

Memo

To: City Council

From: Joni Inman, Director, Mayor and City Manager's Office
Diana Allen, City Council Member
Ron Burns, Chief of Police

Date: 5/31/2007

Re: Review of Citizen Advisory Commissions

At your annual planning session in February you, as a group, renewed your commitment to citizen communication and citizen involvement. As a result, the Director of the Mayor and City Manager's Office was asked to lead a team that would examine our current use of advisory commissions and make recommendations back to you as to how to enrich the experience of those serving as a citizen volunteer as well as how to make the citizen advisory groups more useful to Council.

Beginning in March, the three-member team began conducting interviews with City Council members, commission chairs, department directors and staff liaisons to the groups we currently have in place. In addition, we researched best practices of other cities along the Front Range and those of similar size across the United States. Some 40 interviews have been conducted and the incorporating documents, bylaws and other materials that have been used to guide these groups were examined. Following are our recommendations.

Background: The City of Lakewood has four active citizen advisory commissions and is in the process of considering a fifth. They are: the Senior Citizen Advisory Commission; the Heritage, Culture & the Arts Advisory Commission; the Cultural Diversity and Human Relations Commission; and the Youth Commission. The fifth would pertain to open space and parks. There are currently 59 citizens serving on these commissions.

Each group's mission originally was to serve in an advisory capacity to the City Council on matters of interest to its specific constituencies. Over the years each has been added without clear direction on structure or purpose. As a result, often, members of the commissions, as well as City Council members, have been uncertain as to the expectations of the group. This has led to a great deal of frustration by both commission members and City Council members. Some groups, in their search for meaning and purpose, have even created their own missions and bylaws, without direction from Council.

Advisory committees should have no role in city operations. Their mission is to advise City Council on matters of interest, thereby providing Council members with thoughtful information to use during policy deliberation.

Consistent Messages and Frustrations:

We found some consistent messages throughout the interviews. Among them:

1. Unclear direction.
2. Too many layers between commissions and council.
3. No formal process for communication between commissions and Council.
4. No communication between Council and commissions during screening process.
5. Uncertainty as to Council liaison's role in meetings and work of commissions.
6. Commissions, rather than serving as a "think tank" or group of advisers, have become event planners. This seems to be out of frustration that there is a lack of substantive work to be accomplished. The groups have a tendency to come up with "events" (i.e. Battle of the Bands, a specific gallery exhibit, booths at Lakewood on Parade, etc.) that city staff then is responsible for setting up and working. During the interviews, neither the staff or the commission chairs were pleased with this role.

Recommendations:

- Create one multi-disciplined group – "Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community." The group's primary purpose still would be to serve in an advisory capacity to City Council. Further detail of its responsibilities follows. The new Committee would begin its duties effective January 1, 2008. Current advisory commission members would be eligible to apply for one of the new positions. It is recommended that the Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community consist of 60 citizen positions.
- Hire a full-time Coordinator/Adviser to work under the supervision of the Director of the Office of Mayor and City Manager. This position would be responsible for facilitating discussion between the Council and the Committee; conducting training; working with the Council Screening Committee on the interview and selection process; serving as the primary contact for citizen communication with the Committee; preparing for and attending meetings, etc. This would create a more direct and timely connection with the City Council.

- The Advisory Committee would have several sub-groups, which would meet on an as-needed basis. The sub-groups would be: (Responsibilities identified in bullets.)
 - Parks, Trails and Open Space Group
 - Review and provide written recommendations on draft park master plans, including recommendations on safety issues.
 - Review and advise on use regulation of parks.
 - Study and advise on regional connectivity opportunities for equestrians, pedestrians and bicyclists.
 - Critique dry run presentations on park and/or open space policy issues to be taken to Council.
 - Providing suggestions and feedback on proposed names of new parks.
 - Annually tour each city park and, working with the staff of the Department of Community Resources, provide a conditions report to City Council.
 - Review and provide comments to the City Council Legislative Committee on pending legislation that might impact municipal parkland.
 - Public Arts and Culture Group
 - Annually tour all public art, provide a condition assessment and recommend maintenance priority.
 - Make recommendations on a public art plan that defines funding, selection, acquisition and placement of public art as well as recommendations on raising money and attaining grants to artists for public art.
 - Work with the Youth Group in creating a teen art outreach that includes tours of local galleries, hosting artist receptions, conducting oral histories of artists of public art, and sponsoring a public art competition in the high schools.
 - Review and comment on pending legislation that might impact public art.
 - Meet with other art groups throughout the metro area to determine where joint efforts are possible and advise the Council on same.

- Review and serve as a resource, upon request of staff, any potentially controversial exhibits for recommendations as to appropriateness for the Lakewood community.
- Environmental Group
 - Research and evaluate environmental endeavors in other communities that could possibly be implemented in Lakewood.
 - Research and assess the cost/benefits of any potential program proposed by the public and provide feedback of same to the Council.
 - Assess the feasibility of increasing recycling endeavors in Lakewood utilizing public and private resources and, if found to be feasible, develop an implementation plan to recommend to Council.
- Historic Landmark Group
 - Review and make recommendations on applications for historic landmark designation.
 - The group will review Article 11 of the City of Lakewood Zoning Ordinance and serve as the standing group governed by that section and will be charged with carrying out all responsibilities under that section.
 - Make recommendations to the City Council on how to foster civic pride and raise awareness of the roots of Lakewood.
 - Research and report on “best practices” of other communities in the area of historic preservation and awareness.
- Youth Group
 - Review the City’s annual operating budget and provide comments and recommendations regarding programs that might impact youth.
 - Work with the Public Arts Group on a teen art outreach program.
 - Serve as ambassadors of information to the student body within the high schools. Bring questions and issues from the students back to the City.
 - Discuss specific issues as requested by the Council and provide feedback. (i.e. how to stop graffiti.)

- Senior Group
 - Review City's senior programming to determine if it meets the needs of "today's" seniors. (i.e. Are the age requirements still appropriate? Is the programming sufficiently meeting the needs of all seniors? Are we overlapping with other agencies?)
 - Review and make recommendations to the City Council Legislative Committee on pending state and federal legislation that might impact seniors.
 - Research and report on "best practices" of other senior groups throughout the country.
- Neighborhood Liaison Group
 - Serve as neighborhood ambassadors and attend homeowners meetings to provide information from the City and to "listen" to issues discussed and bring concerns, trends, or information back to the City.
 - Review, rank and make recommendations on Neighborhood Grant applications.
 - Explore the cost/benefit of a large item neighborhood cleanup and make recommendations to Council as to the necessity and guidelines for such a cleanup. (i.e. Is it needed? Should it be citywide or neighborhood specific? Does the benefit warrant the cost to taxpayers?)
 - Keep the City Manager's Office updated on contact persons for neighborhood associations.
- Business Group
 - Review and comment on pending legislation that might impact economic issues within the city.
 - Attend business openings as ambassadors of the City.
 - Advise Council on issues facing local business owners. (i.e. How will state immigration laws impact Lakewood businesses? Do we face worker shortages?)
 - Host informational meetings regarding how a new law or ordinance will impact business.

- Establish links with area business groups (Chamber, Jewel/Wadsworth Business Association, Alameda Gateway, etc.) and serve as a resource of information from the City.
 - Diversity Education Group
 - Study and provide information to Council on changing demographics and how it might impact City services.
 - Advise Council on how to better involve diverse populations in city government.
 - Meet with other diversity groups within the metro area to determine where joint concerns and/or solutions could be met and advise Council on such.
 - Support diversity education throughout Jefferson County by participating as Lakewood ambassadors in programs and events.
 - Develop a list of community contact points for diverse populations. (i.e. churches and other gathering places for specific populations) which will enable the City to better gather and disperse information to these groups.
- The Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community would meet monthly and would have an Executive Team consisting of a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. The Executive Team would meet on a regular basis with Director of the Mayor and City Manager's Office for assignments and guidance on Council requests for advice.
 - The Executive Team would relay Council assignments to each committee and ensure appropriate action/follow-up.
 - At least one member of the Team would attend each regular meeting and study session of the City Council in order to better understand the policy group that they are advising.
 - The Executive Team would be responsible for recruitment recommendations to the City Council Steering Committee in the selection of new Advisory Committee members.
 - Conduct new member orientation.
 - Prepare and personally present an annual report to City Council in January of each year at a televised City Council meeting.

- Create an annual operating budget based on funding level provided by City Council.
 - Prepare minutes of the meetings for acceptance by City Council.
 - Review and approve all written communication to Council by sub-groups.
 - Makes assignments to subgroups when a request comes in from City Council. (i.e. – advice on political sign regulation.)
 - Prepare agendas and conduct monthly Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community meetings. Meetings are to include giving reports to the entire committee on Council endeavors, giving reports on Council requests, receiving reports from the chair of each sub-group on activities, public comment, and other topics as determined by the executive team.
- The Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community would be staffed by a dedicated member of the Mayor & City Manager’s Office. A full-time position should be created to work exclusively with the Committee. This staff position would report directly to the Director of the Mayor & City Manager’s Office, thereby creating a direct and more timely connection to the City Council.
 - As the Committee is “advisory” to the City Council, no Council members would be assigned as liaisons to the Committee. This is the practice in 10 of the 13 communities surveyed for this review and seems to be the most effective. Council members, without ill intent, inadvertently tend to intimidate and therefore, at times, control the committees.
 - In order to be eligible to chair the Committee, a member should have served at least one year as a member of the Committee.
 - The Advisory Committee should hold a Public Comment Period at the beginning of each of its monthly meetings. This allows, and encourages, members of this group to hear suggestions and concerns about areas on which it advises. It creates a “first line of communication” platform for citizens who might be uncomfortable coming before the more formal setting of City Council.
 - Members would be appointed to the Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community and would self-select the sub-groups that they have an interest in. Membership should be maximized at 60. Members could choose to sit on more than one sub-group. This structure allows for work to continue uninterrupted even when there are vacancies on the Committee. It also

allows good applicants to be appointed to the Committee without concern for whether there is a designated “slot” in which they fit.

- By allowing members to self-select sub-groups and serve on more than one if they wish, the frustration of not having enough to do will be eliminated. This model also fosters more cooperation and understanding between the disciplines, providing a much more rewarding experience for the citizens serving on the Committee.
- Committee members should be registered voters.
- All five wards in the City should be represented on the Committee.
- Groups should be responsible for recruiting members who represent their area of involvement to apply for positions on the Committee and should create and report on recruiting efforts.
- All groups should be responsible to identify and meet with other groups throughout the metro area who share a common interest, insuring best practices yet no redundancies.

Recommendations for the City Council Screening Committee

1. The Chair of the City Council Screening Committee should have served at least one year as member of the Committee before being assigned to chair it.
2. Interviews for the Advisory Committee for an Inclusive Community should be conducted once a year with appointments made at the end of the year for the following year’s terms. (a schedule follows in bullet # 11) Interviews can be used not only to fill openings but also to establish a pool of pre-approved interested and eligible applicants who will be ranked in order of preference. No other interviews will be conducted for that year. Mid-term vacancies would be filled by the eligibility list. If there are more mid-term vacancies than eligible people on the list the position would remain open until the following year.
3. The Council Screening Committee should give advance notice of vacancies to the Advisory Committee Executive Team.
4. The Council Screening Committee should give background on a new appointment to the Advisory Committee Chair within a week of appointment so that a welcome phone call can be made by the Chair and a proper introduction can be made at the new member’s first meeting.
5. Committee members should be required to reside or own a business in the City of Lakewood.

6. Youth members should be no younger than high school age and one year beyond.
7. Committee member terms should be for three years, with a term limit of two. Committee members would need to reapply if interested in a second term. There would be no automatic reappointments.
8. Initial appointments, made in the Fall of 2007 for 2008, should be made as follows: Current Commission members must submit paperwork stating their desire to be on the new Committee by August 31; they will not be required to re-interview and current terms will be honored although ending term month will be moved from March up to January.) Any current commissioners with terms ending in March of 2008 would need to follow the same application and interview process as new applicants. The new Committee members will be appointed with different terms to total (between new and old) 20 one-year appointments; 20 two-year appointments; 20 three-year appointments. This will allow for staggered terms. All appointments made beginning in the Fall of 2008 would be for three-year terms.
9. A pool of applicants should be maintained and updated so that vacancies can be filled quickly.
10. Applicant's resumes should be screened and only those who seem like a good fit should be interviewed.
11. The application/selection process should follow a specific schedule:
 - a. Applications for the Committee are solicited and accepted from June 1 through August 31 of each year.
 - b. The City Council Screening Committee reviews applications and selects those applicants that they wish to interview during the month of September. (Not all applicants are interviewed.)
 - c. Interviews are held the first Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of October.
 - d. Appointees will be notified in late October.
 - e. Orientation and training will be conducted within the first two weeks of November.
 - f. New Committee members are approved by resolution at the first meeting in January.
12. Create a policy for removal of Committee members, identifying cause and action.

13. An appreciation dinner should be held for all Advisory Committee volunteers each January.