



Where Success Is A Habit!

Documents List: City Commissioner Information/Orientation Packet

○ **Municipal Documents Section**

City Charter
Zoning Code
Current FY Budget

○ **Commissioner Information Section**

List of Commissioners with Contact Information
City Commission Procedural Policy
Rules of Order for Commission Meetings
Current FY City Commission Strategic Plan / Priorities List
Elected Officials Academy Information
Informational Articles

- The Council-Manager Form of Government: Answers to Your Questions
International City/County Management Association, 2005
- The Ethics of Council-Staff Teamwork
The Institute for Local Self Government, *Public Management*, April 2005
- 10 Habits of Highly Effective Councils
Neu, Jr., Carl H., *Public Management*, November 1997
- Pocket Guide to Conflict of Interest Law
International City/County Management Association

○ **General Information Section**

City Manager Contact Information / Tips on Handling Concerns or Complaints (**attached**)
City of Sturgis Organizational Chart
Volunteer Boards and Committees List
ICMA and MML General Information
ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines

○ **Community Projects / Promotional Materials Section**

City of Sturgis Community Economic Profile
Copies of the City Newsletter, The Sturgis Wire & Sturgis E-Wire Information
Business Development Team Information
Excellence in Neighborhoods Initiative Information
Other Community Informational and Marketing Materials

City of Sturgis
City Commission Procedural Policy

Informational Briefing

As new City Commissioners are elected, it is vital to give them some training and background information before they are introduced to their responsibilities. For this reason, newly elected Commissioners will be strongly advised to participate in an informational session, put on by the Mayor, before that year's City Commission Organizational Meeting. In the session, Commissioners will review the City of Sturgis City Commission Procedural Policy and any other material the Mayor deems necessary. As for Commissioners who are appointed, they should attend this informational session before the first scheduled regular meeting following their appointment. All new Commissioners, whether elected or appointed, should meet with the city manager soon after taking their seat as Commissioner. This will allow the city manager an opportunity to give them a tour of City facilities and to provide any other information they might need.

On Being a Public Official

Being well informed, listening carefully and knowing how to make decisions will enhance those qualifications you need to succeed as a public official: integrity, intelligence and a genuine concern for people.

Being Well Informed

There is no substitute for thoroughly understanding the issues as well as the federal, state and local laws affecting these issues. As a public official, you will receive an enormous amount of information. It is important to be able to handle this material efficiently and effectively.

- Become familiar with the City of Sturgis charter. It is our governing document and you can think of it as the constitution of Sturgis.
- Know the duties and limitations of your office and of the municipality. This requires familiarity with the state and federal constitutions, local ordinances, and the court cases interpreting them – as well as your city charter.
- Know the City of Sturgis. Know its history, its operations, and its finances. Review all reports from the Mayor, city manager, department heads, and citizen boards and commissions.
- Become familiar with Sturgis' plans. Review the master plan, the commission's list of priorities, the parks and recreation plan, the infrastructure plan, the economic development plans, and any other documents outlining the goals, objectives and plans for Sturgis.
- Be aware of current state and federal legislation, pending court cases and other factors that affect local issues. The Michigan Municipal League and the National League of Cities frequently send materials to help you stay up-to-date.
- Talk to people with differing points of view and relevant information. Your constituents, officials in neighboring villages, cities and townships, and county and state officials will all have important and different perspectives on each issue.

Listening

Although seventy percent of our waking day is spent in some form of communication, and at least six hours a day is spent listening to some form of oral communication, we do not always do this well. Yet, it is imperative for you to listen actively and accurately in order to be an effective City Commission member.

Making Decisions

No governmental official can always make decisions that please everyone. Honest people have honest differences of opinion. Making decisions is not always easy; it takes hard work and practice. However, you, as a Commissioner, must eventually “stand up and be counted.” It is this process by which your constituency judges you and for which it holds you accountable.

A City Commissioner has a legal duty to faithfully fulfill his or her obligations as a City Commissioner. That includes participation at City Commission meetings and discussing and voting upon matters properly brought before the Commission. A City Commissioner should abstain from voting only where he or she has a direct personal or pecuniary interest relating to an issue before the Commission not common to the other Commissioners. If a Commissioner believes that an abstention is necessary, he or she should inform the Mayor that he or she will be abstaining from voting on the matter at hand and should refrain from any discussion of the matter. If a Commissioner is uncertain as to whether or not he or she should abstain from voting on an issue, the question can be presented to the other commissioners who are authorized by the city charter to pass upon the qualifications of each Commissioner. Absent a voluntary and proper abstention, or as the result of action taken by the City Commission as a whole, a Commissioner should not abstain from voting on an issue.

Responsibilities of an Elected Official

The specific duties of City Commissioners are spelled out in the City of Sturgis Charter. However, all elected officials share certain responsibilities. First, you must remember you are elected to make decisions as a collective body, not to act as individuals or apart from the City Commission. Together, as well as individually, it is your responsibility to:

- **Observe**

Take a tour of the community with the manager and department heads. Such a tour is especially valuable for you as newly elected Commissioners. You just might discover areas never seen before, learn where legal boundaries are and see where major trouble spots are now and where they might develop.

Keep your eyes open as you go back and forth to work or to City Hall, taking the opportunity to look for problems. Use a different route to see more than just one area. There is really no substitute for first-hand observation.

- **Talk with Citizens**

Direct interaction with your constituents is both politically and practically prudent. Commissioners need to be accessible, concerned and open minded – and you will be if you talk not only with your friends, but also with people you do not know well or at all. Be sure to include people representing various economic levels, professions, occupations and cultural

backgrounds. In talking with citizens, be concerned primarily with listening. Avoid arguing or defending existing positions. Your attitude should reflect a genuine desire to secure information.

In addition to seeking information in a person-to-person setting of your choice, you should also be prepared to receive unsolicited information and criticism from citizens who seek you out.

- **Read**

As an elected official, you will receive a large amount of printed material: minutes, articles, letters, manager's reports, and other background information on issues. Much of this relates to problems and possible solutions, and some of it may help you discover the needs and wishes of your constituents. A letter or a newspaper article may reveal a problem that had not surfaced previously. Problems in other communities that are spelled out in journals or other printed sources may raise the question, "Do we have the same problem in our community?"

- **Establish Priorities**

Now that you have observed what you believe to be possible problems or needs within the City of Sturgis, it is important to establish the priority of each of these. How is this done – remembering that the resources, both human and financial, of any municipality are limited? Even if resources were unlimited, there are a number of activities that would not – and should not – be engaged in by our local government.

Each request should be examined in terms of citizen demand, financial cost, benefit to the city, availability from other sources and even political expediency. A balance should be maintained between the flexibility required to reorder priorities when conditions require and the firmness required to resist changing the programs to meet the momentary whims of special interest groups in the community.

The Sturgis City Commission holds a special meeting each January at which you will work with your fellow Commissioners to outline the goals and priorities for the upcoming year. This list will be your tool for providing direction to the city manager and city staff. It is important for you as a Commissioner to take this responsibility very seriously, as it is one of the most effective ways to communicate the issues you find important to city staff and the community.

- **Participate in Formal Commission Meetings**

The Commission meeting is the final step in determining the projects and programs required to meet community needs. Here, under public scrutiny, a Commissioner must transact the business of the community based on established priorities and data that have been gathered and analyzed.

In Commission meetings, it is important to:

- Look attentive, sound knowledgeable and be straightforward and honest.
- Be familiar with a systematic and efficient way to handle business brought before the City Commission. The clerk will have prepared a concise and easily understood agenda outlining for you – and the general public – the order in which items will be considered during our meetings. This agenda may allow the general public and the you to bring up additional items of business for discussion. Your copy of the agenda will come with a packet of background material and a report from the city manager. These will be given to you before the meeting, to assist you in making knowledgeable decisions.

- Bring all appropriate documents, notes and memoranda to the meeting. Arrange the material in the same order as the agenda so pertinent information can be found easily.
- Have a reasonable knowledge of parliamentary procedure and the Modern Rules of Order, which the Sturgis City Commission has adopted. This will keep the meeting moving smoothly and efficiently, with a clear indication of each item's disposition. However, too much attention can slow down the meetings with complicated rules.
- Eliminate personal remarks intended to ridicule other people. Regardless of the actual relationships between the Commissioners, the general atmosphere should be relaxed, friendly, efficient and dignified. Sarcasm, innuendos and name-calling should be avoided in interactions with other commissioners, staff and the public. This does not mean falsehoods, misinterpretations, distortions and challenges to your integrity or honesty should be left unanswered. They should be answered – and sometimes vigorously – but these rejoinders should address the facts rather than the qualities, or lack of them, of the person being addressed.

- **Cooperate with Other Governmental Units**

More and more of the problems the Commission must face extend beyond the legal boundaries of the municipality. Many – water and wastewater treatment, solid waste disposal, healthcare and drug abuse, for example – cross municipal, township, county or state boundaries and must be solved either at a higher level or cooperatively by several different units.

- **Communicate with the Media**

If you have had little or no experience with members of the press, whether newspaper, radio or television, you may suddenly realize that public figures live in a different world than the everyday public. Anything you say in public – whether seriously or jokingly – can appear in the paper or on the TV screen the same day. An unguarded comment about a person or about someone's idea may be indelibly printed, much to your embarrassment. A poor choice of words, made on the spur of the moment, may be used to distort your opinion on a public issue. It is important to learn to work with the press effectively and comfortably.

Tips for Working with the Media

- **Be honest.** Covering up, lying and distorting statements and actions are guaranteed to establish poor relations with the press.
- **Never say, “No comment.”** It is always better to say that you do not have all the facts yet and are not prepared to publicly discuss the issue at this time.
- **If you do not know the answer to a question, say so.** Offer to refer the reporter to a staff person with more information, or offer to call back later with more details. If you are going to call later, be sure to ask when the reporter's deadline is, and call promptly.
- **Be consistent.** Do your best to maintain the same position on public matters from one meeting to the next. If the facts change or you think through an issue and come to a rational change in opinion, be sure to carefully explain that to the media.
- **Be cautious.** Even though you may trust a reporter, remember that reporters have a story to get and that what you as a public official say, think or do, is news.
- **Do not make statements “off the record.”** They will only come back to haunt you later.

- **Be positive in your attitude toward the press.** The media can help the Mayor, manager and Commission communicate the work of the municipality to the citizens of Sturgis. A good working relationship can be established if the commission is open in its dealings with the press. Under the Open Meetings Act, the press is entitled to attend all public meetings. Provide members of the press with copies of reports, recommendations and other documents related to the business of the City and initiate contact with reporters rather than waiting for them to come to you.
- **Speaking on behalf of the City Commission.** Commissioners should remember that they speak with one voice through the actions taken at a Commission meeting. When one Commissioner speaks to the press however, that Commissioner should remind the press that they are speaking to them on their own behalf, and not on behalf of the Commission as a whole. A single Commissioner should not attempt to interpret the thoughts of their fellow Commissioners.

Guidelines for City Commissioners

Form of Government

The City of Sturgis has a council-manager form of government established pursuant to the Michigan Home Rule Cities Act. In this form of local government, the City Commission appoints a professionally trained and experienced City Manager to administer the day-to-day operations of the City and to make recommendations to the City Commission. The City Commission as a whole, through resolutions and ordinances, establishes basic policy that the City Manager and City Staff implement and administer. One of the major roles of the City Commission is to review, revise, and finally approve the proposed annual budget. The council-manager form of local government requires administrative sensitivity to the policy-making role of the City Commission, as well as Commission sensitivity and regard for the administrative role of the city manager and city administrative staff.

City Negotiations

The City is regularly involved in negotiations, including labor negotiations with employee organizations, leases, development issues, land transfers, and other similar matters. The City Commission's proper role is to provide overall policy direction to the City Manager or other negotiators. The City Commission as a body and individual City Commissioners should not try to conduct negotiations nor should the City Commission intercede in negotiations being conducted by the city staff except in policy-making formats.

City Commission Lobbying

Lobbying of the city's administrative staff by City Commission members is inappropriate. Staff members should be allowed to objectively study or review matters under consideration to which a report is presented to the City Commission. Due to concerns with potential Open Meetings Act violations, Commissioners should refrain from lobbying each other for a potential consensus vote outside of official public meetings.

Attorney Client Communications

The City Commission may require guidance from the City Attorney from time to time and may require that this guidance be communicated privately. Letters from the City Attorney to the City

Commission and to the city manager and city staff are privileged communications between legal council and client. They may be marked confidential or privileged, and if confidential or privileged, they are not to be released to any party without prior authorization of the city manager or the City Commission. To do so unilaterally would unnecessarily compromise the city's legal position and prevents the City Commission from discussing those opinions in a closed session. All requests or communications to the City Attorney by individual City Commissioner members should be processed through the city manager or Mayor.

All meetings of the City Commission are subject to the Open Meetings Act. A closed session may be held for specific purposes authorized by the Open Meetings Act upon a successful two-third roll call vote of the commissioners. All discussions and information provided during a closed session should remain confidential and should not be disclosed by a Commissioner to any individual not present during the closed session. No formal action of the commission can be taken in a closed session. A violation of the Open Meetings Act can subject a public official to personal liability and any intentional violation can be the grounds for a misdemeanor conviction.

Committee Reports to the City Commission

As a part of their positions, City Commissioners are appointed to serve as representatives and liaisons on City Boards and Commissions. While sitting on these Boards and Commissions, they are responsible to represent the City Commission as a whole. This representation should consist of clear, constant and open communication with the rest of the City Commission so that they might best understand what is happening within the City of Sturgis.

City Commission Members' Involvement in Administrative Meetings

City staff may be involved in various preliminary project meetings with citizens, consultants, and prospective developers and so forth at any point in time. The City Commission hires the city manager to perform these preliminary functions. There are occasionally some situations that call for meetings between the Mayor or a designated City Commissioners and the city staff where they will all be involved.

Trust and Team Building Between City Commissioners and City Staff

Boundaries should be put in place for department heads, other members of city staff, boards and commissions and the City Commission. City Commission members often have different definitions and levels of trust for each other and city staff. Through the development of boundaries or limits, trust increases. City Commissioners do not want to read about issues or topics in the local newspaper without being advised first. The City Commission recognizes in some instances that the city staff does not always control or know about issues that are publicly reported. During City Commission meetings, the Mayor should deter City Commissioners from becoming disrespectful, creating a situation, interrogating city staff members, making rude comments or in any way appearing to be less than civil toward each other, city staff, petitioners, and the general public. City Commissioners should advise the City Manager, in private, if they have problems with any department head or city staff member. If City Commissioners are not satisfied with the solution or if problems continue, the City Commissioner may bring it to the attention of the entire City Commission in order to get it on the public record, but they should do so in a very polite, civil manner.

Dress Codes for City Commissioners

The title of City Commissioner is one that commands respect and dignity. In order to embrace this ideal, a certain level of dress is expected at meetings of the City Commission. Although suits and ties for the men, and dresses or skirts for the women, are not required, a minimum of “business casual” dress will be expected of Commissioners at all regular City Commission meetings. During the summer months, Memorial Day through Labor Day, a more relaxed attire will be accepted; a more formal attire will be expected the rest of the time.

City Commissioner Expenses and Pay

City Commissioners are paid every three months. The annual rate of pay is \$2,500 for the Mayor and \$2,000 for Commissioners. The city will be responsible for paying for Commissioners attending conferences and classes, such as those put on by the Michigan Municipal League. Only in two specific cases, the Annual Boards and Commissions Banquet and Mayor’s Exchange/Michigan Week events, will the city reimburse Commissioners for expenses accrued by their spouses or significant others.

Training

City Commissioners are encouraged to take advantage of the many training opportunities that are offered throughout the State. The Michigan Municipal League, which the City of Sturgis is a member, offers different types of seminars throughout the year and in many locations. Newly elected or appointed Commissioners are encouraged to attend the League’s elected official’s academies which can provide information about the responsibilities of the office, knowledge of critical rules and procedures, and insight on being an effective leader. Experienced Commissioners can continue to gain knowledge on specific topics and changing regulations and are encouraged to attend seminars totaling at least two hours per year.

The City of Sturgis adopted a resolution designating the national Incident Management System (NIMS) as the basis for all incident management in the city. As a part of this program, many city officials are required to be trained on parts of the system, specifically IS 100/200 and 700/800. As part of NIMS, the Mayor and Vice-Mayor are required to receive this training.