Members will read background materials and other materials distributed between meetings.
- All members will participate in the group's discussions at noticed meetings, without dominating the discussion or activity of the advisory body.
- Members will be fair, impartial and respectful of the public, staff, and each other.
- Members will respect the limitations of their individual and collective roles. The role of the advisory body is to advise the Board of Supervisors and/or staff. Please keep in mind that appointment does not empower you to make final decisions, unless authorized by state law or the group's enabling ordinance, or to supervise staff.
- Members will strive to appreciate differences in approach and point of view, whether from each other, the community, the Board of Supervisors, or staff.
- The chair of the advisory body will ensure that all members have a fair, balanced and respectful opportunity to share their knowledge and perspectives.
- The advisory body will attempt to reach consensus on issues. If consensus is not possible, strong differing opinions such as "minority" opinions should be recorded and acknowledged in the advisory body's report to the Board of Supervisors.
- All advisory body members will work to avoid "surprises" either in the nature of the work being undertaken or the method and timing for conveyance of recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.
- The staff liaison fulfills an important role in assisting the advisory body in each of these areas.

The Role of the Assigned Staff Liaison

Each Yolo County Advisory Body has an assigned staff liaison. The word "liaison" is used deliberately by the county to describe the nature of the staff role in relation to the advisory body, instead of the phrase "committee staff." A liaison is defined as "one who maintains communication."

The liaisons are staff professionals with significant work responsibilities in addition to their advisory body liaison activities. In general, the liaisons are individuals who have significant staff responsibilities that relate to the same work area as the advisory body. The liaisons do not work "for" or "at the direction of" the advisory body. They are professionals who work with the advisory body to develop information and recommendations for Board of Supervisor consideration.

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While Yolo County staff liaisons have differing duties, depending on past practices, time availability, and departmental resources, in general Yolo County's staff liaisons are responsible for:

- Ensuring that meeting notifications and recordkeeping occurs consistently with applicable state laws, and Yolo County requirements.
- Serving as a communication link between the advisory body, county administration, departments and the Board of Supervisors, as appropriate.
- Providing professional guidance, issue analysis and recommendations
- Assisting the group with research, report preparation, and correspondence in keeping with the work plan for the advisory body which was approved by the Board of Supervisors.
- Making sure that the intent of the advisory body is not lost after a decision or recommendation, and that it is conveyed to the Board of Supervisors in a timely manner.
- Assisting the advisory body in staying on track, focused and within its role.
- Presenting advisory committee recommendations to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, if requested to do so by either the committee or the Board of Supervisors.
- Maintaining a positive working relationship with the Chair and committee members.

Open Meeting Laws in California: The Brown Act

THE BASICS

Advisory bodies are considered public bodies under California open meetings laws. This means that meetings of advisory bodies must be "open and public," actions may not be secret, and action taken in violation of open meetings laws may be voided.

WHAT'S COVERED

A "meeting"* is any gathering or consensus of a majority of the members of a covered board to hear, discuss, or deliberate on matters within the board's jurisdiction.

*Note: No vote or action is required for the gathering to be a meeting, nor must the members meet face to face. E-mail discussion or unnoticed "side meetings or gatherings" about advisory body work and issues may be in violation of open meeting laws.

WHAT MUST HAPPEN

Under the Brown Act an advisory body must:

- Post notice and an agenda for any meeting at the meeting site in a place that is publicly accessible for at least 72 hours before the meeting occurs. Notice must also be mailed at the same time to those who request it. Different noticing requirements apply to continued meetings, special meetings (called by the Chair or a majority on at least 24 hours advance notice), and emergency meetings. Advice regarding such meetings should be sought from the assigned staff liaison.

- Post an agenda that gives a brief but meaningful description of all items to be considered or discussed, whether or not they are to be voted on; and stick to the posted agenda.
- Notify the media of special or emergency meetings if requested.
- Hold meetings within the jurisdiction of the agency (typically, anywhere within Yolo County) except in limited circumstances, and in places accessible to all, with no fee and no "sign in" required for anyone.
- Allow non-disruptive recording and broadcast of meetings, and let the public inspect any recording made by the advisory body of its open meetings. The advisory body may destroy recordings after 30 days.
- Allow the public to address the advisory body at meetings on any item on the agenda, as well as any other matter not on the agenda so long as it is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the advisory body.
- Conduct only public votes, with no secret ballots.
- Treat documents as public "without delay," if distributed to all or a majority of members of an advisory body before or at the meeting, unless they are also exempt under the Public Records Act.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Office of the County Counsel maintains Brown Act resources on the Brown Act on its page on the County website (www.yolocounty.org). The materials include links to third party resources, such as the "Open and Public" series of publications by the League of California Cities, as well as copies of presentations and other materials developed by the Office of the County Counsel. All advisory body members are encouraged to visit the webpage and review these resources to ensure at least a basic understanding of the Brown Act.

Conflict of Interest

Persons making application to serve on advisory bodies often have a special interest in the subject area or services related to the work of the advisory body so it is reasonable to expect that individual bias and/or conflicts of interest may arise for some advisory body members. However, all decisions made in the course of service on any advisory body are to be made solely on the basis of a desire to promote the best interests of the residents of Yolo County. A potential conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal or private interests might lead an independent observer reasonably to question whether the individual's actions or decisions are influenced by considerations of significant personal interest, financial or otherwise.

While state conflict of interest laws are generally not applicable to members of advisory boards, conflicts of interest, or apparent or potential conflicts of interest, should nonetheless be fully disclosed before a decision is made on the matter involved, and no advisory body member should participate (other than by providing information as a member of the public) in any decision in which he or she has a conflict of interest.

It is the continuing responsibility of all advisory body members to review their outside business interests, philanthropic interests, personal interests, and family and other close relationships for actual, apparent, or potential conflicts of interest with respect to the advisory body on which they serve, and to promptly disclose the nature of the interest or relationship. In all situations calling for disclosure of affiliations, the member should abstain from voting or otherwise influencing the decision by the disinterested decision makers. That abstention should be formally noted in the minutes.

Advisory Body Annual Work Plan

One of the best ways to ensure an advisory body is effective is through the use of a work plan. The plan specifies goals for the advisory body, strategies to meet the goals and timelines for completion of the goals.

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Each advisory body is encouraged to propose an annual work plan to the Yolo County Board of Supervisors. An example of an annual work plan can be found on the following page. In developing the work plans, advisory bodies are to consider:

- The authorized mission and purpose of the advisory body;
- The Board of Supervisor's strategic plan;
- The authorized priorities of the related department;
- Resource availability, budget, staff support, members time; and
- Members knowledge, interest, and expertise.

The work plans are reviewed by the County Administrator and then formally presented, reviewed and approved or rejected by the Board of Supervisors. The report should include an outline of the advisory body's past year of accomplishment and should highlight the top two proposed priorities. The report should include a section written by the respective department director or assigned staff liaison addressing resource availability to accomplish the items in the work plan and the relationship of the proposed items to the planned departmental activities for the year.

During its review, the Board of Supervisors may change or modify an advisory body's proposed work plan so that it reflects Board of Supervisors priorities, available resources, and emerging issues. Once authorized and approved by the Board of Supervisors, the work plan serves as the basis for the advisory body's focus and effort during the year, although the Board of Supervisors may occasionally refer other issues to the advisory body during the course of the year.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee - 2007 Work Plan

The purpose of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) is to advise the City Council on bicycle and pedestrian policies, programs and plans.

Title Description	Committee Lead & Commitment	Staff Commitment	Schedule	Budget Implications	Status
Bicycle Master Plan: Update the facilities program; develop plan sections on education, enforcement and encouragement. Deliverable: Draft Bike Master Plan and funding proposal by November.	Full committee: 4 hours Subcommittee: 10 hours	Sophie Stimson: 12 hours	January to April	Funds identified in CFP for bicycle facilities program. Additional funding may be proposed.	
Local Access Street Sidewalk Program: Develop criteria for evaluating sidewalk needs on Local Access streets. Integrate with Parks and Pathways program. Deliverable: Proposed criteria for evaluating needs; funding proposal.	Full Committee: 3 hours Subcommittee: 8 hours	Sophie Stimson: 10 hours	April to June	Funding proposal will be made.	
Sidewalk Repair. Provide a recommendation to Council on the long-term strategy for sidewalk repair. Deliverable: Recommendation to Council on funding and policy for sidewalk repair.	Full committee: 1 hour	Sophie Stimson: 1 hour	May Report to Council in June	None as yet	
Downtown Walkability Project: Participate in the development of the downtown walkability project. Work with staff to identify two downtown corridors to improve for walkability. Help to select corridors, define problems, scope improvements and define funding level. Deliverable: Scope of work	Full committee: 1 Hour Subcommittee: 2 hours	Sophie Stimson: 3 hours	July Present to Land Use Committee in February	Funding to be defined	
Council Advisory Committee Review: Meet with the General Government Committee on February 27 to discuss committee purpose, by-laws, and ordinance. Deliverable: Summary document for discussion.	Full committee: 1 Hour Subcommittee: 2 hours	Sophie Stimson: 3 hour	November	None as yet	
Grant Project Development: Participate in setting priorities for bicycle- and pedestrian related grant projects Deliverables: Comments on project priorities.	Full committee: 1 hours	Greg Walker, Sophie Stimson: 2 hours	June to October	None anticipated	