The League of Women Voters of Edina
Review and Recommendations
City of Edina Boards and Commissions
May 2025

Basis for this Review

LWV Principles are broad concepts of government to which the League subscribes. They authorize the adoption of national, state and local Programs for Action.

LWVUS Principle: Citizens Right to Know/Citizen Participation

"LWV believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation at all levels of government. The League further believes that governmental bodies must protect the citizens' right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible." (1984)[1]

LWVE Position Statement: City of Edina Advisory Boards and Commissions

LWVE supports:

1. Codified, uniform terms limits for all appointed advisory boards and commissions;

2. Appointments to advisory boards and commissions that reflect the demographics of the City of Edina, including youth, with goals of diversity, equity and inclusion;

3. Accurate, consistent, accessible and timely publication of:
   a. The purpose of advisory boards and commissions, openings on boards and commissions, and the application/appointment process;
   b. Advisory board and commission member names, term dates and contact information;
   c. City staff liaison names and contact information;
   d. Advisory board and commission meeting notices, agendas and minutes.

4. Review by LWVE, every three years, of all advisory boards or 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.[2]

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[1] League of Women Voters of Minnesota *Program for Action 2023-2025*, pages 3 and 9. https://www.lwvmn.org/our-positions

[2] League of Women Voters of Edina Position Statement adopted May 2006; updated May 2018; survey and report 2020; updated May 2021. https://lwvedina.org/category/position

What are advisory boards and commissions?

Minnesota's more than 850 cities[3] are of two types, home-rule charter cities that may establish any form of government they choose, and statutory cities.[4] Although bordered by charter cities Bloomington, Minneapolis, and St. Louis Park, Edina has chosen to operate as a Plan B Statutory city, governed by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 412.601 to 412.751.

In a Plan B city, the city council exercises the legislative power of the city and determines all matters of policy. A city manager is head of the administrative branch of the government, responsible to the council for the proper administration of all affairs relating to the city.[5] Plan B does not allow administrative boards or commissions (e.g., the Minneapolis Park Board), but it does authorize city councils to create advisory boards and commissions to advise them with respect to any municipal function or activity or to investigate any subject of interest to their city.[6]

In Edina, the City Council has established two boards and eight commissions to advise it from a community perspective, provide special expertise, serve as a buffer for the Council, and train future leaders. Boards and commissions are accountable to the City Council.[7]

LWVE Study (2005) and Previous Review (2020)

LWVE members approved a one-year study of advisory boards and commissions (hereinafter boards and commissions) in May 2005, reached consensus on study recommendations in April 2006, adopted the position statement above in May 2006, and presented recommendations to the Edina City Council on January 16, 2007.

Over the next ten years, the Council codified term limits and uniform provisions for board and commission membership and operation and made numerous changes in how it selected new members. To assess how well changes in the application and appointment process were working, how well board and commission composition reflected growing diversity in the community, and how transparently boards and commissions were operating (i.e., publication of contact information, meeting notices, agendas, and minutes), LWVE members in May 2018 approved periodic (every three years) audit/reviews.

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[3] 854, Minnesota Department of Transportation, https://www.dot.state.mn.us/project-development/functional-groups/municipalities.html; 855 or 856, League of Minnesota Cities, https://www.lmc.org/about/

[4] Local Government, Cities in Minnesota, https://www.sos.state.mn.us/about-minnesota/minnesota-government/county-local-government/ https://www.sos.state.mn.us/media/1351/chapter-7b_local-govs-2015.pdf

[5] Minnesota Statutes 412.611.

[6] Minnesota Statutes 412.621.

[7] City of Edina *Boards and Commissions Member Handbook* (2023), pp. 4 and 8.

The first audit/review, conducted in 2019 - 2020, resulted in the following recommendations by LWVE to the 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]

This Review

This review was approved by LWVE members in May 2023. Committee members -- Joni Bennett, Susan Clark, Indra Khariwala, and Mary Stanton – began work in September 2023. After deciding their goals and methods, committee members met on October 5, 2023 with City of Edina Special Projects & Engagement Manager MJ Lamon, who develops board and commission materials and administers the application, interview, appointment, and orientation processes.

At the invitation of committee members, MJ Lamon presented to LWVE members at a morning meeting on December 14, 2023. Her presentation highlighted the City's community engagement strategy, the annual process of selecting new board and commission members, and City efforts to increase diversity among board and commission members. The meeting was recorded and can be viewed on the LWVE YouTube page.[9]

On January 24, 2024, at a Happy Hour Review of LWVE Positions and Advocacy Planning, committee members reported to LWVE members their preliminary findings on membership, publication of board and commission purposes and contact information, and posting of meeting notices, agendas and minutes for 2021, 2022, and 2023.

Committee members met again with MJ Lamon on April 3, 2024, following completion of the appointment process for 2024 and the start of new terms on March 1.

After sharing its draft report with MJ Lamon in November 2024 for her review and comment, the committee presented it to LWVE members in December 2024.

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[8] LWVE, *Final Boards & Commissions Review Report,* May 2020, page 7. https://lwvedina.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-Boards-Commissions-LWVE-Report-2020.pdf

[9] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina,* presentation to LWVE, December 14, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WttgjY2Ch0U.

Finding: Advisory board and commission membership still is not gender balanced, and significant gender imbalance exists on both boards and five of eight commissions.

When LWVE first studied City of Edina advisory boards and commissions in 2005, it found that while more than half (54%) of Edina's population was female, females made up well under half (39%) of board and commission membership.[10] In 2020, LWVE found slight improvement, with 41% of adult membership female (46% of adult and student membership combined).[11] This review found still more improvement, with the 2024 gender balance of adult advisory board and commission members at 45% female, 55% male. However, as shown in the chart below, significant gender imbalance existed in 2024 on almost every board and commission.

Board or Commission	Female Adult	Male Adult	Female Student	Male Student
Arts & Culture Commission	7	2	2	0
Board of Appeal and Equalization*	1	3	-	-
Community Health Commission	6	3	2	0
Construction Board of Appeals	0	5	-	-
Energy & Environment Commission	3	6	2	0
Heritage Preservation Commission**	4	4	0	0
Human Rights & Relations Commission***	5	3	2	0
Parks & Recreation Commission***	3	5	2	0
Planning Commission	3	6	1	1
Transportation Commission	3	6	0	1
Total	**35**	**43**	**11**	**2**

*The BAE in late 2024 had just four members.
**The ninth HPC member identified as non-binary/non-gender conforming.
***The ninth positions on the HRRC and PRC were open in late 2024.

All members of the Construction Board of Appeals in late 2024 were male, as were three of four members of the Board of Appeal and Equalization. Two-thirds of the members of three commissions were male – Energy & Environment, Planning, and

[10] LWVE, *A Study: City of Edina Boards and Commissions*, April 2006, p. 9. https://lwvedina.org/wp-content/uploads/LWV-Edina-City-of-Edina-Boards-and-Commissions-April-2006.pdf
[11] LWVE, *Final Boards & Commissions Review Report*, May 2020, page 7.

Transportation – and two-thirds of the members of two commissions were female – Arts & Culture and Community Health. Finally, 11 of 13 student members were female (three student positions were vacant).

While acknowledging the importance of gender diversity, MJ Lamon asserts that there are many other forms of diversity that add perspective to the work of advisory boards and commissions. These include age, race/ethnicity, education, income, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, where (which quadrant; rent or own) and how long someone has lived in Edina, where someone grew up, religious affiliation, and U.S. citizenship (not required to serve on an advisory board or commission).

In its 2020-2021 budget work plan, the City Council adopted an initiative to diversify advisory board and commission membership to make it "a bit more reflective of Edina and Hennepin County."[12] MJ Lamon and Heidi Lee, then City of Edina Race & Equity Coordinator, developed strategies to recruit more diverse applicants and encourage the appointment of more diverse members. These are evaluated and updated each year.

Beginning in 2020, Lamon and Lee added a set of "Optional, but important, Questions" to the application form that still are used each year. Finding no other model in surrounding cities, Lamon and Lee adapted questions used by the City of Minneapolis.[13] They are preceded by the explanation "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. The information provided will help guide how Edina is doing in engaging a wide variety of community members through Boards and Commissions."[14]

Every other year since 2017, more information about diversity in board and commission membership has been gathered through a member survey. The sample size is small – only about 2/3 of members, those in mid-term or requesting reappointment, not the approximately 1/3 whose terms are ending in a few months, are invited to take the survey, and only about half of those respond.[15]

The most recent survey (fall 2023) showed board and commission membership that was younger (ages 25 to 44), newer to Edina and Minnesota, over 85% white, highly educated (50-60% had completed graduate school), and 40% from a neighborhood with a City-recognized neighborhood association.[16]

Beginning in 2025, the City will use a single, consistent set of demographic questions organizationally, for all applications, questionnaires, and surveys.[17]

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[12] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commission in the City of Edina.*
[13] Ibid.
[14] City of Edina Board & Commission Regular Member Application, December 8 – January 21, 2023, pp. 6-8.
[15] MJ Lamon, October 25, 2023 and *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina.*
[16] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina.*
[17] MJ Lamon, email dated December 2, 2024.

Finding: Student members do not appear actively engaged in the work of many commissions.

There are two student member positions on each commission, but none on either board. Commission minutes showed significant gaps in student member attendance.

Student members are no longer subject to the board and commission attendance policy.

MJ Lamon told LWVE members that student engagement appears to depend on the student. Most who serve on commissions are involved in multiple activities, and much commission work takes place outside regular meetings.

Commission chairs and regular commission members may encourage more student member engagement. At least one recent Planning Commission chair seated student members on either side of him, at the center of the dais.

Finally, student engagement may depend on the work of a particular commission. MJ Lamon told LWVE members that students often are active with commission working groups. [18]

Finding: The City has made the process of applying for board and commission membership more standard and transparent.

The City uses a standard, annual process to fill positions on boards and commissions. It is published on the Advisory Boards & Commissions webpage on the City of Edina website. Here is a summary of the post and MJ Lamon's description:[19]

> November – City staff assesses board and commission membership: how many openings will exist on which commissions due to members completing two terms, resigning, or choosing not to seek reappointment?
>
> December – City Council reappoints eligible members, City opens application and publicizes positions to be filled. Applicants are invited to name a commission or commissions in which they have the most interest.
>
> January – Applications close. Every applicant is offered a 10-minute interview on Zoom. Most accept. City Council panels conduct interviews.
>
> February – Interviews end. City Council appoints new board and commission members, who attend a required orientation/training.
>
> March 1 – New terms begin.

[18] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina.*
[19] MJ Lamon, October 25, 2023, December 14, 2023 and April 3, 2024; https://www.edinamn.gov/678/Boards-Commissions-Task-Forces.

Applications are taken online on a form available only during the application period. Although the Advisory Boards & Commissions webpage states how to contact MJ Lamon by email and telephone, it does not offer a way to apply except online. The form itself states that "In order to complete this application, you will need a valid email address. Please be sure to type your email address correctly, as it will be used as a communication tool in the application process."[20]

Finding: The City has made the interview process more consistent for applicants and interviewers, and more focused on increasing the diversity of board and commission membership.

Since 2010, all applicants for board and commission membership have been offered an interview, and most accept. With the number of applicants exceeding the number of open positions almost every year (in 2024, 58 people applied for 18 openings[21]), the City has developed a process and tools "to ensure that every applicant who chooses to interview has the same experience."[22]

Before interviewing, applicants are given an *Interview FAQ*. It is updated each year.

Interviews are held on Zoom. Moved to virtual space during COVID, interviews continue to be held on Zoom "for the convenience of the applicants and to allow applicants and interviewers more time for conversation."[23]

Each interview is limited to 10 minutes.

Interviews are conducted over several evenings, on different days of the week (in 2024, five evenings on four different days of the week).[24]

Interviews are conducted by City Council members serving on panels (since 2022) with the City Manager and one or more commission chairs.

Each panel member is given copies of the applications, results of the most recent board and commission diversity survey, a geographic map showing current board and commission membership, and the *Board & Commission Interview Guide,* first developed in 2022 "as part of the City of Edina's strategy to increase diversity on Boards & Commissions."[25]

The *Interview Guide* states the purpose, goals, process, timeline, format, and preparation for interviews, and includes sections on Conducting an Inclusive Interview

[20] City of Edina Board & Commission Regular Member Application, December 8, 2023 – January 21, 2024, p. 1.
[21] MJ Lamon, April 3, 2024.
[22] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina.*
[23] MJ Lamon, ibid., and October 25, 2023.
[24] City of Edina *Board & Commission Interview Guide* and *Interview FAQ*, January 2024.
[25] MJ Lamon, April 3, 2024, and *Interview Guide*, page 1.

and “What makes a good board or commission member?”.[26] It is reviewed and updated each year; an Evaluation Matrix used as a selection tool was eliminated between 2023 and 2024.[27]

Every applicant is asked the same standard questions, used in board and commission interviews each year, in the same order.[28]

Finding: The City has made the selection of new board and commission members more transparent and more focused on increasing the diversity of board and commission membership.

After all interviews have been conducted, all interview panel members participate in a special public meeting to select those applicants they will recommend for appointment by the full City Council. Each interviewer first identifies five top candidates. Discussion focuses on applicant strengths, balancing skills, increasing diversity, and identifying the best candidate for each board or commission opening.[29]

Any notes taken by interviewers are given to MJ Lamon at the end of the process. The notes are retained for one year, not posted, but, as public data, available upon request.[30]

The slate of proposed new board and commission members is presented to the full City Council for approval by majority vote at a regular meeting (usually in mid-February).

Some applicants not recommended for appointment may be recommended and selected as alternates in case an unscheduled vacancy occurs in the first six months (March-August) of the new terms. If a vacancy occurs after August, the vacant position is left open until the next round of applications, interviews, and appointments.

Finding: The City has created a process and resource to better support new board and commission members.

New board and commission members, before their terms of service begin on March 1, must attend a general orientation conducted by the City Manager and Community Engagement Manager. The date of the orientation is included in the *Interview FAQ.* A City of Edina *Boards & Commissions Member Handbook* is given to each new board and commission member. It includes information on Council, staff, and commission roles, commission structure, meetings, communication, and ethical conduct, and is evaluated and updated each year.

[26] *Interview Guide,* pp. 5 and 7.
[27] MJ Lamon, October 25, 2023 and April 3, 2024.
[28] MJ Lamon, April 3, 2024, and *Interview Guide,* pp. 5-6.
[29] MJ Lamon, April 3, 2024, and *Interview Guide*, pp. 6-7.
[30] MJ Lamon, April 3, 2024.

Both the orientation and the *Handbook* are designed to support board and commission members, who are not required or asked to have past board experience, "so that everyone can be comfortable and part of the group."[31]

Finding: Information about boards and commissions published on the City of Edina website is more complete and up to date, but still has gaps.

The City publishes information about boards and commissions on its website, on an Advisory Boards & Commissions webpage, and on individual webpages for each board and commission.

The general webpage features a brief paragraph on boards and commission, contact information for MJ Lamon, and links to the application page, a correspondence submission form, and the City meetings calendar.

The webpage for each individual board and commission includes the following information:

- Brief statement of the purpose of the board or commission;
- Meeting schedule (e.g., 7 PM second Thursday of each month);
- Roster of its current members including seat number, member name, term number (first, second, or partial), and term end date (the latter two items recommended by LWVE in 2020);
- Name and photo of, and contact information for, the City staff liaison;
- Link to board or commission meeting agendas and minutes;
- Link to board and commission work plans;
- Link to the City meetings calendar; and
- Link to a City of Edina Commission Correspondence form.

MJ Lamon strongly prefers that contact be made only with full boards and commissions through staff liaisons, because each board or commission can act only as a body – i.e., individual members have no authority to act. She asserts that this communication is quicker and more transparent.[32]

Comment to a full board or commission may be made by letter or email, on the Commission Correspondence form, or in-person at a board or commission meeting (on every board and commission meeting agenda, but rules prevent comment on any item on that meeting's agenda). MJ Lamon prefers use of a single method of contact: "A person should have to communicate only one way. Duplicating comment should not make a difference."[33]

Contact information for individual board and commission members, including a residential address, and either or both a telephone number and email address, is defined by Minnesota statute, and must be maintained by the City, as public data.[34]

[31] MJ Lamon, *Evolution of Boards and Commissions in the City of Edina.*

[32] MJ Lamon, email dated December 2, 2024.

[33] MJ Lamon, October 25, 2023.

[34] Minnesota Statutes 13.43 and 13.601

The City of Edina does so in a database but not online, making the information available upon request. However, there is nothing on the general or individual board and commission webpages to notify the public that the information is available upon request, or to advise the public how to request it.

New City of Edina agenda management software (late 2024) gives easier access to meeting agendas and minutes, but includes past records only for 2022, 2023 and 2024. According to MJ Lamon, documents for earlier years are available through EdinaDocs, the City's formal archive system.[35]

Committee members found every commission missing minutes for one or more meetings. No minutes were posted for any Planning Commission work session.

LWVE Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. Better gender balance, among other types of diversity, is important on individual boards and commissions. LWVE recommends enforcement of two-term limits, more focused recruitment of applicants, anti-bias training for interviewers, and prioritizing balanced selections among qualified applicants.

2. Goals for student membership should include, for students: active participation, education about civic issues, and leadership development; and, for the City: civic engagement, gaining youth perspective, and building the next generation of leaders.

3. Consistent attendance of and participation by student members are essential to meet those goals. LWVE recommends that the City improve the recruitment, mentorship, and experience of student commission members by better publicizing student membership; appointing younger students with more time for commission work and less desire to pad resumes; identifying clearer expectations and requirements for participation, including attendance; and conducting ongoing orientation, mentoring, and monitoring of student members.

4. It is important that members of the public be able to contact individual board and commission members. LWVE repeats the request it made in 2020, that clear instructions be published on the City of Edina website and individual board and commission webpages for members of the public who wish to request and obtain contact information for individual board and commission members.

5. The minutes of Planning Commission work sessions should be posted on the City of Edina website.

[35] MJ Lamon, email dated December 2, 2024.