

League of Women Voters of Edina Review City of Edina Advisory Boards and Commissions, May 2020

League of Women Voters Edina (LWVE) Statement of Position

The League of Women Voters Edina (LWVE) adopted the following statement of position at its Annual Meeting in May 2006.

LWVE supports:

- Codified, uniform term limits for all appointed advisory boards and commissions;
- Appointment to advisory boards and commissions that reflect the demographics of the City of Edina;
- Accurate, consistent, accessible and timely publication of:
 - The purpose of advisory boards and commissions, openings on boards and commissions, and the application/appointment process;
 - Advisory board and commission member names, term dates and contact information;
 - City staff liaison names and contact information;
 - Advisory board and commission meeting notices, agendas and minutes.

At the LWVE annual meeting on May 10, 2018, members voted to adopt an update to the position, adding the following:

Review by LWVE every three years of all advisory boards and commission appointments, application/appointment process, and publication of contact information/meeting notices/agendas/minutes. LWVE will report the findings of the review to the LWVE Board, the advisory board or commission, and the City Council within two months of completing our review.

Background

Over 100 volunteers serve on 10 City of Edina advisory boards and commissions that advise the Edina City Council on various projects and, at times, make recommendations for City Council consideration. Service on an advisory board or commission provides an opportunity to become more involved in the Edina community and, for some, has served as the beginning of work with City government.

LWVE members approved a one-year study of advisory boards and commissions in May 2005. They reached consensus on study recommendations in April 2006 and adopted the Statement of Position at the Annual Meeting in May 2006. LWVE presented the recommendations to the

Edina City Council on January 16, 2007. Since then, the Council has codified term limits and uniform provisions for advisory board and commission membership and operation. The City has also made numerous changes in how it selects members and publishes information concerning advisory boards and commissions.

The Review

To learn about how changes in City code and process have affected appointments and transparency, LWVE members proposed an audit/review, to be conducted every three years, at the Lively Issues meeting on December 14, 2017. The position update supporting an audit/review was approved by LWVE members at the Annual Meeting on May 10, 2018. After an additional director was added to the LWVE Board in May 2019 with responsibilities for work on the LWVE Program (positions), the new Program Chair formed a committee to conduct a review.

The review was conducted by the committee of Jean Tracy, Joni Bennett, and Susan Clark in the fourth quarter of 2019 and first quarter of 2020. They reviewed advisory board and commission appointments, the application process, and publication of contact information/meeting notices/agendas/minutes. Thanks to Colleen Feige and Julie Rogers Bascom, LWVE members who reviewed the report, and to MJ Lamon, the City of Edina's Community Engagement Coordinator, for her assistance with information gathering. The committee first reviewed the City of Edina website¹ where a significant amount of the information is available. They then met with MJ Lamon to gather additional information.

Overview of Advisory Boards and Commissions

Boards:

- Construction Board of Appeals
- Board of Appeal and Equalization

Commissions:

- Arts and Culture
- Community Health
- Energy and Environment
- Heritage Preservation
- Human Rights and Relations
- Parks and Recreation
- Planning
- Transportation

¹ <https://www.edinamn.gov/>

The advisory boards have five members each and no student members. Each advisory commission has 11 members, including two non-voting student members. All advisory board and commission members, with the exception of the Planning Commission, are eligible to serve two, three-year terms. Planning Commission members are eligible to serve three, three-year terms. An individual may serve on only one advisory board or commission at a time. Vacancies that occur in mid-term may be filled by majority vote of the City Council for the balance of the unexpired term.²

Each advisory commission meets once a month, with the exception of the Planning Commission, which meets twice a month. The Construction Board of Appeals meets as needed. The Board of Appeal and Equalization meets twice each year, with both meetings held in April.

Application/Appointments

The City uses an annual process to fill advisory board and commission vacancies. Vacancies may occur because a member's service term has ended or because a member resignation occurred. Each year in December, the City completes member assessments and notes expiring terms. In January, the City calls for applications for open positions. The City communicates the call for applications in a variety of ways, including on the City's website, in a press release sent to the Sun-Current newspaper, through social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, nextdoor.com) and through outreach to City volunteers.

Applicants may indicate preferred advisory boards or commissions. Some applicants indicate they are willing to serve wherever needed. Most times, the number of applicants has been more than the number of open positions. There has been a slight decrease in applications – from approximately 50 in previous years to 43 in 2020. That may be due, in part, to an increased number of task forces; volunteers may be opting to join a task force instead of an advisory board or commission.

Each applicant is offered an opportunity to interview with an interview panel. Depending on availability, the panel could be composed of City Council members, the City Manager, and various board or commission chairs. Since the number of applicants is extensive, usually 40 to 50, each interview is scheduled to last 10 minutes. In the 2020 interviews, the interview group consisted of the Mayor and one City Council member. An additional Council member participated on one of the three evenings of interviews.

Following the interview process, the interview panel submits appointment recommendations to the City Council for approval. The process is completed prior to March 1, when terms begin. An alternate list is kept of all qualified applicants who may not have been appointed by the City Council. An applicant from the alternate list may be drawn upon if an unscheduled vacancy occurs from March to August, with the alternate applicant recommended to the City Council for

² City Code Chapter 2, Article III, Division I, Section 2-81

their approval. If the vacancy occurs after August, the position is left open until the next round of interviews and appointments.

Diversity/Equity

The 2006 LWVE advisory boards and commissions study found that women were under-represented on advisory boards and commissions. Edina’s population was 54% female, but just 39% of advisory board and commission members were female. LWVE continued to evaluate gender diversity on boards and commissions with a panel discussion and *Edina Leaguer* article in September 2008 and a follow-up *Leaguer* article in December 2011/January 2012.

The League reviewers gathered information on board and commission member gender identity to the best of their ability from board and commission membership rosters and other sources. No information was available on members identifying as non-binary. In May 2020, advisory board and commission membership includes 34 female adults, 48 male adults, 11 female students, and 5 male students. Approximately 46% of the advisory board and commission members are female.

Board or Commission	Female Adult	Male Adult	Female Student	Male Student
Arts & Culture Commission	7	2	1	1
Board of Appeal and Equalization	0	5	-	-
Community Health Commission	4	5	2	-
Construction Board of Appeals	0	5	-	-
Energy & Environment Commission	5	4	2	-
Heritage Preservation Commission	5	4	1	1
Human Rights & Relations Commission	4	5	2	-
Parks & Recreation Commission	3	6	2	
Planning Commission	3	6	1	1
Transportation Commission	3	6	-	2
Total	34	48	11	5

In 2016, the City of Edina launched a Race and Equity Initiative to address “long term racial inequities” that had “manifested in our community for decades.” In early 2017, the City conducted a demographic study of its advisory board and commission membership to “better understand the demographics of who is serving and who is represented so that the City can

work towards a Board and Commission member base reflective of the community.” The study’s survey questions included gender, age, ethnicity and/or race, identification as LGBTQ, disability status, education, city quadrant of residence, where one grew up, approximate annual income and religion. In 2018, the City of Edina Race and Equity Task Force presented its Final Report and Recommendations.³

The Racial Equity Implementation Report⁴ created by City staff in 2018 includes this “high impact/high effort” recommendation: “Coordinate volunteer opportunities and public participation when there are decisions for which the City is seeking public feedback and other types of public involvement, such as Boards, Commissions, Task Forces and other appointed positions to ensure that residents of color are included and heard.”

The City’s 2020-2021 Budget Work Plan includes as its Goal 4: Foster Inclusion and Engaged Community. Goal 4 includes as one of its 2020-2021 Budget Objectives “Develop and implement a plan to increase diversity of boards and commissions members.”⁵

MJ Lamon said, in an interview for this review, that she and Heidi Lee, the City’s Race and Equity Coordinator, are working on how best to take steps to ensure advisory board and commission membership reflects all community demographics and diversity characteristics. She said the plan may include not only what characteristics are sought to achieve a balanced advisory board or commission, but how to engage with communities underrepresented on advisory boards and commissions. She added that the proposed plan could change past processes including the interview process.

Lamon and Lee have revised and updated the advisory board and commission application form. It now includes an optional set of six questions, preceded by this notation, “While these questions are voluntary, the answers are important to help the City of Edina’s goal to be inclusive to all in the community engagement process.”

Contacting Board and Commission Members

It is not clear on the City website how someone may contact an advisory board or commission member. Requests for contact information go to a staff liaison (each advisory board and commission has a staff liaison), who provides an email address and/or telephone number. If the liaison is unavailable, another staff member provides the contact information. Those wishing to reach an advisory board or commission member may also submit a completed

³ <https://www.edinamn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5021/Race-and-Equity-Final-Report-and-Recommendations-PDF?bidId=>

⁴ <https://www.edinamn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6302/Race--Equity-Implementation-Report-September-5-2018-PDF?bidId=>

⁵ <https://www.edinamn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8069/2020-2021-Budget-Work-Plan-PDF?bidId=> , Q3 2020, Goal 4, #5

correspondence form from the City's website.⁶ Applicants for advisory boards and commissions are advised that, once appointed by the City Council, they are required to provide a phone number and/or email address where they can be reached.

Meeting Notices

A calendar of advisory board and commission meetings is set annually. Meeting dates, times, and places are posted on the City website calendar and the websites of the advisory boards and commissions. Upcoming meetings of an advisory board or commission are also noted in the City's monthly *Edition Edina* publication. If a meeting location is moved, the new location is posted at the original meeting site and online. Notice of a special meeting must be posted three calendar days prior to the event. Notices are posted on the City's three bulletin boards (at City Hall, Edina Liquors at 50th & France, Centennial Lakes) and on the City's website. Minnesota's Open Meeting law governs meetings of advisory boards and commissions.⁷

Meeting Agendas

City policy requires that advisory board and commission meeting agendas must be posted online three calendar days before the meeting. This review, in December 2019 and January 2020, confirmed the City is posting advisory board and commission meeting agendas as required.

Agendas are developed by the advisory board or committee chair with support of the staff liaison. Each group's annual work plan drives prioritization in setting the agenda. The agenda-setting process is outlined in the City of Edina Staff Liaison Guidebook which is currently being updated and unavailable online.

Meeting Minutes

A review of the online posting of approved minutes found significant gaps in timely posting. For instance, when reviewed during December 2019 and January 2020, the last approved minutes that were posted online for the Arts & Culture Commission were dated September 2019, Heritage Preservation Commission were June 2019, and Planning Commission were September 2019.

The City uses an agenda management software called Novus Agenda. Meeting agendas and approved minutes are posted publicly using this software on a site separate from EdinaMN.gov. On every board and commission webpage and on the electronic meeting calendar, there are direct hyperlinks to the page that hosts all public meeting agendas and approved minutes. In

⁶ <https://edinadocs.edinamn.gov/Forms/contact>

⁷ Minnesota Statutes 13D

addition to Novus, the City has a digital records management software referred to as EdinaDocs. All board and commission records are available to the public through EdinaDocs.

Recommendations for the City of Edina City Council

- Clarify on the City of Edina website how to contact an advisory board or commission member. Currently, one must either 1) contact the City staff liaison to get an email address and/or telephone number or, 2) on the City website, click on the “Submit Comments” link and then complete the Correspondence Submission form.
- Adopt and follow a process to ensure that approved meeting minutes are posted within three calendar days after approval.
- Provide online guidance on how to find approved meeting minutes from an advisory board or commission, possibly through a link from the respective board and commission websites.
- Provide increased online visibility to the annual calendar of City Council and advisory board and commission meetings. While currently posted only on the City Council’s webpage, the calendar provides a useful overview of the City’s meetings.⁸

⁸ <https://www.edinamn.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7641/2020-Meeting-Calendar-City-Council-and-Boards-and-Commissions-PDF>