Welcome to the Commission!

A Guide for New Members

Prepared by the PLANNING COMMISSIONERS JOURNAL



They jump into the middle of their neighbor's business, staying up late at night to attend meetings, attempting to play Solomon. If they had any sense, they'd be at home playing cards. ... Around City Hall they're accorded the title of "planning commissioner." Whether it's an honor or a burden depends on what you are able to make of it.

Welcome to the Commission!

A Guide for New Members

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AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE EDITOR

First "Daze" on the Planning Board

Many planning commissioners look back with a sense of humor at their first days -- or, perhaps more accurately, first "daze" -- as a member of their planning board.

For many new planning board members, it's like entering a strange world, with its own special language and rules.

The primary purpose of this Guide is to help new board members more quickly feel comfortable in their "job" as a planning commissioner (or, in some parts of the country, as a "plan commissioner"). But veteran members should find much of interest as well.

The first part of the Guide contains some "tips" for your consideration. Many of the tips are from your colleagues -- that is, individuals who have served as planning board members.

The second part of the Guide introduces you to some of the players in the "planning universe" you're likely to encounter along the way -- including, most importantly, your local governing body.

But first, I thought you might enjoy hearing Mike Chandler recount his first days or "daze" as a member of the Blacksburg, Virginia, Planning Commission (since that early experience, Mike has moved on to become one of the best teachers of planning skills in the country ... and author of a regular column in the *Planning Commissioners Journal*).

"I recall rather vividly my initial commission meeting; in part because I had just broken my ankle. My movement was tentative and uncertain as I was unable to coordinate the crutches with my arms and legs. My sense of rhythm -- which has never been great -- was completely missing. In the words of my youngest child, I moved like a 'klutz.'

Once I settled into my seat and the meeting started, it did not take long for me to dismiss the crutches as a problem. In short order, colleagues began using the king's English in a manner that sounded almost foreign. They spoke at length about a PUD and its special relationship to open space. They also spent a fair amount of time talking about floor area ratio and density bonuses.

I was perplexed. The words sounded familiar, but they made little sense in the context of the discussion.

PUD sounded like a dog running loose in an open field and floor area ratio with density bonus sounded like a carpeting job.

But this could not be right. This was a planning commission meeting. What was wrong with me? Was I missing something? What was this language I was hearing and what did it mean?

Fortunately for me, a veteran of the commission took me aside at the conclusion of the meeting and reassured me that all was well. He told me that planners had a language all their own. I would have to learn what was meant one meeting at a time. As my seasoned colleague put it, planning was like learning how to drive: it would take awhile and there would be frustrations along the way; however, I would probably make it."

Mike is not alone in having a memorable first meeting. I remember my own experience. Even though I had a background in planning, I was nervous. I didn't know most of the other commissioners. I wasn't quite sure about how to participate. And, as luck would have it, my first meeting included a controversial neighborhood project -- and a crowd of about fifty people seemed to be focusing their eyes on me, knowing that I was going to have to vote "yes" or "no" on a project of special importance to them.

Many planning board members have gone through a similar experience – or have, like Mike Chandler, felt the strangeness at being suddenly thrust into a world with its own peculiar language.

I hope this Guide will help make your transition to planning board member a bit easier and more rewarding.

Wayne M. Senville, Editor
Planning Comm'rs Journal

Part I:

Ten Tips for New Commissioners

TIP #1 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

LISTEN!

When They Speak, Do You Listen?

"I know you hear me, but are you listening?" Nearly shouting with exasperation, a frustrated citizen confronted her community's planning commission after a particularly heated public meeting on a controversial zone change.

The chair of the commission took exception to her question. "Of course we're listening. What do you think we've been doing the last four hours?"

They may have thought they were listening, but the decision made by the planning commissioners soon after the meeting did nothing to convince a skeptical public. The commissioners voted unanimously to endorse their previous stand on the issue without any acknowledgment of the public comments they had ostensibly been "listening to" the previous four hours.

It is possible that no amount of public discussion would have changed the opinions -- and the votes -- of the planning commissioners, and it is entirely within their rights to reaffirm their original opinion. But once they opened up the discussion to the citizens, they should have showed by their questions and other responses that they considered the public's input seriously before they took another vote. "Why did we bother to come? They didn't even hear what we were saying," is a reasonable public evaluation of the proceedings that occurred. ...

Be aware of what you say and how you say it. When you answer or respond to a public comment, do you engage in a dialogue or in a monologue? In other words, do you have your set speech or point-of-view no matter what the citizens say, or do your responses show you were listening?

One effective approach is to respond to each individual by name. If you are not personally acquainted, give your memory a boost by jotting down their names as they introduce themselves. Then, take care to couch your response or comments in terms the citizen has raised. "Yes, Mrs. Jones, I can understand your concern that widening the street will take out those two old oak trees. Several of your neighbors have also raised that issue."

... During the commissioners' discussion after the public comment period is over, look for ways to give further evidence you were listening. "According to what we've heard today, several citizens seem to think that it is better to save the trees than widen the street. I would like to explore this further before we make a decision." Or, even if you think the citizens are off track, you should acknowledge what you heard, and then go on to state why you disagree.

Most citizens are reasonable, and understand you cannot always give them what they want. But they do want -- and deserve – to have their points-of-view listened to and acknowledged.

From, "When They Speak Do You Listen?" by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #2)

Do Be Attentive

Those appearing before you have probably spent hours and hours preparing and rehearsing their arguments. The least you can do is listen and make them think that you are as interested as you should be. Refrain from talking to other members, passing notes and studying unrelated papers.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #12" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13)

All the People

Listen to all the people and not just those who fit into a neat stereotype of "desirable citizen." Worst traits often come out at a public zoning or planning hearing. But angry, obstreperous or noisy people are not necessarily wrong.

Neither are minorities who do not speak English well or understand bureaucratic procedures. It is important to give polite attention to everyone -- people you may not want as friends or neighbors, newcomers as well as those whose forebears settled the place.

From, "It's Time to Discuss the "P" Word" by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #16)

TIP #2 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Learning the Language

You have been active in community organizations and causes. You are intelligent and enthusiastic. You have even attended some planning commission meetings, like that time there was a rezoning in your neighborhood. You know what planning is all about, right?

Then you get your first agenda packet and you discover there are a few things about planning you do not know.

The agenda and its staff reports are written in a language you only partially understand. Common words seem to have different meanings and some words have no meaning to you: "variance," "findings," "conditional uses," "nonconforming," "mitigation measures." Many new planning commissioners leave their first meeting feeling dazed and confused.

As a new commissioner you need to have some early orientation or training so that you can better understand what is expected of you and so that you can do a better job sooner. The training can come from many different sources. Your planning department staff or a consultant can provide it soon after your appointment. You can attend a seminar or conference with special sessions for new commissioners. You can study on your own and talk to "old" commissioners. ...

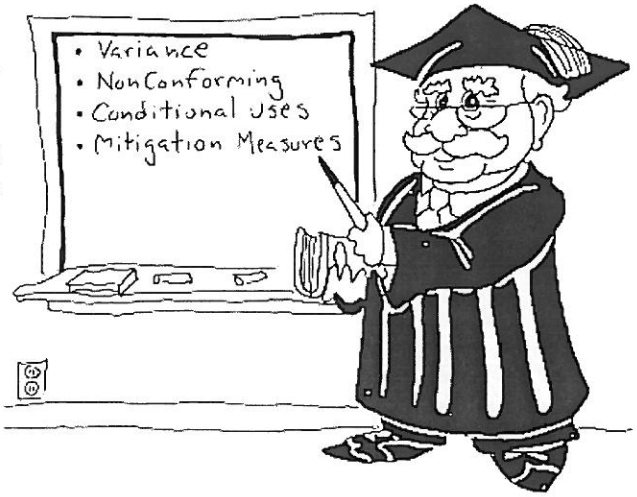
Most of a planning commissioner's work is done at meetings.

Meetings are where you interact with the public and developers, hold hearings, and make decisions on the cases before you. While it is the chair's responsibility to keep the meeting running smoothly, you should know enough meeting protocol to make proper motions. You also need to know your state's open meeting laws and conflict of interest laws

The respective roles of staff, commission, and governing body are especially important. You were appointed to fulfill your role, not staff's and not the governing body's. It is very important that you understand how this works in your community.

Usually the most difficult for the new commissioner are the environmental regulations and procedures. These must be understood in order to make intelligent decisions on a project. These are more difficult because they cover many areas of expertise -- biology, botany, geology, air quality, water supply/quality, and so on. While your understanding of these issues will grow as you gain experience as a commissioner, training programs can give you a better foundation.

From, "The New Commissioner - - Dazed & Confused," by Sharon Wiley Hightower (PCJ #24)



Getting Oriented

Get to know your material and your commission make-up as soon as possible. Zoning codes can be unwieldy and difficult to read through. Mucking through the sign provisions of your zoning code can be pretty tiring. It's better to orient yourself by sitting down with the retiring commission member, the chair, or another experienced member. Let them quickly outline the various documents and maps with which you will be working.

Not only will these individuals concisely summarize the zoning structure, they will often identify the controversial areas, and the political and public hot potatoes that can lead to lengthy meetings and distressed neighbors. They may also give you a better understanding of the group dynamics in which you will work.

From, "Orient Yourself," by Theresa Long (PCJ #39)

TIP #3 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

BE POLITE ... AND PATIENT

Common Civility

Too many public meetings degenerate into name calling and chaos through neglect of common civility. Citizens who brave ice storms, heat waves, or the comfort of their living rooms to show up at a public forum deserve our respect, no matter how we feel about their opinions. It is important that public officials speak in measured tones, address each person appropriately, and otherwise model the kind of behavior they expect from the audience.

Is your tone sarcastic or angry? Most perpetrators of this behavior usually accompany their words with folded arms and frowns. "Well, sure, you just never saw the signs we posted" or "You don't really expect us to believe you didn't notice your brother-in-law's violation." Similar to assuming guilt, this type of posture puts you at a disadvantage because people will tend to side with someone who is being insulted.

From, "Ask Questions Well and You May Even Receive Worthwhile Answers!" by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #22)

Don't Become Involved in Altercations

Some persons seem to come to hearings with the express purpose of "telling them guys down there how the cow ate the cabbage." If you answer their irrelevant rantings, you are immediately involved in a fight. Don't answer or try to defend yourself. You are there to hear testimony and make decisions based thereon, not to head up a debating society.

Remember, you are the judge and the jury. In most cases, it is sufficient to say, "thank you very much for coming here and giving us the benefit of your thinking. I am sure that the members of this body will give your remarks serious consideration."

From, "The Riggins Rules, #21" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13)

Show Respect

Respect the questioner even when you doubt the question. People ask dumb questions ... hostile ones ... tough ones ... all of which you should answer as directly as you can, but always respectfully. Those three little words, "I don't know," followed up by "but I'll find out for you," should be high in your vocabulary.

From, "You, Too, Can Speak So People Will Listen!" by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #25)

Patience

It will not take long after you have joined the planning board to become an "insider." You will begin to understand professional planning jargon and may even be able to decipher plat maps and legal documents.

That knowledge, which is essential to doing a good job on the commission, can also cause you to be impatient with lesser informed citizens who slow down commission meetings with simple or elementary questions.

Patience may be the first attribute you lose when it should be the one you hold on to most tenaciously.

From, "Starting Out the New Year on the Right Foot," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #8)



TIP #4 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

ASK QUESTIONS

"The Only Dumb Question ..."

Once appointed, don't be reluctant to ask questions of other board members and the planning staff. The staff is there to assist and advise the board. At your board's public meetings, ask questions. Other board members, or citizens in attendance, may have the same question in the back of their mind. The old adage "the only dumb question is the one not asked" is true. A new board member will not (and should not) be chastised for asking basic questions to understand the issue before the board.

From, "The Only Dumb Question ..., " by Stephen DeFeo, Jr. (PCJ #39)

Ask the Right Questions ... and the Hard Ones

Learn to ask the right questions of applicants, staff, and the public -- and don't assume the unstated. If you ask the wrong kinds of questions the answers will be meaningless.

For example, it may be "logical" that a developer would only propose development on safe, stable soil. It seems "logical" that he wouldn't want to risk future problems with development on soil of unknown or unstable characteristics. He may even profess to "value" safe, well-engineered projects. Everyone values safety, surely. But neither issue of "logic" or "value" has anything to do with the reality of whether the soil is stable or not. Don't take things for granted. Ask the right questions, and make sure of the fact that the soils are indeed stable.

Ask the Hard Questions. My favorite is, "Is this just your idea, or do you have any evidence to back it up?" No category of comment is more common at a zoning hearing than unsubstantiated "fact."

Comments like, "It will decrease my property values," or "The traffic impacts will hardly be noticeable" will plague you all your days. Sift through the testimony for relevant planning information corroborated by evidence. Keep in mind that aside from expert witnesses, and without evidence, one person's opinion is just about as valid as another's. Be fair, but be discriminating in what you choose to accept as truth.

From, "Being a Planning Commissioner," by Steven R. Burt (PCJ #24)

When In Doubt

One of the responsibilities of the planning commission is to assess the evidence presented. What is often a difficult concept for many commissioners to accept is the fact that you do not have to believe everything that you are told.

If you have doubts about what you are hearing, you can and should ask for better documented information. For



example, if an applicant verbally assures the commission that stormwater management will be taken care of, you may request that the applicant submit an engineering study prepared by a qualified engineer to be made part of the public record.

It is true that if an applicant meets the requirements of the regulations, you must approve the application. However, in reviewing projects, some evaluation of evidence is usually required. Very few codes are entirely quantitative in nature. Indeed, if a set of regulations were entirely quantitative in nature, there would be no need to have a planning commission.

From, "Getting Even," by Greg Dale (PCJ #26)

TIP #5 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Before the Meeting

Preparation in advance of the meeting will make you a more effective board member, better suited to serve your community. It is not fair to the applicant, fellow board members, or the community you were sworn to serve to enter the meeting unprepared. Open the plans and read the documents relating to items on the agenda *before* the meeting. Know what the agenda items entail and what action the board is expected to take. But don't worry about being an expert or an authority on the issues before the board.

From, "The Only Dumb Question ...," by Stephen F. DeFeo, Jr. (PCJ #39)

Have you read the agenda packet ahead of time and prepared for the meeting? As you prepare and find you need additional information, do you ask staff to get it for you?

I'm certainly not saying that you should have all your questions answered and your mind made up before the meeting. However, if staff can gather additional information to assist the process, it will benefit the commission, the staff, and, in many cases, the applicant.

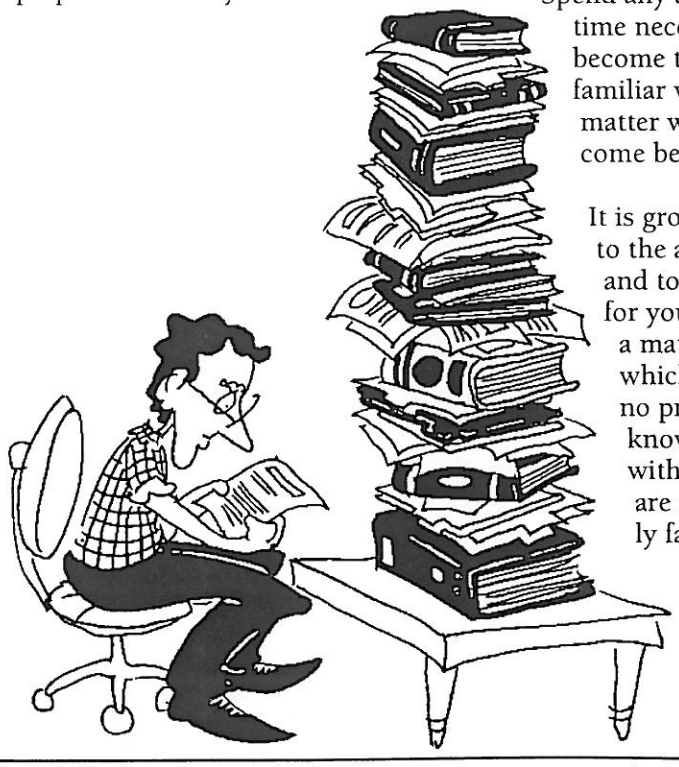
For instance, you may want to refresh your memory regarding a previous similar request. Often locating this type of information requires "digging" in archived files. Staff can either supply the information to you before or at the meeting.

From, "Planning from Different Perspectives," by Carolyn L. Braun (PCJ #24)

Do Your Homework

Spend any amount of time necessary to become thoroughly familiar with each matter which is to come before you.

It is grossly unfair to the applicant and to the City for you to act on a matter with which you have no previous knowledge or with which you are only vaguely familiar.



And you will make some horrible and disturbing decisions.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #7" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13)

See the Sites

A resident in our town sought a variance of a few feet to erect a garage addition he had planned over a decade ago. Now that he could finally afford to build it, he found that the town had changed the zoning. So he needed a variance.

Had I not gone by the house I wouldn't have known that the footing for the house had been poured long ago.

Unfortunately, one of our board members, who hadn't seen the site, asked "Why can't you just shift the addition a little this way?" -- a remark that I thought would cause the poor applicant to have a cardiac arrest. The color left his face, he went into a sweat, and began stuttering!

While no harm was done -- we granted the variance -- as a board member you should do your best to take a look at the projects you'll be acting on.

From, "Lessons From Nine Years on a Zoning Board," by Douglas C. Hageman (PCJ #3)

TIP #6 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

AVOID "EX-PARTE" CONTACTS

"Bending Your Ear"

Consider the following scenario: you are approached by a developer who is considering acquiring a large parcel for development into a major retail facility. He asks if he can "bend your ear" a bit, and gain an understanding of how you might view a zone change on this property to permit the facility. Since he has not yet purchased the property, he requests that you keep his inquiry confidential so as not to inflate the asking price for the property. In the interest of wanting to be helpful, you agree. During the conversation, you indicate your belief that the zone change is a good idea.

... The first mistake made by the planning commissioner in our scenario was to agree to meet with the developer. This meeting would be considered an "ex-parte" contact, meaning that it occurred outside the public realm. ...

The literal meaning of the term "ex-parte" is "one-sided." This, of course, suggests that when you engage in an ex-parte contact, you are engaging in a one-sided discussion, without providing the other side an opportunity to respond and state their case.

Obviously, commissioners can and do have outside contacts with many members of the community, including developers. While such contacts are often appropriate, a line must be drawn when they involve matters which the commission is likely to act on in its capacity as a review body (e.g., when reviewing development proposals or rezoning requests). Moreover, the fact a contact occurs on a matter that is not yet formally before the commission does not eliminate the problem.

The second mistake was to accept something as confidential information. Planning commissioners are, in fact, public officials. Any public official, including those serving on commissions, should as a general rule consider information provided them to be public information. (Note: I do not mean to include information that the commission, as a body, is legally authorized to treat as confidential -- such as discussion of pending litigation or personnel matters).

If information you obtained through a confidential discussion ends up having relevance to a public matter before the commission, you will have an ethical obligation to disclose it.

The situation described above is different than a situation where you have knowledge about a particular property or development from previous experience through non-confidential sources. As a member of a community you often have relationships or contacts that reveal relevant information. Certainly this cannot be avoided and presents no particular problem as long as you disclose that information for public consideration.

The third, and final, mistake made by the "helpful" commissioner in our hypothetical situation was to give an opinion about the merits of the possible rezoning. A commissioner's credibility is undermined by announcing a position on a matter before the public hearing occurs. Moreover, prejudging matters harms the credibility of the commission as a whole by raising doubts about the integrity of the decision-making process.

From, "Bending Your Ear," by Greg Dale (PCJ #24)

Politely, Say "No"

Don't discuss a case privately and as a single member of a body with an applicant or objector prior to the filing and prior to the hearing if it can be politely avoided.

In the event that it is not avoidable, and many times it is not, be very non-committal, ... explain that you are only one member of the body, that you have not had an opportunity to study the matter thoroughly, that you have not seen the staff recommendation, and that you have no way of knowing what opposition there may develop or what will occur at the public hearing.

Be certain that the person concerned understands that you cannot commit yourself in any manner, except to assure him that he may expect a fair and impartial hearing.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #6" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13)

TIP #7 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

RECOGNIZE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Why Care About Conflicts of Interest?

Conflict of interest questions are part of the larger due process consideration of the impartiality of the planning board or commission. Simply stated, every party before your board is entitled to a fair hearing and decision, free from bias or favor. Having a conflict of interest can threaten that impartiality. Therefore, it is critical that conflicts be identified and dealt with in an appropriate manner.

The issue of conflicts of interest is particularly acute when a planning board member has an interest in developable real estate. While none of us like to think that we have given up some right by agreeing to serve on the planning board, the most sensitive ethical area involves a perception that a planning board member is acting in a way to advance his own interests in private property development.

As a planning commissioner you are a public official. As such your actions are sure to be under scrutiny by members of the public and by your local media. The slightest stumble in how you deal with ethical issues has the potential to flare up into controversy.

When in Doubt, Disclose

If you believe that you have a conflict of interest or a situation that could create the impression of a conflict of interest, the safest route is to disclose the nature of your concern to the planning commission. Be sure to make this disclosure *before* beginning discussion of the item.

Let the Commission Decide

Rather than an individual planning commissioner making a unilateral determination on conflict questions, consider establishing a procedure whereby a commissioner may request permission to be excused, or request permission to participate, and let the commission make the determination. This has several effects. First, it removes the burden from the individual. Second, it allows for the possibility that the commission may disagree with the individual commissioner's determination.

Err on the Side of Caution

When faced with a potential conflict, readily agree that you are willing to step aside if the commission so desires. Any insistence on your part to stay involved will only create the impression that you have a reason "to stay involved."

Leave the Room

Once a determination has been made that there is a conflict or potential conflict the simplest course of action is for that commissioner to simply leave the room. Out of sight, out of mind. Continuing to sit silently with the commission or even moving to the audience is not good enough. Leave the room.

An Ounce of Prevention ...

As with many things in life, it makes sense to *plan* for contingencies. Take the time to become familiar with whatever legal restrictions involving conflicts of interest apply in your state. It may benefit your full commission to schedule an informal meeting or workshop with your city or county attorney to discuss hypothetical conflict of interest (and other ethical) concerns and how to deal with them..

From, "Conflicts of Interest – A First Look" and "Caution: Conflicts of Interest," by Greg Dale (PCJ #1 and 34)

Disqualify Yourself

Don't fail to disqualify yourself if either directly or indirectly you have any financial interest in the outcome of the hearing, and let your conscience be your guide where it could be said that moral, ethical, political, or other considerations, such as personal animosity, would not permit you to make a fair and impartial decision. ..

To avoid all accusations of undue influence, it is generally wise to leave the room and ask that the record show that you did so and that you did not indicate by word or action whether you were in favor of, or opposed to, the matter under discussion.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #9" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13).

TIP #8 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

ATTEND ... AND CONTRIBUTE

Be There ... On Time

Don't accept an appointment or nomination to a Board, Commission, or Council unless you expect to attend 99.9999 percent of the regular and special meetings.

If your participation falls below 85 percent during any six months' period, you should tender your resignation. You aren't doing your job. Your aren't keeping well enough informed to make intelligent decisions, and you are making other people do your work for you and assume your not inconsiderable responsibility.

Do be on time. If the hearing is scheduled at 7:30, the gavel should descend at the exact hour, and the hearing begin, if there is a quorum. If you have to wait ten minutes for a quorum and there are 100 people in the room, the straggler has wasted two full working days of someone's time besides creating a very bad beginning for what is a very important occasion for most of those present.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #1 & #3" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13).

Call In

Serving on a planning commission means having to attend meetings. Just as you would do with your employer, you should call the planning staff or the planning commission chairman if you know you will be unable to attend a commission meeting or be arriving late.

From, "Getting the Job Done" by Michael Chandler (PCJ #19)

You Need to Attend!

Failure to regularly attend meetings can result in a number of problems. It can create poor morale on both the part of staff and fellow commissioners. It can make decisions more difficult to reach -- and can, at times, make it harder to obtain a quorum for doing business.

This is a disservice to applicants, as well as to members of the public, who are entitled to action on a project request. Finally, it can cause resentment on the part of those commissioners who are doing their job, and create a poor public image of the commission.

Many absences are obviously legitimate, and scheduling constraints often make it difficult to both prepare for and attend meetings. But often times the problem is more a reflection of the low priority that the ghost commissioner places on serving on the commission.

From, "The Ghost Commissioner," by Greg Dale (PCJ #6)

Contribute

Recognize that you have an obligation to contribute to your planning and zoning meeting, even if you don't have a set of initials following your name and can't name the planner who laid out the streets of Paris. It's not a "chance" to contribute; it's an "obligation" by virtue of your appointment. Study any staff reports, maps, and the like, and come prepared to contribute.

... Planning commissions are places for people who care and want to make a difference to their communities.

From, "Being a Planning Commissioner," by Steven R. Burt (PCJ #24)



TIP #9 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

BE INDEPENDENT & INFORMED

The Planning Commission's Role

A central function of a planning commission is to provide an objective, and independent, voice on matters relating to a community's long-term development. This is especially important since local governing bodies are (quite naturally) more sensitive to public opinion and the demands of various special interests.

Planning historian Larry Gerckens has noted that "citizen planning commissioners were put in that position not to execute administrative chores for city council, but to provide insights into the problems and potential of the community, and to provide leadership in the solution of problems before they arise." (*see, p. 17*)

Moreover, the American Planning Association's "Statement of Ethical Principles in Planning" notes that: "Planning process participants should exercise fair, honest *and independent judgment* in their roles as decision makers and advisors." (emphasis added)

What are some of the basics to ensuring that a commissioner is well-informed, and capable of exercising his or her independent judgment?

First, be sure to open your meeting packet *before* the meeting! OK, maybe that is too basic, but many commissioners have cringed to hear the sound of a fellow board member tearing the envelope open at the meeting.

If you have a professional staff you should obviously review the staff report carefully. If not, then you should review the application itself. Also, there is no substitute for viewing the subject site and the surrounding area. ... It is also helpful to review the zoning code and comprehensive plan provisions that are relevant to a particular request.

Do not confuse independent judgment with personal bias. The comprehensive plan and the regulations that implement that plan represent the policies and laws that you are bound to uphold, regardless of your own personal biases.

Can one do too much to prepare? Always remember that your decision must ultimately be based upon evidence in the public record. Many commissioners, in their well-placed enthusiasm to be as prepared as possible, engage in independent investigation that involves discussing pending cases before the commission with interested parties to that application. Such ex-parte contacts are improper and should be avoided. *See Tip #6.*

Another aspect of this issue has to do with the relationship between the commission and staff. Professional planning staff have the training and ability to provide the commission with valuable information and insights. Planning commissions should take full advantage of staff expertise in making decisions.

However, both commission and staff should recognize the obligation of the commission to act in an independent manner.

From, "Independent and Informed" by Greg Dale (PCJ #36)



Facing Friends and Neighbors

As planning commissioners, I'm sure you have heard difficult requests from friends or neighbors that do not comply with the code. It is hard not to be empathetic with your neighbors. They stand before you, looking at you, hoping you -- of all people -- will understand and help them. After all, you live there.

Silently, you wonder whether granting the request would be that bad. After all, it really wouldn't hurt anyone. What's a couple of feet in the greater scheme of things?

Similarly, you may be called on to decide applications that have evoked strong neighborhood opposition. This time, many friends and neighbors may be standing before you. One by one they make impassioned pleas against the proposal. Once again, you are in a difficult position ... how can you approve this request with so many people in opposition? How could this possibly be best for the community? How could all of these people be wrong?

Your staff, though they may empathize with your friends and neighbors, are usually not under the same pressure as you. While both your job and theirs is to review projects to determine whether they comply with the code -- staff members not make the final decision. You do.

It is tempting as a commissioner to simply make a popular decision. It has been my experience, however, that in the long run, consistent decisions give you more credibility. But rest assured, it won't always be easy.

From, "Planning from Different Perspectives," by Carolyn L. Braun (PCJ #24)



Think It Through

A new member has to do a lot of homework to understand what the whole thing is all about. Also, a new member needs to realize that in meetings there's sometimes pressure from some group to resolve a problem quickly.

I think new members are more likely to feel they have to get this decided, or they'll make an extremely positive statement which they cannot change, or feel they can't change.

It's important to realize that perhaps your first reaction to something may not be the best -- and that you might change your mind as you think it through. I know I've had that experience where something looks pretty good right at the beginning and then as we thought about it, talked about it, and put it over for another month we began to realize what some of the underlying issues were.

From, "A Roundtable Discussion," comments of Carl F.W. Kohn (PCJ #39)

TIP #10 FOR NEW COMMISSIONERS

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

A Commitment to Excellence

There are fundamentally three types of planning commissioners. The first type thinks they should have some title after their last name and planning commissioner is as good as any. The second type believes in giving public service, prepares well for commission meetings, and participates thoughtfully. The third type of commissioner, however, takes this one step further. Because of a personal commitment to excellence, the third type will make an extra effort to become especially well informed about their community, about planning ideas and techniques, and about ways in which the planning commission can work towards creating a better community.

From, "What Type of Planning Commissioner Will You Be?" by Ron Ames (PCJ #39)

Show Some Passion

We rarely think of passion as a quality of an effective planning commissioner. Passion need not be stubbornness or unwillingness to examine all sides of an issue. It does require, however, that you are willing to speak out or hold out on some matters on which you feel very strongly, even if you are a minority of one.

At least once in your career as a planning commissioner there should be an issue of sufficient importance that you will want to be its champion, regardless of the consequences. On the other hand, do not give the same level of passion or support to every issue, or, like the boy who cried wolf, your colleagues and the community will not be able to recognize those issues that really concern you.

Passionate espousal of your point of view requires that you honor and respect others who are equally impassioned.

From, "Starting Out the New Year on the Right Foot," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #8)



Roll Up Your Sleeves

In my zeal to learn the ropes, I rolled up my sleeves and plowed through as many books and articles as I could find. Then, as each project or zoning application was set to come before our board, I researched the applicable regulations and statutes before the meeting, because I didn't want to make uninformed decisions -- nor did I wish to look stupid in public.

The result was that I sometimes had a leg up on some of the other board members, and I occasionally found myself catching details others had missed. ...

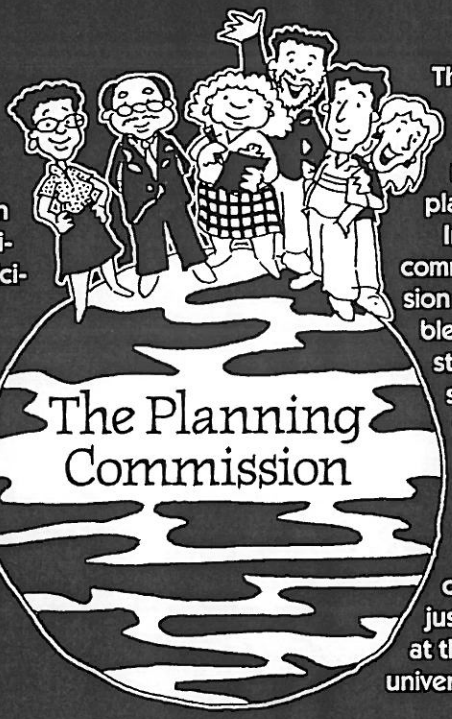
Now, as I drive around town and see subdivisions springing up and new businesses coming to town, I like to take my friends or visiting relatives with me, because it's fun to point out the changes I helped to make.

From, "Skills You Will Need," by Ann R. McReynolds (PCJ #39)

Part II:

The Planning Universe

The Planning Commission



Obviously at the center of the planning universe! Planning commissions often have two distinct functions. The first involves preparation and revision of the community's comprehensive (or municipal) plan and local land use regulations, such as the zoning or subdivision code. This role is typically advisory to the local governing body, with the planning board forwarding a recommended plan (or ordinance) to the governing body for consideration.

The second, and often most time-consuming, function involves review of development proposals, such as site plans and subdivision plats. In some states the planning commission makes the final decision on these, subject to possible court review. In other states, the planning commission recommends a decision that the local governing body can modify.

With both long and short range planning responsibilities, planning commission members can justifiably lay claim to being at the hub of the planning universe!

THE PLANNING COMMISSION

The Planning Commission's Chief Responsibility

Planning commissions have numerous duties and responsibilities. Chief among them is the preparation of a comprehensive plan for the community.

Whether we label our plan comprehensive, master or general, we are, in most instances, describing the same thing. For most communities, a comprehensive plan is the physical manifestation of putting down on paper the hopes, dreams and goals a community holds for itself.

Properly done, a comprehensive plan will describe how, and at what pace, the community desires to develop physically, economically, and socially. The plan functions much like a roadmap; it is a means to an end.

From, "Developing the Comprehensive Plan," by Michael Chandler (PCJ #10)

Forward Thinking Advisors

Planning commissions serve as independent *advisors* to their local governing body on planning and land use matters.

Keeping this in mind is important when considering a planning commission's relationship to the governing body.

Not having the final word can be a difficult thing – especially when the commission expends great amounts of time and energy only to have its advice rejected by the governing body (though, hopefully, this will not happen too often). Don't let this discourage you. Instead, look for ways your commission can advance the cause of good planning, and strengthen its relationship with the governing body.

Remember that as a planning commissioner you're responsible for focusing on the long-term. Most elected officials appreciate this forward thinking role.

From, "The Planning Commission As Independent Advisor," by Michael Chandler (PCJ #23)

Don't Apologize!

They jump into the middle of their neighbors' business, staying up late at night to attend meetings, attempting to play Solomon. If they had any sense, they'd be at home playing cards. Around the neighborhood they may be considered opinionated, nosy, busybodies, or "butt-in-skis." But around City Hall they're accorded the title of "planning commissioner." Whether it's an honor or a burden depends on what you're able to make of it. ...

Don't apologize for being a planning commissioner. Sometimes developers or citizens may make you feel uncomfortable for even being in a position to render a decision. Don't fall into that trap! Acting properly, planning and zoning commissions perform a valuable service to the community as a whole. Since most communities make substantial investments in plans, parks, roads, sewer systems, and so on, they have every right to exert reasonable control, through planning and zoning, over how private development affects the community's built environment and whether development conforms to the adopted master plan and ordinances.

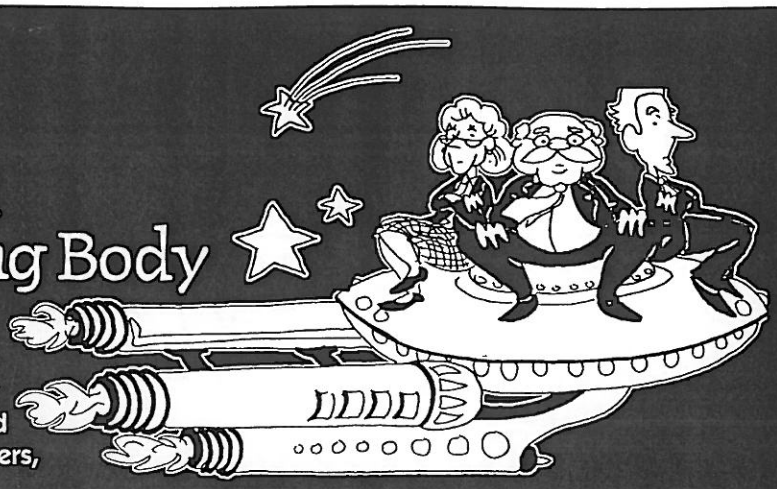
From, "Being a Planning Commissioner," by Steven R. Burt (PCJ #24)

Providing Insights

It's easy to sit back and wait for problems to arrive at the planning commission. All of a commissioner's time can be spent stamping out brushfires and processing standard reviews. But it is worth recalling that citizen planning commissioners were put in that position not to execute administrative chores for city council, but to provide insights into the problems and potential of the community, and to provide leadership in the solution of problems before they arise.

From, "Community Leadership & the Cincinnati Planning Commission," by Laurence Gerckens (PCJ #18)

The Local Governing Body



Your mayor and local legislative body, whether it be a city or town council, or board of county commissioners, are key players in the planning universe. Indeed, a responsibility for setting the planning process in motion rests with the local governing body. In most states, the process begins with the governing body and/or mayor appointing the planning commission.

The comprehensive plan, which is typically produced by the commission, cannot go into effect without being adopted by the governing body. Similarly, the local governing body has final say on the adoption of zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and other regulations designed to implement the comprehensive plan. In some states, the governing body also makes the final decision on development approvals.

Planning commissions need to keep the mayor and governing body well informed of planning initiatives, as elected officials generally like to know what's going on and frown upon surprises.

THE LOCAL GOVERNING BODY

The Different Roles of the Governing Body and Planning Board

A misunderstanding of roles is the most frequent barrier to a positive relationship between councils and planning boards. What are the roles? The Council begins with the responsibility of appointing the members of the Board. It is the Council's job to create a capable Board with a balance of experience and expertise. However, the Council then needs to leave the Board to do its job.

The two groups have distinctly different jobs. Councilors are policy makers. They are elected by and are responsive to the public whom they represent in all its various constituencies. The Board members, on the other hand, are not policy makers. They are appointed to work within the ordinances adopted by the Council. They work within already established policy and do not change policy based on public comment. Even if the room is packed with citizens arguing that a permitted use be denied in a site plan hearing, it is not the Planning Board's role to change what is or is not permitted. It is their role to apply the given ordinance.

If the public does not like what the ordinance permits, then the Council is the place to get it changed. Similarly, if the Board is concerned about the impacts of applying a given ordinance, their option is to recommend changes to the Council.

Even in the process of rewriting or developing new ordinances, the Council is still the policy maker.

The Board functions like a technical consultant to the Council recommending effective ways to accomplish the general community goals requested by the Council. The Council gives a sense of direction to the Board. The Board then uses its specialized background and expertise to make recommendations back to the Council.

The recommendations may be creative and far reaching. They may be more complex or technically innovative than the Council ever imagined. But, it is the Council that makes the final decision with whatever political considerations it deems appropriate. Each role is vital to a smoothly functioning community. But they are separate.

From, "Town Councils & Planning Boards," by Pamela Plumb (PCJ #9)

Understanding Your Governing Body

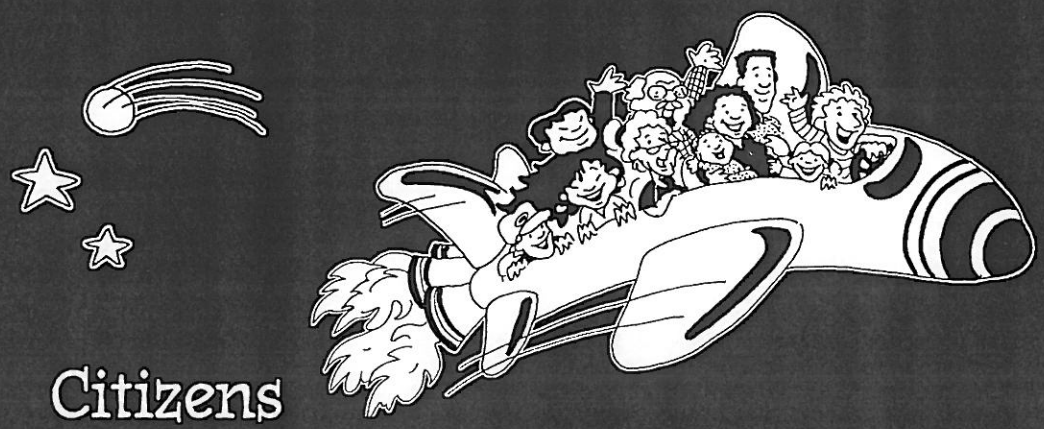
There are steps you can take to at least make sure planning commission aims and policies are clear to the elected body, with the long-range goal of mutual understanding and support.

Attend your governing body's meeting when an appeal of one of your decisions is being considered. It may not be pleasant to hear people disagree with you, but the experience will give you some sense of the depth of feeling of elected officials, and the public, on specific issues. If the commission's findings often are overturned because of form or content, you may want to review them with your staff; if the findings are okay but the governing body disagrees with your conclusions, it is still appropriate to revisit the issue informally to see why you are out of step.

... Be acquainted with the political platforms of the members of the governing body. Did someone campaign for office promising to end all planning as you know it? That is a clue to how that individual may respond to particular issues. You still should not give up. You or other commissioners should arrange a visit to explain your position and the positive results planning has on your community -- and also listen to the elected official's contrary ideas.

Suggest a retreat or informal workshop among planning commission members and elected officials to try to come to consensus on a common vision, goals and objectives. Even if the best you can do is agree to disagree, you will have heard each other and learned something.

From, "Working Effectively With Elected Officials," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #20)



Citizens

For planning commissioners who have just concluded a prolonged or heated public hearing, the happy, smiling citizens illustrated above must appear as a cruel joke or a scene that could only take place in outer space! Perhaps, however, the citizens have just returned from a dynamic and exciting workshop helping to envision the community's future!

Citizens are an essential (perhaps the most essential) element of the planning universe, and one that planners must reckon with if the planning process is to have any long-term value. A challenge facing many localities is deciding how best to include citizens in the planning process. A multitude of strategies, each with particular strengths, are possible. If planning is to succeed, however, the question will not be whether citizens should be involved in planning for the future, but how to get them involved.

CITIZENS

Involving the Public

We all know the drill. We hold a public hearing on a controversial planning issue and the expected proponents and opponents with strongly held and often emotional opinions show up. At the end of an exhausting session, planning board members may be comforted that they have conformed to all the legal requirements, but, on reflection, may ask themselves: Have we received sufficient and accurate information from the public? Have we heard from a cross section of the community? Do we really know what people think about this issue?

Of course, planning policy should be based on more than "just what the public wants." You have to consider the law, political realities, and your own sensibilities and consciences. Still, community outreach is important. Though it is more an art than a science, you are remiss if you rely only on public hearings, or any other single method, to gauge public opinion. Let's explore a few others.

Advisory committees and task forces. The planning department is undertaking the arduous task of updating the comprehensive plan. The more you get into it, the more obvious it becomes that there are many factors to consider if you are to craft a living document that will meet the needs of your community. To help you in this task, consider appointing one or more citizen advisory committees or task forces, each with a specific charge and deadline. ...

Cable access. Cable companies often will be receptive to an offer to broadcast a panel discussion about a provocative or vital local planning issue. Some stations even have a call-in capability so that listeners can telephone questions and comments. Such programs usually do not have a large audience, but with the proper notice beforehand, you will be surprised by how many people watch.

Surveys and focus groups. These scientific methods of testing public opinion can be expensive, but they are the best ways to test a sample of the population. If you use them, understand their limitations. They are snapshots of opinions and perceptions at a particular time, and the public mind can change rapidly.

Open house. Projects with high visual qualities, such as a park master plan, lend themselves to an open house format. Choose a school cafeteria, church basement, or other easily accessible location, and put up displays showing possible options and opportunities. ...

Newspapers. As a general rule of thumb, the smaller the community, the more likely that planning issues will get front page or prominent coverage. But an editorial or a story -- favorable or not -- is only one-way communication. Try to convince the editor to run a short questionnaire that people can clip out and return; certainly, always read the "letters to the editor" column for another way to test the public pulse.

Web page. With the click of a mouse, many people are logging on to city or county Web pages for a host of information. At the least, make sure that up-to-date notices about your meetings are posted. Investigate including information that explains, in clear, layperson's language, upcoming decisions you are considering.

From, "New Ways to Reach New (and Old) Audiences," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #39)

The Challenge

The inability to achieve a public consensus about what kind of future a community intends to create for itself is a fundamental reason land use planning fails. To be successful, planning must reflect the wants, needs and desires of the citizens who live in the community. Thus, a primary challenge facing a planning commission involves developing an effective strategy for getting citizen input in the planning process.

From, "Developing the Comprehensive Plan, Part II," by Michael Chandler (PCJ #11)

Planning Staff

Many towns, cities, and counties employ a local planner or planning staff to manage, in partnership with the planning commission, the local planning effort.

It is important that the planning commission and planning staff agree on ways to foster a mutually beneficial work relationship. Clarity regarding roles, duties, and expectations should be viewed as a top priority. While the planning commission typically focuses on the "bigger picture" associated with policy, direction, and goal setting, the chief responsibility of planning staff involves providing technical assistance and guidance — and managing the planning office's many functions on a day-to-day basis. This requires communication and coordination. As a result, it is not surprising that planning staff are frequently found whizzing through all corners of the planning universe.





PLANNING STAFF

Understand What Your Planning Staff Does

Planning commissioners may well be unaware of the amount of time that staff spends in dealing with major or controversial requests. Staff may have met and talked numerous times with neighbors and the applicant to resolve the issues. In essence, staff often "lives and breathes" these requests for months at a time. ...

From, "Planning from Different Perspectives," by Carolyn L. Braun (PCJ #24)

Don't forget that the staff is there to help you in any way possible. It is composed of very capable professional people with vast experience. Lean on them heavily. They can pull you out of many a bad spot if you give them a chance. Or they may just sit and let you stew, if you do not give them the respect which is their due. Remember that their usual practice is to remain silent unless they are specifically asked to comment. Most of them consider it presumptuous and unprofessional to inject any unsolicited comments into the hearings. Always ask them to comment prior to the final vote.

Do not take staff recommendations lightly. These recommendations are made after much study by professional people with years of experience in their field and are based on pertinent laws, ordinances, regulations, policies, and practices developed by you and your predecessors.

Your job is to temper their recommendations with information developed during the hearing which was not available to the staff. It is not unusual for a staff to voluntarily reverse or change the details of its recommendation during the course of a hearing.

From, "The Riggins Rules, #30 & 31" by Fred Riggins (PCJ #13)

A Working Relationship

Effective staff/commission relations are vital to the overall success of planning in your community, whether your planning agency has one, ten, or one hundred employees. Good will and an understanding of the pitfalls that impede sound relationships can help you solve any problems that may arise.

Resist the temptation to "micromanage." After you have been on the job any time at all, you will become more familiar with planning jargon, and the rules and regulations of your community, than most citizens. Still, you are not expected to be a professional planner. Indeed, you would be less effective as a citizen planning commissioner if you were.

Even if you are a successful professional or businessperson, it is not appropriate to try to tell the planning director whom to hire or fire or how you think the agency should be managed. You should have more than enough to do studying the issues and making policy decisions. ...

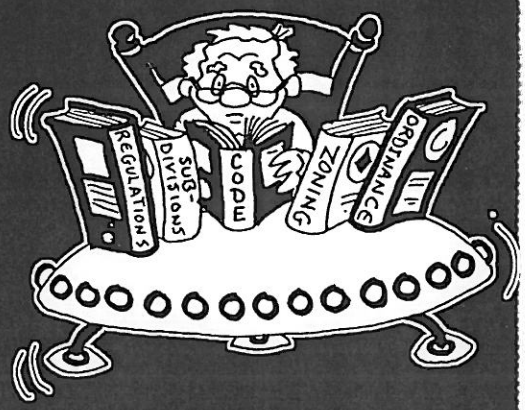
Control your public behavior. Never be guilty of berating, downgrading or insulting the staff at a public meeting. Yes, it can be embarrassing if citizens point out apparent errors in staff reports or presentations. The public meeting, however, is not the place to find out what happened or why ... in most cases, a quiet discussion with staff away from the public can work out seeming discrepancies or disagreements.

Reward good work. A simple "thank you -- you did a great job last night before that group of hostile homeowners" can be just the right comment to uplift a harassed planning staff when it appears the whole town has taken up arms against them. Take your planning director to lunch. Praise a particular piece of staff work at a public meeting. ... There are all manner of ways you can -- and should -- reward your often overworked and undervalued planners.

There will always be some tension between commissioners and staff; you have different responsibilities and, often, different perspectives. But the sooner you can develop a creative partnership -- and the more you can nurture it -- the better it will be for everyone.

From, "Staff Needs a Little TLC, Too!," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #3)

The Law



Planning is a structured process governed by legal principles, statutes, and codes. A planning commission works within the framework of its state's enabling law, for this defines a commission's range of substantive duties and responsibilities, as well as the procedural requirements it must follow.

Any consideration of the planning universe must also recognize the strong influence that federal laws and regulations — and the financial assistance funneled to local governments pursuant to these laws and regulations — have on the local planning process.

THE LAW (and Lawyers)

Within the Law

When considering applications or requests, you are operating within a prescribed set of procedures and standards, as set out in your state and local regulations. When someone appears before you, the question is not whether or not you "like" their proposal, but whether or not it complies with the regulations.

From, "The Ethics of Bias," by Greg Dale (PCJ #11)

Subdivision Controls

The primary impetus to land subdivision reform came from the Standard City Planning Enabling Act, prepared in 1928 by the U.S. Department of Commerce as a model for adoption by the states.

The Planning Enabling Act provided, among other things, for municipal planning commission approval of plats. The subdivision plat review process helped assure that residential streets would have adequate capacity to handle future traffic, and that lots would be of adequate size and shape and have frontage on a public way. By 1968 over 95 percent of municipalities of 5,000 population or more had adopted subdivision control ordinances.

Subdivision regulation in many communities has expanded beyond the early objectives. By the mid-1950s, local subdivision controls were often specifying road construction quality and utility services, and many were requiring donation of land for neighborhood park and recreation facilities.

In more recent years, some jurisdictions have used subdivision regulations as a growth management tool. Others have used subdivision controls to preserve natural features such as wetlands, or as a way of achieving environmental goals such as the control of stormwater runoff.

From, "Ten Successes that Shaped the 20th Century American City," by Laurence Gerckens (PCJ # 38)

Spot Zoning

Because spot zoning often focuses on the single parcel without considering the broader context, that is, the area and land uses surrounding the parcel, it is commonly considered the antithesis of planned zoning. While rezoning decisions that only affect a single parcel or small amount of land are most often the subject of spot zoning claims (as opposed to rezonings of larger areas), a locality can lawfully rezone a single parcel if its action is shown to be consistent with the community's land use policies. ...

Courts commonly note that the underlying question is whether the zoning decision advances the health, safety, and welfare of the community. A zoning decision that merely provides for individual benefit without a relationship to public benefit cannot be legally supported.

From, "Understanding Spot Zoning," by Robert Widner (PCJ #13)

The Role of the Lawyer

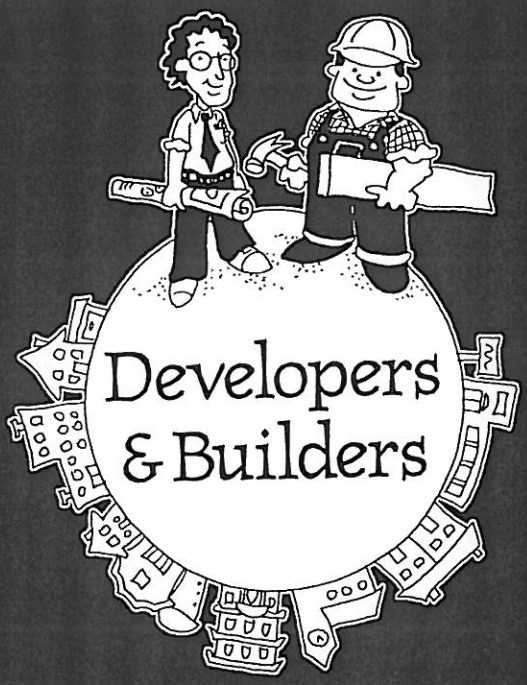
When the applicant brings a lawyer, listen carefully to the presentation, but don't assume that the lawyer is necessarily right on every point, either of law or of fact. Lawyers in this situation are advocates and as such will be selective in the points they make to the commission.

Lawyers who have done their job will be familiar with the commission's ordinance and regulations, especially the sections that pertain to their clients' applications. But a lawyer's interpretation of a given section may differ from yours. Be consistent in your application of the rules.

Ask questions, but don't argue with the lawyer. Make notes of any points where you disagree, and the basis for your disagreement. Above all, don't let yourself be bullied by threats of litigation, unconstitutional takings and other bluster which may come your way. Make your decision based upon the law as set forth in your ordinances and regulations.

Be sure that the bases for your decision are clearly stated in the motion or motions on which the commission votes. Courts do not lightly overturn planning commission decisions if they are in accordance with duly adopted regulations and are firmly based on factual findings.

From, "The Role of the Lawyer," by Carolyn W. Baldwin, Esq. (PCJ #11)



Developers and builders often transform land from one use to another. In doing so, they are acting to satisfy a perceived community demand for a service or product in a manner that produces a profit. This market dynamic is representative of our free enterprise system and is central to sustaining our society. The planning challenge lies in deciding how best to integrate the market with the needs of the larger society.

Much can be learned from developers who realize that markets and market demand do not exist in isolation from one another or from the larger society. Developers can pinpoint regulations and policies which may sound great in principle, but are impossible to achieve in the real world. By recognizing the valuable role developers and builders play in the planning universe, and reaching out to gain their insights, planning commissioners can enhance the quality of the regulatory process.

DEVELOPERS & BUILDERS

Cooperation

Developers and environmentalists are starting to cooperate to change local laws and policies that impede smart growth. Both realize that land use regulations need to be more flexible to allow for innovation. ...

While builders, environmentalists, and planning commissioners will never see "eye-to-eye" on everything, it is certainly true that all these groups have much in common. Establishing non-adversarial mechanisms for identifying common interests is one planning trend that benefits us all.

From, "Smart Growth Trends," by Edward McMahon (PCJ #33)

Building on Common Ground

As planning commissioners, professional planners, citizen planners, builders, and developers, it is up to us to set the stage for higher-quality development and better-planned communities. Rather than trying to reinvent the wheel with each discussion, perhaps we can reach consensus on some issues.

The fields of planning and development are plagued with outdated ideas. Even though the evidence is clear that these ideas do not work, they nonetheless prevail and have power over people.

One of these old ideas concerns the desirability of large lots and low-density development. We now know that developing homes with large lots does *not* preserve farmland and does *not* preserve rural character. Large lots incur higher public service cost and force people to drive longer distances. As a planning tool, low density development *has been a failure.*

Some home builders believe that customers want large lots, but consumer preference surveys conducted by the National Association of Home Builders show that a large lot is one of the first features homebuyers are willing to forego to obtain the home they want. Consumers are most interested in getting the most house for their money in a good neighborhood.

Another outdated idea is that wide neighborhood streets are safe and desirable. In fact, just the opposite is true. Wider streets encourage people to drive faster and more carelessly. Research has shown that narrow streets force people to drive slower. ...

We need to step back for a second and look at the bigger picture. We need to recognize that development does and will happen. In fact, we build about one million homes in this country in an average year. Therefore, debating whether growth will occur is not a productive way to spend our time. Instead, we should be debating the pattern that this growth will take and the type of communities we will be building.

From, "Building on Common Ground," by Joseph Molinaro (PCJ #12)

A Quick "Fairy Tale"

A community fears development will destroy views of its mountains. Developers own the mountains, but must make money or bust. Community has housing shortage. Classic deadlock, classic problem.

Planning Commission works with both groups. A consensus is formed, higher densities at the base of mountains with no development on sides or top. Everyone is happy (This is a fairy tale remember!).

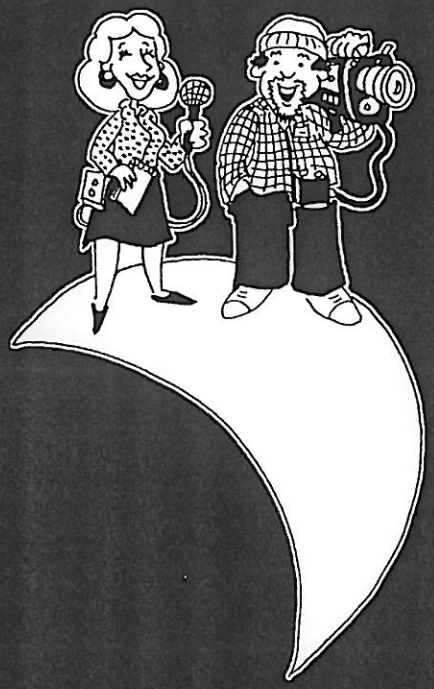
Is the problem solved? Nope. Developers still need to make money and community still needs housing. So developers build housing and community moves in. Now the problem is solved.

The Planning Commission did not solve the problem. They simply facilitated a solution. The community and developers solved their own problem, they just needed help. This is a customer service view of planning.

From, "Customer Service: What It Is & Why It's Important," by Ray Quay (PCJ #1)



The Media

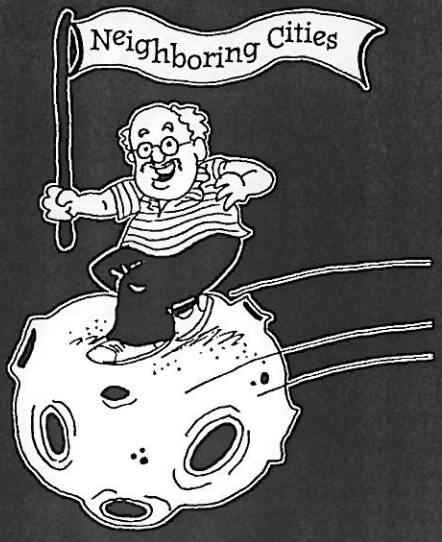


For years, planners were advised that the media should be held at arms length. This attitude is giving way, fortunately, to a new way of thinking. Rather than viewing the media as an obstacle to be avoided, planning commissions are beginning to realize that the media — in all its various forms — represents a direct link to the larger community. Accordingly, efforts aimed at increasing the knowledge and perspective media representatives have of planning and the planning process are being initiated. Working with the media in a manner that is respectful, courteous, and open will yield positive dividends.



Nearby Communities

Each community does not live in its own universe isolated from neighboring towns and cities. Local land use decisions can have impacts outside a jurisdiction's own boundaries. Inclusion of a regional assessment or impact strategy section in local plans — to ensure that neighboring communities' plans are consistent with each other — is becoming a more common practice. County and regional planning commissions are also vital in seeing that cities, towns, and villages work together to solve shared planning problems.



THE MEDIA

Avoiding "Bad Press"

The best way to prevent "bad press" is to take steps to avoid it in the first place.

In most cases, the cause of bad press is ignorance, not bias. Luckily, ignorance can be dealt with in a variety of non-confrontational ways -- ways which, incidentally, complement the mission of your agency in disseminating information to the public.

The most effective techniques are those used before the fact:

Return phone calls. Leaving questions unanswered invites errors and unintentional bias.

Be prepared. This means creating in advance of meetings a very succinct written summary of the issues to hand to the media. Be sure to include a thumbnail sketch of the legal basis for your decision -- the most commonly misunderstood aspect of planning and regulatory actions.

Do not duck controversy. You have to conduct your business in public, and attempting to shy away from controversy will only whet a reporter's appetite.

Do not try to dictate a story's content or tone. Instead provide enough information so that the story tells itself. Very few reporters set out to write an unfavorable story. Usually it is ignorance or laziness that produces one.

Alert the media to favorable stories. If you never call them in advance, then all they will cover is meetings, not all of which go smoothly. Contrary to popular perception, good news goes in the paper too.

From, "Dealing With the Press," by Dan Hamilton (PCJ #6)

Be Open, But Remember

Have you ever been misquoted in the newspaper or found your remarks seemingly out of context in a television interview? As a public figure, you can expect to be sought after by the media. You want to be friendly and open. But always remember that the media are businesses, and as such, report news in the way they believe will best attract and hold their customers. That may conflict with your perception of the specific situation.

From, "What's Your PMQ," by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #31)

NEARBY COMMUNITIES

Regional Cooperation

Home rule says that people only care about what's going on in their own town, but most issues are really regional -- what our kids learn, a healthy environment, traffic, taxes, jobs.

A HUD study of metropolitan regions (*America's New Metropolitan Economy*, 1998) found that where communities emphasized cooperation over competition within their regions, greater success in expanding economic prosperity and creating jobs was the result.

In other words, when cities and suburbs work together they can expect more new investment, business expansion, and employment and income growth than when they act independently.

From, "Metropolitan Pressure Points," by Mayor William Johnson, Jr. (PCJ #32)

What Other Communities Are Doing

One of the problems that I see is to get commissioners to go outside of the box a little bit. If they're just told "this is the way we do things here," then you get a lot of status quo. It helps if planning commissioners see what's going on elsewhere so they can make comparisons between what's happening in other communities and what's happening in their own. And that can be done through trips, through workshops, through books, through articles.

The goal is to expand your horizon. Of course it's very important that commissioners know what the zoning code in their own community requires, but beyond that it's helpful for them to be aware of what other communities are doing to solve some of the same problems they're dealing with.

From, "A Roundtable Discussion," comments of Irv Schiffman (PCJ #39)

SOME ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Less Vocal Constituencies

Never worry that developers or land-owners will be shy about voicing their opinions about planning policies or programs. Planning affects them directly and they make it their business to follow what you are doing. But there may be other less vocal constituencies in your community equally as deserving of attention. ... Before you make significant decisions, broaden the range of people you inform and involve.

From, "What Your PMQ (Public Meeting Quotient)?" by Elaine Cogan (PCJ #31)

A Fair & Open Process

Failure to adopt and follow formal, fair, and coherent procedures erodes public confidence in planning. Rules of procedure assure that all members of the body are treated equally, and that all are free to participate fully in the discussion.

From, "The Commission Will Come to Order," by David J. Allor (PCJ #20)

The Big Picture

When a shopping center is proposed, when the question of what is wetland and what isn't hits the fan, when people line up to protest the conversion of a single family residence to some sort of a group home, the local area newspapers are quick to point out that the "planners" did this, or the "planners" did that.

And who are these planners? Well, they're not those professionally trained planners, with degrees in planning. They are the members of local planning boards. They are, for the most part, volunteers, unpaid volunteers I might add, who give hours of their time, mostly in the evenings -- carrying out the mandates of local and state land use planning laws.

The work, at times, gets tedious. Hours and hours of discussion as to whether a proposed land use meets the requirements of the zoning or subdivision ordinance, is consistent with all the codes, is not discriminatory, is or isn't a landmark, and so on.

There are, indeed, so many items on the agenda that board members sometimes wonder what happened to the Big Picture.

The Big Picture is, indeed, a vital part of a planning board's responsibilities. ... The public, through legislatures, gives planning boards broad mandates. Again, the specifics vary from one location to another, but the fact remains that people turn to planning boards to secure a high quality of living environment.

You get the picture. What society wants from its planners is something more than the processing of permits. It would like the processing of some vision, as well. Not an easy row to hoe. But enormously fruitful if faithfully tended.

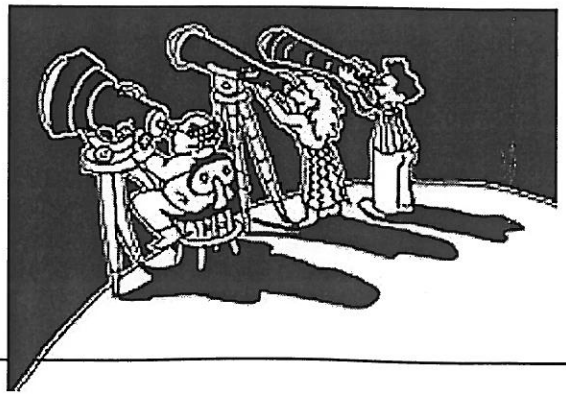
From, "Remembering the Big Picture," by Perry Norton (PCJ #1)

One Commissioner

I'm familiar with a rural county where strong leadership came from a planning commissioner. He did not hold grandiose ideas, and there was no specific project that he promoted. But he was a constant presence, a calming influence, and a fair and honest dealer.

Through his perseverance, his willingness to share his knowledge, and his ability to teach other volunteers ... he created an environment for the county to deal with serious conflicts and major changes to its economic structure in a productive way.

From, "Finding Community Leaders," by Eileen Hennessy (PCJ #18)



Be Open to New Ideas

Avoid tunnel vision and the "we've always done it that way" approach. Be familiar with other communities with similar situations. Be able to direct staff where to search out resources. Be open to new suggestions and be proactive in planning for your community's future.

From, "Orient Yourself," by Theresa Long (PCJ #39)

Serve the Whole Community

When commissioners are viewed as promoting their own interests, citizens may legitimately wonder about the fairness of the process. In my experience, this includes situations where commissioners become advocates for their own neighborhood.

Each planning commissioner is, obviously, the resident of some neighborhood. Understandably, each commissioner also wants his or her neighborhood to be the best possible. The difficulty is when commissioners, charged with implementing community-wide policies, find them in conflict with what their own neighborhood wants.

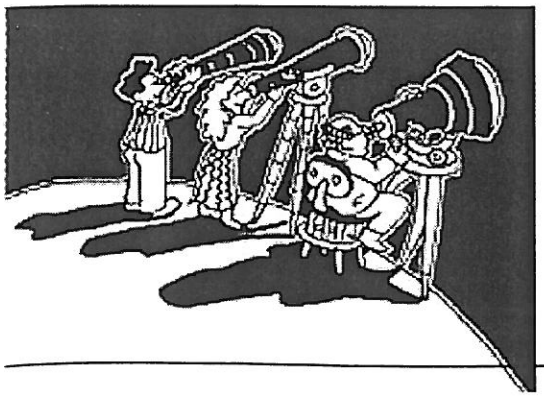
This is not to say that commissioners, through the comprehensive planning process, should not try to improve the quality of neighborhoods -- including their own. However, each commissioner needs to be guided by what is in the best interests of the *entire* community.

From, "Planning Commissioners as Advocates for Their Neighborhood," by William M. Harris (PCJ #27)

Dealing With Change

There are two fundamentally different strategies for dealing with change. One strategy is premised on a belief that change is a threat, and should be feared and avoided. Much like a turtle sensing danger, this strategy involves retreating into a "shell" of comfort to ride out the storm.

The second strategy, in contrast, views change as an opportunity. Rather than being feared, change is pursued with vigor and enthusiasm. This mindset sees change much like the sculptor views a mound of fresh clay -- as something to be shaped, molded, and formed.



Making change happen is a fundamental planning commission responsibility. A reading of state planning enabling authority clearly establishes that planning commissions are to actively plan for the future, in addition to meeting the needs of the moment. In light of this mandate, planning commissions need to identify strategies that will enable change.

From, "Making Change Happen," by Michael Chandler (PCJ #20)

Being a Decision Maker

If you have never held a public position before, understand that being a planning commissioner can change your perception about how plans are made and cities are governed. It is very easy to take pot shots at elected and appointed officials when you are a concerned citizen.

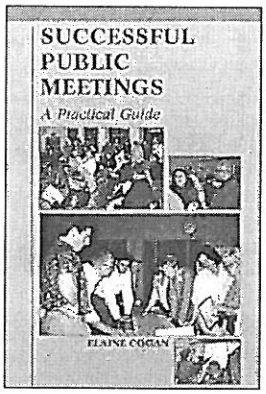
Once you have made the transition to being a decision maker, you realize how difficult the decisions can be. You are often called upon to approve plans that are unpopular with a group of citizens. They may be very unhappy with your decision and stay angry with you for years.

Think carefully before you respond to demands from citizens and developers. Often a salient issue will come to the attention of citizens before you, as a board member, have all the facts. Resist the urge to express your opinion until you are sure about where you stand on the issue.

From, "Think Before You Respond," by Cheryl R. Roberts (PCJ #39)

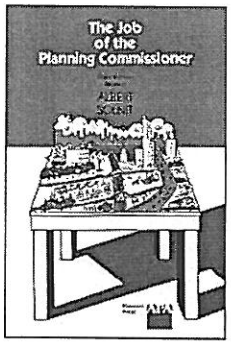
From the Editor of the Planning Commissioners Journal:

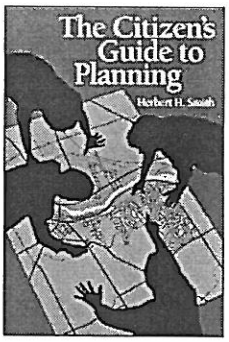
For those of you new to the planning commission who would like to learn more about the role of the commissioner, or about planning, I thought it might be helpful to recommend a few books. As a cautionary note, the following is only a sampling of the many good books you can find dealing with planning issues. I urge you to also speak with your planning director and fellow commissioners to find out what books they've found most useful.



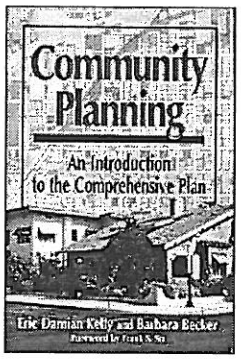
If you need information on how to order any of the following books, visit the "books" page our PlannersWeb site: www.plannersweb.com/books.html

If you've read the *Planning Commissioners Journal*, you're already familiar with Elaine Cogan since she's the author of a regular column titled "The Effective Planning Commissioner." If you're interested in further exploring many of the topics she covers in her column, you'll want to obtain a copy of her excellent book, *Successful Public Meetings: A Practical Guide*.

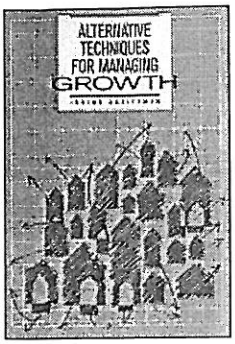




The Job of the Planning Commissioner, by the late Albert Solnit, and *The Citizens Guide to Planning*, by Herbert H. Smith, are two well-organized books that provide a good overview of the planning process and the planning commissions role in it. *The Job of the Planning Commissioner* has especially helpful chapters on understanding the language of planning and zoning (containing short explanations of a number of terms you'll run into) and on the importance of due process. *The Citizens Guide* includes thorough introductions to the role of the master plan, and key plan implementation tools: zoning, subdivision regulation, and capital improvement programs (topics also covered in Solnit's book).

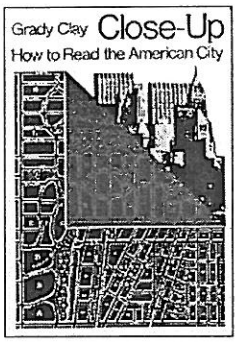


A recently published book by Eric Damian Kelly and Barbara Becker, ***Community Planning: An Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan***, provides a detailed look at the comprehensive planning process, focusing on how plans are prepared, what they deal with, and how they can be implemented. While the book is formatted, in part, for classroom use (each chapter includes follow up exercises and group discussion questions), it's the kind of resource your planning department may want to have in its library (and, if your department doesn't have a library, consider starting one!).

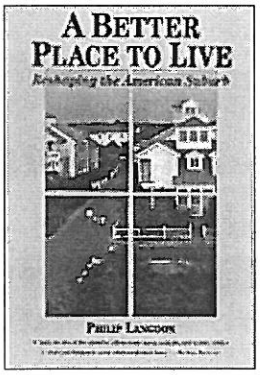


Many communities are dealing with growth-related issues. If that's the case where you live, and you'd like a good summary of various approaches to controlling growth, you (or your planning department office) might want to obtain Irving Schiffman's *Alternative Techniques for Managing Growth.* The book is divided into short sections explaining thirty different techniques (ranging from Adequate public facilities ordinances to Zero lot line housing), including a brief description of how each technique works, followed by a summary of its potential benefits and limitations. While written primarily for a California audience, this is a book planning departments anywhere will find useful to have on hand.

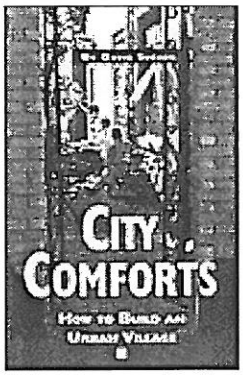
The nature of the American town, city, and suburb, how they have changed over time, and how we can plan and build better communities, have been the subject for countless books. It's almost overwhelming to try to make just a few recommendations. Nevertheless, I think the following may be of particular interest to planning commissioners -- again, my apologies for, in the interest of brevity, not listing many other very good books.



One of the first "planning" books I stumbled across years ago -- but a book just as relevant today -- is Grady Clay's *Close-Up: How to Read the American City*. Clay spent many years as a reporter and editor for the Louisville Courier-Journal. In *Close-Up,* Clay explores how cities are laid out, how different parts of the city work, and, most importantly, how people use cities. A very well-written, illustrated, and engaging book.



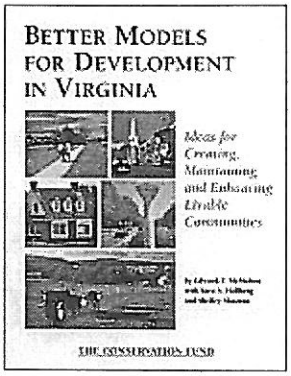
For an excellent look at American suburban development trends, perhaps the best choice is Philip Langdon's *A Better Place to Live: Reshaping the American Suburb.* Much of the book examines how planners and architects in recent years have been trying to respond to sprawl and come up with better forms of suburban development. Langdon condensed some of the principal points made in his book for an article, "New Development, Traditional Patterns," that ran in the Winter 2000 issue of the *Planning Commissioners Journal* (Issue #37)



Former Seattle planning commissioner and real estate developer David Sucher hones in on small steps that can be taken to create better, more pleasant urban environments in his delightful, amply illustrated, short book (really more of a visual guide) *City Comforts: How to Build an Urban Village*. Planning commissioners will find many practical ideas and suggestions. Plus the book is simply fun to read.



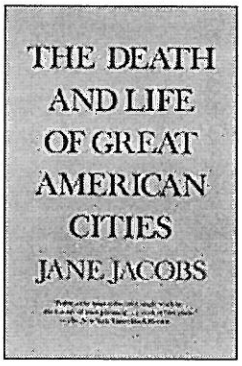
There are any number of books providing information and ideas related to site design. One I find particularly well-organized and helpful is called ***Better Site Design: A Handbook for Changing Development Rules in Your Community***. Published by the Center for Watershed Protection, the handbook offers a series of twenty-two "model development principles" -- focused on reducing the environmental impacts of development. Many deal with streets, driveways, parking, and parking lots. The book includes a number of short case studies, and provides thorough references to additional resources for each suggested development principle.



If you've enjoyed reading Edward McMahon's articles in the *Planning Commissioners Journal*, you'll appreciate his recently published handbook, ***Better Models for Development in Virginia: Ideas for Creating, Maintaining, and Enhancing Livable Communities***. The handbook benefits from McMahon's clear writing style and outstanding collection of photos in identifying and illustrating six principles for better development (such as, "respect local character in new construction," and "maintain a clear edge between town and countryside"). While many of the examples are from Virginia, the book's ideas will be of value to readers across the country.

More Reading Ideas ...

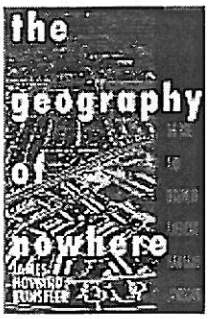
In the Fall of 1999 we invited visitors to our PlannersWeb site to submit their list of the planning-related books they would most highly recommend. We received 63 responses. The following six books received the most recommendations:



1. ***The Death and Life of Great American Cities***, by Jane Jacobs. It's not hard to understand why this was the top recommended book by participants in the PlannersWeb survey. Jacobs' 1961 text has been one of the most influential in the field of planning. It is chock full of insights into how the built environment works, with an especially strong focus on the role of pedestrian oriented streets in shaping neighborhoods. While much of Jacobs' book is focused on big cities, many of her points will have value even for those who live in small towns or suburban areas. This is a book that every citizen seriously interested in planning should, at some point, read. As one person who recommended the book noted, "Jane Jacobs classic book is one that, even though older, gives a lot of inspiration to the idea of good planning and neighborhood values."



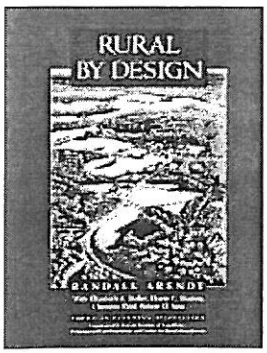
2. *Design With Nature*, by Ian McHarg. One of the landmark works on how land use planning can take into account ecological considerations. McHarg pioneered in the use of environmental overlays to demonstrate how development can be sited while minimizing negative impacts on valuable areas, such as woodlands, wetlands, prime agricultural soils, and water resources. He also helped design The Woodlands in Texas, the first ecologically-based American new town.



3. *The Geography of Nowhere*, by James Howard Kunstler. This is a modern day jeremiad against the way the built environment has evolved in the last few decades. As Kunstler asserts, "Eighty percent of everything ever built in America has been built in the last fifty years, and most of it is depressing, brutal, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading." This is a highly opinionated book, but one that will resonate with many readers. To get a flavor of Kunstler's approach, you might want to look at his article, "How to Mess Up a Town," in the Winter 1995 issue of the *Planning Comm'rs Journal* (Issue #17). As one former planning commissioner who recommended the book commented, "Insightful, hard-hitting book that describes post-WW II development in the U.S.: isolated uses through zoning, poor design, and suburban sprawl."

4. *City: Rediscovering the Center*, by William H. Whyte. Another "classic" in the field of planning. As one planning commissioner succinctly observed in recommending the book, "absolutely fascinating in its simplicity and common sense." The late William H. Whyte pioneered in studying how built environments are actually used, and how this often differed sharply from what designers expected. *Note: unfortunately, this book is currently out-of-print. Check at your library.*

5. *Visions for a New American Dream*, by Anton C. Nelessen. Like William Whyte, Nelessen has focused on discovering what people really think of their environment. He developed a "visual preference survey" method for seeking to quantify aesthetic preferences, as he explained in "Understanding & Making Use of People's Visual Preferences," an article published in the *Planning Comm'rs Journal's* March/April 1993 issue. In this book, Nelessen details how planners can involve citizens in developing a vision for their community. As one planning director noted in recommending Nelessen's book, "A wonderful, in-depth, yet readable 'tour de force' of the best in land use planning principles."



6. *Rural by Design*, by Randall Arendt. An excellent, well-illustrated and written, resource for planners dealing with development in rural and outlying suburban areas. Arendt sets out a process designed to preserve valuable open space and natural areas, while accommodating development. Also by Arendt is another insightful book, *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances.* Excerpts from *Growing Greener* were included in the Winter 1999 issue of the *Planning Commissioners Journal.*

♦

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GUIDE

The late **David Allor** was Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Cincinnati School of Planning. He was the author of *The Planning Commissioners Guide: Processes for Reasoning Together*, and served as a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution.

Ron Ames is a member of the Town of Parker [Colorado] Planning Commission. According to Ron, The Town of Parker is one of the fastest growing towns in the U.S., having increased from a 15 percent annual growth rate (for the past six years) to more than 20 percent in 1999. Ames is an engineer, and began his career on the Apollo program, having since worked for businesses large and small.

Carolyn Baldwin is an attorney with the law firm of Baldwin, Callen, Hogan & Kidd, P.L.L. in Concord, New Hampshire. Her practice focuses on environmental and land use regulation. Baldwin has served on the Gilmanton Board of Selectmen (local governing body), as Chairman of the Gilmanton Planning Board, and as a member and chairman of the Lakes Region Planning Commission.

Carolyn L. Braun is Planning Director for the City of Anoka, Minnesota (population 17,500). Prior to this, she was a project planner with the City of Minnetonka, a suburb of Minneapolis-St.Paul. Braun has also served as a planning commissioner for thirteen years, eight as chair.

Steven R. Burt, AIA, served on the Planning and Zoning Commission for Sandy City, a suburb of Salt Lake City, Utah, for nine years. He was a recipient, in 1990, of the Utah Chapter APA "Outstanding Achievement Award for Urban Design." Burt is a licensed architect and Vice President of Field Operations for Daw Technologies, Inc., providing Design/Build cleanrooms systems to the microelectronics industry.

Michael Chandler is Professor and Community Planning Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Chandler also conducts planning commissioner training programs across the country, and is a frequent speaker at workshops. He is currently a member of the Blacksburg Town Council and the American Planning Association Board of Directors. His column, "The Planning Commission At Work," appears in each issue of the *Planning Commissioners Journal*.

Elaine Cogan, partner in the Portland, Oregon, planning and communications firm of Cogan Owens Cogan, is a consultant to many communities undertaking strategic planning or visioning processes. She is also author of *Successful Public Meetings* (*see p. 34*). Cogan's column, "The Effective Planning Commissioner," appears in each issue of the *Planning Commissioners Journal*.

C. Gregory Dale is a principal with the planning and zoning firm of McBride Dale Clarion in Cincinnati, Ohio. Dale manages planning projects and conducts training for planning officials throughout the country. He is also a former President of the Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association. His "Ethics & the Planning Commission" articles appear regularly in the *Planning Commissioners Journal*. [Note: A collection of all of Greg Dale's ethics articles is available for purchase; either call our office or go to: www.plannersweb.com].

Stephen F. DeFeo, Jr., is Chairman of the Methuen [Massachusetts] Community Development and Planning Board, and has served on the Board since 1990. Methuen is a small city (population 42,000) located about thirty miles north of Boston. DeFeo works as a construction engineer with Judith Nitsch Engineering in Boston.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GUIDE

Laurence Gerckens, national historian for the American Institute of Certified Planners, **founder of The Society** for American City and Regional Planning History, and emeritus **professor at The Ohio** State University, teaches American urban planning history as an adjunct **professor at Michigan** State University, Kansas State University, and Goucher College, **Baltimore. Gerckens** has contributed a number of articles to the *Planning Commissioners Journal.*

Douglas C. Hageman operates Hageman Group Vehicle & Equipment Leasing in Southington, **Connecticut. Hageman** served for nine years on the Southington Zoning Board of Appeals. He **also represented** Southington on the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency.

Dan Hamilton has worked as a publications specialist for the Cape Cod Commission, a **regional land use** planning and regulatory agency. He is also former Managing Editor of *The Register,* a Cape Cod weekly newspaper published continuously since 1836.

William M. Harris is Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning at the University of Virginia. He served for ten years on the planning commission for the City of Charlottesville, Virginia. Recently elected to the inaugural class of Fellows of the American Institute of Certified Planners, Harris has authored a number of scholarly articles and books related to African American economic development, professional ethics, and higher education.

Eileen Hennessy is a technical advisor to the Land Trust for Tennessee. Previously, she served on the board of the Piedmont Land Conservancy in North Carolina and was Technical Advisor to the North Carolina Conservation Trust. Hennessy also has many years' experience working with local planning boards, having served as planning and community development director for Stokes County, North Carolina and for the Town of Pelham, New Hampshire.

Sharon Wiley Hightower is a planning consultant and has served as Chair of the Claremont, California Planning Commission. She has been a local government planner for thirty years. Her firm, Hightower/Associates, provides training sessions for new commissioners as well as other planning services.

William A. Johnson, Jr. is Mayor of Rochester, New York's third largest city. Prior to being elected Mayor in 1994, Johnson served for 21 years as President and CEO of the Urban League of Rochester.

Carl F.W. Kohn is a retired United Methodist pastor. He attended planning commission meetings in Carroll Valley, Pennsylvania, until appointed to the commission in September, 1995. Kohn was also appointed in 1996 (and then elected, in 1997) to the Carroll Valley Borough Council.

Theresa Long is Chairman of the Northampton County [Virginia] Joint Local Planning Commission and has been the Town of Cheriton's representative on the Commission for eleven years. Besides being the mother of seven, Long is also a registered nurse with a degree in Environmental Science from Rutgers University.

Edward McMahon is a land use planner and attorney, and serves as Director of The Conservation Fund's "American Greenways Program." He is former President of Scenic America, a national non-profit organization devoted to protecting America's scenic landscapes. McMahon's column, "Looking Around," appears regularly in the *Planning Commissioners Journal.*

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GUIDE

Ann R. McReynolds has served on the Plan Commission of Webster Groves, Missouri, for three years, and was recently named its Chair. Interestingly, Ann McReynolds' father served on the Webster Groves Plan Commission -- some thirty years ago.

Joseph R. Molinaro, AICP, heads the National Association of Realtors' "Smart Growth" program. He previously served as Director of Land Development Services for the National Association of Home Builders.

Perry Norton is a retired planner and teacher residing in Tucson, Arizona. He is a past director of the American Institute of Planners. Norton has also been actively engaged in online planning, and helped develop one of the first online planners discussion groups in the mid-1980s. He has periodically written for the *Planning Commissioners Journal.*

Roberta Peters is a planning commissioner in Sidney, Nebraska. As Peters puts it, "I'm one of those people who thinks everything is interesting. So I've done a lot of things through the years. Like 25 years as a doctor, 8 years as a journalist, and 6 years as an electrician and telephone repair person." Most recently, she works as a "PC repair technician, system consultant, and web page maker."

Pamela Plumb is a Portland, Maine, consultant specializing in conflict management, group dynamics, and organizational development. Plumb served on the Portland City Council from 1979 to 1990, and as the City's Mayor in 1981 and 1982. She is also a past President of National League of Cities, and has chaired the Maine Governor's Municipal Advisory Council.

Ray Quay is Assistant Director of Planning for Phoenix, Arizona, and previously served in the same capacity for the city of Arlington, Texas. Quay is the co-author (with Bruce McClendon) of *Mastering Change: Winning Strategies for Effective City Planning* (APA Planners Press 1988), and has prepared several articles for the *Planning Commissioners Journal.*

The late **Fred Riggins** served as Chairman of the Phoenix, Arizona, Planning Commission. His "Suggested Do's & Don'ts" have been re-titled in his honor. The "Riggins Rules" were brought to our attention by Bev Moody of the Arizona Department of Commerce.

Cheryl R. Roberts recently completed her term on the Planning Board in Huntersville, North Carolina.

Irv Schiffman is a Professor of Political Science and the former Director of the Master's Program in Rural & Town Planning at California State University, Chico. He is the author of *Alternative Techniques for Managing Growth* *(see p. 35)*, and has conducted workshops and written extensively in the areas of planning, environmental policy, and land use implementation.

Robert Widner, Esq., is an attorney with the Denver, Colorado, law firm of Gorsuch Kirgis L.L.C., specializing in land use and local government law. Widner previously served as an assistant city attorney for Arvada, Colorado, and acted as legal counsel to the city's planning commission. In addition to holding a law degree, Widner received a master's in urban and regional planning from the University of Colorado, Denver.

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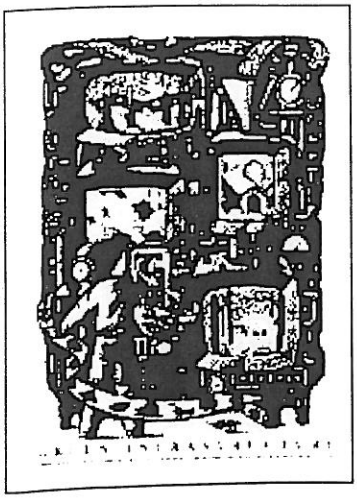
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Reprint Collections: "Taking a Closer Look"

Here are summaries of the contents of each "Taking A Closer Look" reprint set. If you would like to see the detailed table of contents of any set before ordering, please contact our office and we will FAX or mail it to you.

Our Changing Society: This collection explores our past -- and looks ahead. It includes an examination of the critical events that have shaped our society, along with articles on our aging population, home occupations, family day care, and impacts that information technology is starting to have. (15 articles, 44 pages)	**Sprawl & Today's Landscape**: This reprint set focuses on the dynamics of sprawl and land use. Includes insights into how today's land use pattern was shaped, and thoughtful suggestions for change. Articles deal with the challenge of sprawl, and the new interest in "brownfields" redevelopment. (14 articles, 40 pages)
Ethics: From conflicts of interest and ex-parte communications to the politics of planning, this collection of Greg Dale's "Ethics & the Planning Commission" columns will help planning board members understand and deal with ethical issues. (16 articles, 17 pages)	**Green Essentials:** Why green is important to our cities and towns. With articles on: green infrastructure, open space zoning, conservation subdivision design, planning for trees, the role of land trusts, and more. (8 articles, 40 pages)
Planning Law Primer: These articles, all written by experienced land use lawyers, focus on topics such as spot zoning, subdivision regulation, due process, mediation, and other basic legal issues. Also included: a look at the role of the lawyer in the planning process. (18 articles, 46 pages)	**Transportation Planning Topics**: This collection provides an overview of street, sidewalk, parking, pedestrian, and bicycle issues. Several of the articles take a closer look at residential street design. Also articles on the use of traffic calming and the new interest in traffic roundabouts. (18 articles, 48 pages)
New Development, Traditional Patterns: Featuring an excellent introduction to the "new urbanism" movement and the impacts it is having on planning. Articles put new urbanism in context by looking at issues such as: the physical isolation of uses, changing demographic patterns, the role "third places" can play, and much more. (12 articles, 43 pages; note: some of the articles are also included in other reprint sets)	**Design & Aesthetics**: This grouping covers a spectrum of design issues, including sign and billboard regulation, visual preference surveys, gateways into cities and towns, downtown development, and zoning for aesthetics. Plus a look back at the historic links between aesthetics and planning in America. (13 articles, 40 pages)



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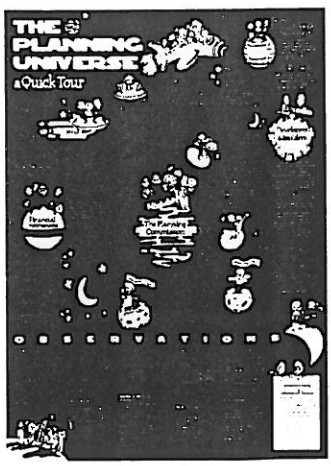
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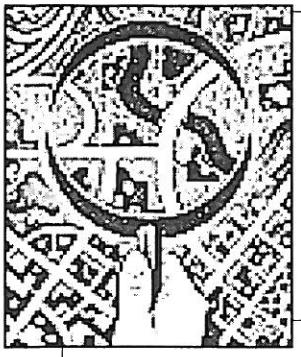
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