



## CITY OF KIRKLAND

Planning and Community Development Department

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### MEMORANDUM

**Date:** November 30, 2011

**To:** Planning Commission

**From:** Paul Stewart, Deputy Planning Director

**Subject:** Planning Commission Retreat Topics

#### Background

The annual Planning Commission retreat is scheduled for January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The primary focus of the retreat is to review the proposed 2012-2014 Planning Work Program. The retreat is an opportunity to look back over the past year to evaluate the various projects the Commission worked on to see what was successful and identify areas for improvement. The retreat is also the time to discuss other general topics of interest.

Last year's retreat began with remarks from Kurt Triplett, City Manager. It was his first appearance before the Commission and it gave him a chance to meet the Commission members and outline the overall City's work program priorities.

In addition the Planning Commission covered the following topics:

- Year in Review (agenda topics for 2010 and joint meetings with the Houghton Community Council)
- Draft Planning Work Program
- Neighborhood Plans
- Public Involvement

Here is a link to last year's [retreat packet](#) or go the City's website and scroll down to the January 13, 2011 Planning Commission meeting at the following address:

[www.kirklandwa.gov/depart/Planning/Planning\\_Commission.htm](http://www.kirklandwa.gov/depart/Planning/Planning_Commission.htm)

Following the retreat, staff will bring back a revised work program to the February 23<sup>rd</sup> Planning Commission meeting. The Planning Commission's recommended work program will be presented to the City Council at a joint study session currently scheduled for March 20, 2011.

**Retreat Topics**

At the December 8<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, please be prepared to identify other topics of interest at the retreat along with the proposed 2012-2014 Planning Work Program. One suggestion is to have a discussion on the working relationship and expectations between the commission and staff. This was explored in an article in the Fall 2011 Planning Commission Journal along with other articles providing various perspectives on being a commissioner from other Planning Commission members around the country. All Planning Commission members should be receiving the Journal.

- Are there other topics of interest that should be considered at the retreat?
- What would be the preferred starting time (we usually provide dinner at 5:30 pm and start the retreat at 6:00 pm)?
- Is there a preferred meeting place (last year we met in the Peter Kirk Room)?

Attachment:

Adopted 2011-2013 Planning Work Program  
Article from Planning Commission Journal





# Commission and Staff: Expectations of Each Other

by Michael Chandler

*Editor's Note: For many years Michael Chandler wrote "The Planning Commission at Work" column for the PCJ. We're reprinting here one of Chandler's columns that closely ties in to what you just read on the preceding pages.*

In my last column, I looked at the relationship between the planning commission and the local governing body. In this column, I want to shift the focus to the important, but often overlooked, relationship between commission and staff.

Historically, the emergence of the planning commission as an important component of local government played a major role in the birth – and growth – of the planning profession. Accordingly, it seems fair to suggest that the commission and staff share a close relationship. As such, a challenge facing both commission and staff centers on identifying ways the relationship can be cooperative, as well as beneficial.

## THE ROLE OF EXPECTATIONS

Relationships involve expectations. What expectations will or should a planning commission have of the planning

*In my experience, here are ten of the most common expectations I've heard each "side" express:*

### COMMISSION EXPECTATIONS OF STAFF

- Be well organized and anticipate the type and kind of information the commission will need to perform its duties.
- Respond to requests for information in a timely and professional manner.
- Prepare accurate, well-documented, and well-written reports that, where appropriate, lay out options for the commission to consider.
- Leave personal or political bias out of reports.
- Provide exhibits, illustrations, and/or pictures to help commissioners visualize the location or layout of proposals.
- Help orient new commissioners, and provide educational opportunities for all members.
- Be accessible to all commissioners, whether in person, at meetings, or over the phone.
- Keep all commissioners equally informed; do not show favoritism.
- Make the commission decision work after it's made.
- Act in a fair, ethical, and consistent manner.

### STAFF EXPECTATIONS OF COMMISSION

- Prepare for meetings by reading all reports and by visiting (if legal in your community) each site on the agenda.
- Whenever possible, call staff with your questions before the meeting, so answers can be researched and shared during the meeting.
- Examine all the facts on a given issue and make the best decision possible.
- Do not ridicule or make light of the staff in public; instead, provide criticism in private.
- Do not assume the staff is wrong and citizen is right when there is a disagreement.
- Compliment the staff when and where appropriate.
- Trust and respect the staff.
- If the commission disagrees with a staff recommendation, explain your reasoning.
- Do not hold a grudge if you disagree with a staff recommendation.
- Act in a fair, ethical, and consistent manner.

staff? Likewise, what expectations will or should the planning staff have of the commission? Without discussing the expectations each has of the other, misunderstandings are likely to result. This, in turn, can lead to publicly aired disagreements or squabbling that reflects poorly on both staff and commissioners.

The simplest way to overcome the guessing game is for commissioners and staff to share their expectations with one another. A work session or retreat can focus on discussing expectations.

If the planning commission and its staff can communicate with one another, the occasion for commission-staff entanglements will be minimized. This is critical because the business of planning is too important to be sidetracked as a

result of differences or difficulties involving the commission and staff.

Remember, the common goal of staff and commission is to serve the public good. This requires, above all, that all actions be taken in a fair, ethical, and consistent manner. ♦

*Michael Chandler is a planning consultant based in Richmond, Virginia. He is a former Professor and Community Planning Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech. Chandler has for many years conducted planning commissioner training programs across the country.*



*This article was originally published in PCJ #24, our Fall 1996 issue.*



### On-Line Comment:

"I am a planning commissioner in a small town (population 1578). Mike's article hits on the very heart of where problems begin, lack of clear expectations. We have a permanent part-time zoning administrator. That is our only staff. Perhaps the most important expectation is CONSISTENCY!" While the commissioners may or may not agree with the job the zoning administrator does, we all expect him to be consistent in administering our zoning ordinance. Lack of consistency leads to public perception of favoritism or incompetence."

— Dennis Riggan, Rock Hall, Maryland

