



Town of Bowling Green Planning Commission

What is the Planning Commission & How Does It Work?

Introduction

The planning commission is in a unique position in local government. It is an independent commission made up of private citizens with neither legislative nor administrative authority. It is an advisor to a governing body. It also advises local governmental departments and officials, public agencies, private developers, and other individuals on matters related to the community's development. The planning commission's position in the structure of local government greatly enhances its ability to carry out this advisory function. It is placed in the middle of the flow of information throughout the community. This central coordination function can be extremely valuable to the community and to its elected and appointed officials. Plans and proposals from individuals and groups who help develop the community pass through the planning commission.

What Is the Planning Commission?

The planning commission is a legally mandated group of people who draft a comprehensive plan, a zoning ordinance, and a subdivision ordinance. They also make recommendations to elected officials on proposed changes. Planning commissions have the authority to approve or deny subdivisions of land based on the subdivision control ordinance. **Virginia** law [Section 15.2-2210] **mandates** that **every** locality must **have a Planning Commission**. Once established, this body becomes the unit of local government with the responsibility for comprehensive planning and zoning. The legislature carefully defined the responsibilities and duties of the plan commission. They are to create planning that is comprehensive, done on a continuing basis, and free from partisan pressures.

What Does the Planning Commission Do?

As the advisory arm of local government on planning issues, the planning commission has many important responsibilities. Some of the most common include the following:

- 1) Prepare and recommend to the legislative body a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the jurisdiction it serves and other tools useful for implementing the comprehensive plan.
- 2) Prepare and recommend zoning and subdivision control ordinances to the legislative body.
- 3) Review all petitions for amendments to the zoning ordinance and map, and recommend their approval or disapproval to the legislative body.
- 4) Review and approve or disapprove subdivision plats.
- 5) Do special studies as requested by the local legislative body.
- 6) Hold public hearings, as necessary, to receive comments from the public concerning changes to the plan, zoning ordinance, and other land use control regulations.
- 7) Review and revise the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement programs to keep them up to date and adjusted to changing conditions.
- 8) Carry on a continuing program for citizen education in planning and good public relations in the community.



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What Are the Responsibilities of Planning Commission Members?

Plan commission members need to be prepared for the business to be discussed at the meetings. They should take time to review each proposal in light of the comprehensive plan and applicable land use control several days in advance. If a major development is involved, they can talk to the town engineer (or surveyor) or to others for a technical review. They should share any findings with other commission members.

Members should be prepared to act at the planning commission meetings. They should avoid spending so much time on the technicalities and procedural distractions that they miss the big issues. They should not vote on a request until they are satisfied that the proposal and its probable impact on the community are understood. Effective planning commission members serve the public interest and are fair and unbiased. They conduct public business in public meetings, disclose any personal interests, and avoid abusing the power of public office. They should also attend meetings regularly, communicate openly, review staff reports, listen, give citizens a meaningful opportunity to participate, and seek solutions.

Conclusion

Planning commissions prepare communities for growth and change. Their review helps citizens have input and helps county governing boards make informed decisions. The impact of good planning may take some years to be recognized. An orderly growth pattern takes time as well as input from people who care about their community.