



GENERAL PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The General Plan is a major community-wide effort that involves a number of diverse participants. The purpose of this paper is to summarize to community members the roles and responsibilities of those participants so their involvement in the General Plan process is clearly defined and understood. In addition, the paper provides a set of rules and procedures for the General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), which will act as the Committee's By-Laws.

What is a General Plan?

The General Plan is one of California's most important planning tools. The General Plan is a long-range planning document that represents the community's view of its future; it is a blueprint for a city or county's growth and development. Typically, city councils, boards of supervisors, and planning commissions use the goals and policies of the General Plan as a basis on which to guide land use decisions; city staff uses the General Plan to guide recommendations on development and decisions about implementation strategies and capital improvements, which in turn, impact operational and budget decisions. As a result, the General Plan will also establish a framework for self-governance for the City of Westminster.

General Plans are required to address a range of topics and issues. The City's General Plan will be comprised of seven State-mandated chapters, or "elements" which include: land use, circulation, noise, housing, safety, conservation and open space. In addition to the elements required by State law, a city or county may adopt other elements that relate to its physical development. Once an optional element is adopted by the City Council, it has the same force and effect as the statutory elements.

Westminster's General Plan will be drafted to reflect the local values and priorities of the City's diverse communities as well as the unique attributes that distinguish Westminster from other cities in the region. The General Plan will also develop strategies to sustain the quality of life and economic prosperity desired by City residents and businesses.

What is a GPAC?

The General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) is an ad hoc committee established by the City of Westminster for purposes of the General Plan. The GPAC will serve as one of the primary channels for the community to make recommendations to the City Council on the updated Westminster General Plan.

The purpose of the GPAC is to provide recommendations to City Staff and to the consultant team regarding strategic milestones in the process (Vision, Land Use Plan, Focus Areas, etc.). Another crucial function of the GPAC is to assist in the formation of City goals. What do people say they want in their City? How can this be translated into a set of compatible, consistent, long and short-range City goals? Through its recommendations the GPAC can help make these goals a part of the decision-making process, recognizing that the determination of what items are included in the General Plan ultimately rests with City Council.

Participation by members appointed to the GPAC is temporary; the roles and responsibilities of its members will terminate with City Council Adoption of the General Plan, which is anticipated to occur in 30 months.

Participant Roles and Responsibilities

City Council – Legislative body directing the affairs of the City

- Authorized the preparation of the General Plan and approved the budget.
- Provides overall policy direction for the General Plan.
- Resolves City policy issues and major budget/scope adjustments as necessary throughout the General Plan preparation process.
- Certifies the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that accompanies the General Plan.
- Conducts public study sessions and/or hearings on the General Plan and EIR.
- Adopts the General Plan as recommended by the Planning Commission or as modified by the City Council.

Planning Commission – Chief advisory body on community planning and development matters

- Conducts public study sessions and public hearings on the General Plan and EIR.
- Advises the City Council on recommendations for approval, modification, or deletion of goals, policies or programs proposed in the General Plan.

GPAC – Appointed special advisory body on the General Plan

- Provides feedback to City staff and the consultant team on the planning process and its products.
- Informs City staff and the consultant team of information that is valuable to the process or issues/opinions that should be taken into consideration as part of the General Plan preparation.
- Passes on knowledge to the community on General Plan related topics.
- Reviews and discusses items proposed by City staff or the consultant team.
- Stays familiar with, and seeks policy consistency with the City's Vision during General Plan policy deliberations.
- Serves as an ambassador for the General Plan process; provides the community at large with information about the General Plan process.
- Irrespective of individual perspectives or preferences, seeks the benefit of the entire community in recommendations

City Staff – Key City resources facilitating the preparation of the General Plan and providing technical and logistical support

- Provides input regarding professional, technical, administrative and policy insights and implications on topics being discussed.
- Manages consultant team's work program and products.
- Reviews and modifies consultant products as necessary to insure consistency with City policy and practice.
- Arranges for logistics and support of each meeting/workshop.
- Distributes materials for the GPAC approximately one week prior to scheduled meetings.
- Prepares and presents staff reports as appropriate.
- Documents meeting deliberations in the form of annotated action minutes.
- Oversees schedule modifications and compliance.
- Keeps consultant team informed of current City activities and issues that relate to the General Plan.

Consultant Team – Advisors hired by the City to provide technical support and serve as an extension of City staff during the duration of the General Plan process

- Complies with the adopted Scope of Work.
- Submits draft documents identified in the Scope of Work to City staff for review, revision and distribution as required.
- Prepares consultant technical reports as specified in the Scope of Work.
- Provides input regarding professional, technical and policy insights.
- Assists in clarifying issues, providing options and evaluating the implications of topics being discussed.
- Recommends methods to resolve policy issues when conflict arises.
- Advises on schedule or procedural matters.
- Presents consultant-prepared work products to decision-makers, city staff, and the public.
- Coordinates with agencies and other organizations outside of City Hall in the preparation of work products.

Participation in the General Plan Advisory Committee

The following is a summary of important considerations to keep in mind as you undertake your commitment to the City.

Representing the GPAC

Individual GPAC members must be careful not to represent their own views or recommendations as those of the body unless the majority has officially voted on the issue. Public statements should contain no promises binding the Committee or the Council.

Maintaining Community-wide Perspective

Although GPAC members may be selected in part on the basis of representing clearly defined groups or neighborhoods, in order to assume that all interests are voiced and considered, each member should represent the overall public and not that of an exclusive group or interest.

Keeping the Lines of Communication Open

The GPAC members will serve as liaisons between the City and the general public in helping to educate and receive input from the community. Therefore, each member must serve as a communication link between the community and the City, explaining City programs and recommendations, as well as providing a channel for citizen expression. To properly represent the community, members must be accessible to the public so they can receive input as to the sentiment and opinions of their fellow residents.

Be Conscious of your Relationship to Elected and Appointed Officials and City Staff

Good relations with elected and appointed officials and City staff are necessary for the successful operation of any Committee. It is important that each member respect the authority of those who, in the end, will be charged with the final responsibility for action taken by the City. To avoid placing the City staff in a compromising position and to facilitate effective communication, your actions as a member should be done with the approval of the body. In contacting City personnel on business matters, the proper channel is through the staff liaison appointed to your advisory group (in this case it is the Planning Manager).

Establishing a Good Relationship with Other Members

On many occasions, the success or failure of a GPAC will depend upon the degree of cooperation among the individual members. In order to build a consensus around common goals and objectives, members will often first have to reconcile contradictory viewpoints and show a willingness to objectively consider the issues.

Another way of developing this cooperation is for each member to do their part to ensure that meetings proceed in an orderly manner. The Chairperson is primarily responsible for seeing that meetings are conducted in an expeditious and thorough fashion. However, each member can help by becoming familiar with the basic rules of parliamentary procedure and by adequately preparing for meetings.

Participation in Political Activities

Local government elections in California are generally nonpartisan. Council appointments to a City Board, Commission or Committee are made without regard to political party affiliation. Acceptance of such appointment, however, does not restrict an individual's participation in political activities at any level of government. Nevertheless, appointees should not use their appointed office or title to conduct political activities.

Other Important Points to Consider

GPAC participants shall always show respect for other individuals' viewpoints and shall allow other members adequate time to present their views before making comments. It is essential to be open and honest at all times, welcome new members and see that they become acquainted with their duties, and strive to minimize political action among members. Be aware that, in the public's eye, GPAC members represent the City they serve. Comments and actions of the GPAC, therefore, should express sensitivity to the diverse viewpoints held within the City. Membership on the GPAC does not entitle participants to exercise undue influence upon individuals in the community.

Committee Membership

Considerations when selecting members to serve on the GPAC should include:

- Who is represented - neighborhoods, districts, special interest groups etc.?
- Do any of the candidates have the potential to become "future leaders of Westminster"? Consider those that have a strong propensity for long term involvement in the community.
- Will the member contribute in a way that is representative of all interest groups?

Official Charge of the GPAC

- Ensure City staff and the consultant team is aware of and understands community concerns, values and expectations.
- Assist City staff and the consultant team in identifying critical issues that must be addressed in the planning process.
- Identify areas of existing or potential conflicts and find ways to constructively resolve them.
- Capitalize on the creative ideas and insights within the Westminster community for input into the General Plan.
- Keep community organizations and interested citizens informed about the status of the planning process.
- Provide recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council supporting the General Plan including the proposed land use plan, which is comprised of the final recommendations associated with specified focus areas and other land uses.

Rules and Procedures

1. All meetings of the General Plan Advisory Committee must be open to the public pursuant to the Ralph M. Brown Act enacted in 1953. The intent of the Act is to ensure that “actions be taken openly and that deliberations be conducted openly.” Once selected, the time, place and date for regularly scheduled GPAC meetings shall be publicly posted or announced.
2. The GPAC may elect a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson to serve as the representatives for the GPAC. If one is selected, the Chairperson would be responsible for managing the meeting, facilitating discussion, and gaining consensus from the GPAC on various components of the General Plan. Should the Chairperson leave his or her position on the GPAC for any reason, the Vice Chair should assume the role of Chairperson and a new Vice Chair would be selected by a majority vote of the GPAC. The GPAC Chair and Vice Chair would also serve as the “official” representatives of the GPAC and shall attend meetings with other committees, the Planning Commission or City Council if requested. However, all GPAC members act as “ambassadors” of the General Plan to the community and are encouraged to share their knowledge about the process to ensure the community’s exposure to the process is as far-reaching as possible. Prior to any commitments, GPAC members that receive requests from the community for information or presentations about the General Plan should advise the Planning Manager who will coordinate all outreach activities.
3. The General Plan preparation is subject to a constrained time schedule. GPAC members need to have done their “homework” for each meeting and be prepared to make recommendations and decisions in a timely manner that allows the process to move forward according to the adopted schedule.
4. Committee meetings should be conducted formally with speaker time limits to avoid long conversations on non-critical tangents, resulting in delayed action. Summaries of recommendations made at each meeting should also be prepared.
5. The GPAC must not become involved in the administration or operation of City departments, and should not direct the administrative staff or its consultants to initiate programs, conduct studies or establish official policy without approval of the City Council and/or the City Manager. GPAC members however, are encouraged to review and comment on relevant department programs as they pertain to the implementation of the General Plan.
6. It is hoped that agreement can be reached by the full GPAC for as many issues as possible. Where a committee member does not agree with the direction being taken by the committee, he or she is expected to offer a constructive alternative approach or approaches. Concerns and issues need to be brought up early in the process so that they can be addressed to the extent possible. Lack of comment will be considered an agreement with the majority opinion.

7. Items brought before the GPAC requiring a decision by vote will either be administrative matters, which can be voted on immediately, or matters of substance, which may be deferred to the next regular meeting for vote. It is important to reiterate that the GPAC will not be a policy-setting body. Rather, the GPAC is an advisory committee, providing recommendations to City staff for their consideration.
8. Where consensus cannot be reached on major decisions by the full committee, the GPAC shall form its recommendations based on the affirmative vote of a simple majority of the GPAC membership. On decisions regarding recommendations to City Staff, dissenting members may submit a separate report to ensure both sides are represented for City Council consideration.
9. Conflict of Interest: The Political Reform Act is intended to prevent conflict of interest by requiring designated public officials to disclose financial interests which could potentially cause conflicts. You may be required to disqualify yourself from making, participating in, or attempting to influence any governmental decision which will affect your financial interests, including those required to be reported on a statement of economic interest where appropriate.
10. The Fair Political Practices Commission's Guide to the Political Reform Act, California's Conflict of Interest Law for Public Officials, explains what a conflict is and when disqualification is required by law. If in doubt, the staff liaison person will assist in acquiring legal clarification.
11. Community input is a very important component of the General Plan process. GPAC members will need to carefully consider input from a wide range of stakeholders. GPAC members should bring other stakeholder comments to the table, as appropriate.
12. In accepting appointment to the GPAC, each member accepts responsibility for devoting sufficient time to the project to effectively represent the views of the community. Attendance is required at every GPAC meeting, approximately 10 meetings are scheduled over the duration of the process. Members shall notify City staff prior to a scheduled meeting if they are unable to attend and request an excused absence. Three unexcused absences constitutes grounds for dismissal from the Committee.
13. If members have questions or are concerned with particular issues, the City Manager or designated City staff liaison should be contacted to review the matter.

What the GPAC Is:

- A source of insight on the community, its interests and expectations.
- A source of ideas to achieve a responsible and responsive plan.
- A vehicle for achieving a sampling of community opinions and attitudes.
- A sounding board for ideas and plan proposals presented by city staff and its consultants.
- A vehicle for communication to and from the planning process

What the GPAC Is NOT:

- A replacement for either the City Council or Planning Commission.
- A decision-making body, except as it may offer advice and direction to City staff and the consultant team regarding General Plan policy.
- A forum for political position taking.
- A substitute for the public hearing process required by law.