

Report to the City of Bristol on Methods Used by Cities to Make Appointments to Advisory Boards

(8/2016 by Pat Hardy, MTAS)

Introduction

Medium to larger size cities usually have a significant number of advisory boards, most of which function to support, advise, and even encourage the governing body on a variety of functional issues. These boards range from planning commissions to golf course advisory boards to unusual boards such as the City of Knoxville's "Public Property Naming Board." Each of these play an important role in a city's governance, and as such the membership and make-up of such boards is vitally important. This being the case, the methodology used by a governing body to make appointments to advisory boards is also important.

In this regard City Manager Bill Sorah asked MTAS to look at the advisory board appointment practices of other cities, in order to improve the process used by Bristol. He also asked for an examination of the Bristol process itself, and recommendations for improvements.

As a part of this report 14 cities were examined regarding the practices they use to make advisory board appointments.

Practices Used in Other Cities

The table below summarizes the appointment practices of other cities. Regarding "process", this summary utilizes three options:

1. Formal Process – includes written guidelines used by the governing body to guide appointment decisions. Usually also includes a lengthy application.
2. Partially Formal – written guidelines (usually a simple application), but very few.
3. Informal Process – no guidelines regarding appointment decisions.

City	Population	Process
Knoxville	178,874	Partially Formal
Johnson City	63,152	Partially Formal
Kingsport	51,274	Informal
Collierville	45,550	Partially Formal
Cleveland	41,285	Informal
Brentwood	40,401	Partially Formal
Columbia	34,681	Informal
Spring Hill	32,053	Partially Formal
Cookeville	31,154	Informal
Oak Ridge	29,330	Partially Formal
Maryville	27,536	Informal
Bristol	26,702	Formal
Athens	13,458	Formal
Signal Mountain	8,363	Formal

From the data above it appears most surveyed cities do not have a formal process similar to that used in Bristol. Of the cities with a "Partially formal" process, nearly all have only an

application process for potential advisory board candidates. They do not include formal procedures used to guide the governing body's appointment decisions.

Among the three cities utilizing a formal process, Signal Mountain and Athens are the same, as one was modeled on the other.

The lack of formal guidelines among most cities is an indication of the inherently political nature of the appointment process. That is, "who you know" is a key consideration, and "what you know" appears to be secondary in many cases. In addition, competition for key appointments can cause divisions among governing body members, which may spill to other, future appointments. All of this is to say, the political dimension is an important, if not the most important, factor in many appointments.

Due to these dynamics it is apparent the political dimension will not, nor should it be, eliminated from the appointment process. These dynamics reflect the "democratic" nature of governance and thus play an important role by ensuring that appointments reflect community values, standards, and needs. However, balancing the political dimension with quality information about candidates will provide balance by ensuring the types of expertise and knowledge necessary to adequately serve on an advisory board are reflected in Council appointments.

Bristol Guidelines

The guidelines currently used in Bristol are among the most extensive found in this research (see Appendix A). The Bristol process requires potential advisory board members to submit a resume and to complete an application (see Appendix B). This information is returned to the City Manager who then conducts a background check on the candidate (as necessary). All this information is then forwarded to the City Council for consideration. When asked by the Mayor, the Council then votes by ballot on each appointment, such ballot also providing an opportunity for a Councilmember to abstain. Each part of this process helps to partially minimize the political dynamics related to so many appointments.

The Bristol Application asks a candidate two open-ended questions, one designed to focus on the candidate's area of interest, and the other focused on their "previous community experience." Candidates must date and sign the Application, consenting to a background check by doing so.

Suggestions

As mentioned earlier, the Bristol process is one of the more structured among the cities examined in this report. Written guidelines, a structured "ballot" process, and a candidate application and background check provide guidance to help the Council with advisory board appointments. However, based on an examination of the process used in other cities, below are a couple of suggestions which may add to the already quality process used in Bristol.

1. Prior to appointments, provide a "Candidate Information Sheet" to candidates for each position. This sheet can include information about the position, informing the candidate regarding meeting times, expectations for time commitments, length of appointment, mission and purpose of the advisory board, current membership, etc.

In addition, the information sheet should contain questions for the candidate to ask themselves in order to help them ascertain their motives and depth of commitment to the

position. These may include, for example (taken from the “Town of Signal Mountain Application for Board Appointment”):

- *What is my motivation for applying for membership?*
- *Do I fully understand what this board expects from me?*
- *Am I committed to the purpose, duties and responsibilities of the board?*
- *Can I afford the demands on my time, resources and energy?*
- *Can I attend meetings regularly, making them a priority for the duration of my appointment?*
- *Am I willing to perform a reasonable amount of work outside of regularly scheduled meetings?*
- *Can I work effectively with members of the board, city manager, staff and council?*
- *Am I committed to serving even if the going gets rough and controversy arises?*
- *Am I willing to participate in necessary training, education and development activities to improve my effectiveness on the board?*

2. Add a few more questions to the candidate application. These may include questions such as:

- Have you attended meetings of the board for which you wish to serve? How many?
- Are you willing and available to attend training sessions provided by the City?
- Would you be able to commit to attending at least 80% of meetings of the board to which you are appointed?
- Do you know of any circumstances or conflicts of interest that may cause you to abstain from voting on any action before the board? If yes, please explain.
- Do you, your employer, or members of your family do business with the City of Bristol?
- Please explain your reasons for wishing to serve on a particular board.
- What goals and objectives do you wish to achieve on the board?
- Please provide a personal history, including education, experience, community involvement, or other service involvement that would help the City make an informed decision regarding your appointment.
- Are you a registered voter of Bristol?
- Are you current with all financial obligations (taxes, permit fees, etc.) to the City?

3. Provide a short (2-3 hour) “orientation” for each new advisory board member.

APPENDIX A
Bristol Appointment Guidelines

City of Bristol Tennessee

Rules and Procedures of the City Council

VI. Appointment of Citizens to Municipal Boards and Commissions

A. Notice of Opportunity for Appointment

The month before the normal expiration of a term of office or upon receipt of a resignation, the Manager shall notify Council members and the public through the news media that an appointment will be held to fill the Board or Commission vacancy at an upcoming Council meeting.

B. Filing Deadline

1. A person desiring to be a candidate for Council appointment to a board or commission shall submit a resume to the City Council at the office of the City Manager by the close of business on the Tuesday one week prior to the Council meeting at which the appointment is scheduled.
2. All resume and application material submitted from eligible candidates seeking appointment to a Board or Commission vacancy shall be distributed to the City Council upon receipt.
3. Unless otherwise provided by statute, ordinance or resolution, a person must be a resident of the city at time of appointment and shall maintain residency during the term of office, or shall have deemed to have resigned the appointment. [Code of Ordinances, Section 2-122]

A. Appointment Process

1. The City Manager shall include the application form, resume, or other material submitted by each eligible candidate in the agenda packet for the meeting at which the appointment is scheduled, along with a ballot that lists the names of all eligible candidates and offers the opportunity to abstain.
2. At the time requested by the Mayor, each Council Member will mark his ballot for up to as many appointments as are scheduled to be made, or for none altogether, and pass them to the City Manager to be publicly read and the vote therein recorded.
3. No citizen shall be appointed to serve on more than two (2) Boards and Commissions.

D. Notification of Appointment Results

Following appointment, appropriate letters shall be sent to all candidates and outgoing board members over the Mayor's signature and an updated roster shall be sent to City Council members and concerned City staff members.

E. June Appointments to be Delayed

All Board and Commission appointments that are scheduled to occur in the month of June will be delayed until the July meeting for formal action.

F. Background Checks

Local background checks of prospective board and commission members will be conducted by the City Manager in advance of scheduled appointments on an as-needed

basis. Any discrepancy identified that brings into question the suitability of a person to serve in a position will be brought to the attention of City Council prior to appointment action.

G. Removal of Members for Excessive Absences

Boards and Commission members who miss three (3) consecutive meetings without cause may be removed by the City Council. [Code of Ordinances, Section 2-121]

H. Boards and Commission Reception

A social reception for members of city boards and commissions will be scheduled annually in recognition of their service to the City of Bristol and to provide an informal gathering for City Council and Board Member to mingle and become better acquainted.

APPENDIX B

Bristol Advisory Boards and Commissions Application

City of Bristol, Tennessee
BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES APPLICATION FORM

Please indicate the Board/Commission that you seek to be appointed (a separate form should be submitted for each board/commission that you seek appointment)

Last Name First _____ Middle _____

Home Address

City, State, Zip Code

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email

Birthdate _____ (must be 18 years old to apply)

Driver's License No. _____

Occupation _____ Years of residence in Bristol _____

Please list your particular areas of interest and qualifications

_____ (please attach more if necessary)

Previous community service experience _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____

I understand that by signing this form that a background check will be conducted before being considered for a board, commission, or committee.

*Please return this form to the Office of the City Manager, 801 Anderson Street,
P.O. Box 1189, Bristol, Tennessee, 37621-1189 or via Facsimile at 423-989-5506*

Form 01-01-01
May 1, 2014