

Citizen Involvement Guide

Making A Difference In St. Louis Park



*The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating.
The paths are not to be found, but made, and the action of making them
changes both the maker and the destination.*

- John Schaar



Introduction

“The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville

To address the declining health of public life, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship challenges individuals to see themselves as more than taxpayers, consumers or bystanders and instead make an effort to become true citizens. In its publication, *Reinventing Citizenship*, the authors state, “Democracy relies on strong, active citizenship inside and outside of government. Civic involvement must tap common sense, energy, insight and effort that comes from citizens with different talents and points of view working together, often across lines of sharp partisan differences. It is not enough for political and corporate leaders to ‘reinvent government.’ We must reinvent ‘citizenship.’ Citizenship involves relating individual efforts to the larger well-being of the community. Active public citizenship begins and is grounded in our everyday institutional environments—the places we live and work, go to school, volunteer, participate in communities of faith. It is public-spirited and practical; not utopian or immaculate, but part of the messy, difficult, give-and-take process of public-solving. Citizenship links our daily life and interests to larger public values and arenas.”

While much has been written about getting involved on the state and federal level, very little exists on getting involved in your own community. Yet, this is where an individual can have the greatest impact. This guidebook aims to help interested citizens get involved on a local level and make St. Louis Park an even better place to live, work and learn.

This guide was created as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of St. Louis Park’s City Charter. It is dedicated to all the caring citizens who give their time to make our community a better place to live, work and learn.

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*The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly, or quiet.
It requires a certain relish for confusion.*

- Molly Ivins

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Benefits Of Involvement

A lot of people are waiting for Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi to come back -- but they are gone. We are it. It is up to us. It is up to you.

- Marian Wright Edelman

Our society benefits when people get involved in civic life. Fortunately, there are many ways to get involved and involvement offers personal rewards as well as societal benefits.

Community Benefits

Living in a democracy gives us the opportunity to play an important role in our government. Participating in our community's civic life enables you to influence decisions that affect the lives of your family and neighbors. Participating in our civic life gives you the opportunity to leave this community a better place for the generations to come.

St. Louis Park elected officials believe that public participation leads to better decision-making. Hearing from citizens helps lawmakers gain perspective on citizens' interests, needs and desires. Citizens can help policy-makers better understand the implications of their decisions.

Personal Benefits

Although our community reaps many rewards from civic participation, volunteers also benefit. Here are just a few reasons to share your time and talents –

- Maintain or renew job skills
- Contribute to the community
- Explore new careers
- Gain knowledge or learn a new skill
- Put your ideas to work in new ways
- Meet new people
- Earn school credit or job references
- Develop leadership skills
- Add variety to your life
- Set a positive example for others
- Experience how good it feels to help others



Options for Involvement

Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

- Vince Lombardi

There are a myriad of ways you can get involved in our community. Here are just a few suggestions. Details about some of these are found in later chapters of this manual.

Vote

One of the simplest things you can do is to exercise your right to vote. And don't limit your participation to national elections. Be sure to vote in state, county, city, school elections as well. Low voter turnout in local elections makes your vote even more crucial!

Attend A Meeting, Open House Or Forum

If there's a particular issue you're interested in, you can attend the public meeting where that issue is being decided. Attending a city council meeting enables you to learn about the issue first-hand and voice your opinion to decision-makers. City Council agenda items are listed on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Go to the "What's New" section and then click on "Meetings.")

Open houses or special meetings are often called to outline a development proposal or plan to change a city policy or program. Notices are mailed to households most effected by the project or proposal. Major proposals are also posted on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Go to the "What's New" section and click on "Pending Decisions.") By attending the open house or meeting, you can ask about the proposal and give your comments to city staff who forward all comments to the City Council. The City Council uses this feedback as it considers the pros and cons of the issue.

Periodically, there are also special forums or community meetings on broad issues. *Vision St. Louis Park*, a strategic plan for St. Louis Park's future, stemmed from meetings the entire community was invited to participate in. The Mayor's Youth Summit and Senior Summit are an annual opportunity for these two groups to bring their issues and concerns to the attention of elected officials.

Write A Letter Or Send An E-mail

If you're concerned about an issue, write a letter or e-mail to elected officials or city staff. Letters can be sent to City Council c/o City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416.

Or, share you views with the community by writing a letter to the editor of our local newspaper. The address where letters to the editor should be sent is usually listed on the second page of the newspaper.

Organize A Petition Drive

A petition can be a powerful way to urge lawmakers to hear your view. An author of a petition writes a clear statement on the issue at hand and then asks individuals who support the position to sign their name. Petitions should include each supporter's signature and address. Each page of the petition must include the issue statement. Petitions can be addressed to: City Council c/o City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416.

Volunteer In Your Neighborhood

If you have something you wish you could change about your neighborhood, getting involved in a neighborhood organization is an option. Activities vary with each neighborhood association but often include planning special events, writing newsletter articles, welcoming new neighbors, planting a community garden, or coordinating a neighborhood garage sale, voicing neighborhood views on an issue. You can serve on a neighborhood steering committee which meets once a month or just help out with a single activity.

St. Louis Park has 35 neighborhoods and approximately 23 have formal neighborhood organizations. To see which neighborhood you live in, take a look at the neighborhood map in this folder. Details about each neighborhood are listed in the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Go to "Our Town" and then click on "Neighborhoods.") To participate in an organized neighborhood, simply contact your neighborhood association president or the city's community outreach coordinator at 952/924-2613.

If you live in one of the 12 neighborhoods that isn't represented by a formal neighborhood association, you can work with your neighbors to organize one. Although organizing your neighborhood may seem like a big job, it can be a rewarding for you and your neighbors to create a new entity that addresses common concerns and helps neighbors get to know one another. The city's community outreach coordinator can help you with this process. For more information, call 952/924-2613.

Serve As A Block Captain

Neighborhood Watch is another way to get involved. Each participating block has a block captain who serves as a liaison between the block and the police department. Block captains distribute crime alert fliers to their neighbors, participate in National Night Out Against Crime block parties, and hold one block meeting a year. To learn more about this crime prevention program, call the police department at 952/924-2661.

Help Out A Local Organization Or Initiative

Whether it's the local school, food shelf, church, synagogue, the Children First initiative, library or service organization, volunteer opportunities abound. Volunteering in any organization that interests you, will make our community better. Depending on your time, you can offer to help out on a one-time project or serve on an ongoing committee governing that organization. A list of local organizations appears later in this publication. Volunteer opportunities are also listed on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Go to "Jobs & Volunteers.")

Serve As An Election Judge

Election judges help citizens exercise their right to vote. Election judges set up voting rooms, distribute and collect ballots, register new voters, process absentee ballots, and certify election results. No experience is necessary, and judges are paid to attend a two hour training class and for working on Primary Election Day and the General Election Day. For more information about serving as an election judge, call the City Clerk's office at 952/924-2505.

Serve On An Advisory Committee

If you'd like to have an impact on city policies or services, consider volunteering to serve on a board or commission that advises the city council. Individuals must be willing to commit to one or two meetings per month for a duration of their appointment (usually one to five years).

You can follow the topics under consideration by boards and commissions by checking the "What's New" section of the city's web site located at www.stlouispark.org. Once you've opened "What's New," click on "Meetings" to see the week's meeting schedule and major agenda items. A list of boards and commissions appears later in this publication.

Attend A Political Caucus

Precinct caucuses begin the process for Minnesota's major political parties to choose the candidates and issues they will support in the upcoming federal or state election. Minnesota's four major political parties will hold their precinct caucus on the first Tuesday in March in even-numbered years.

Caucus participants will vote for their preference for the party's nominee to run for president in November. Attendees may also submit and vote on resolutions that the party conventions will consider as they create their party platform. In addition, participants will elect delegates who will go on to the party's endorsement conventions.

If you'd like to participate, you must select the political party you wish to caucus with, and attend your local caucus. To be eligible to participate in the caucus, you must be eligible to vote in November, and you must support or be likely to support that party's candidates. To find out where your party will caucus, contact one of Minnesota's four major political parties.

Serve On A Political Campaign

If you have a candidate you'd like to see elected to office, you can help that person's campaign. You can donate money to the campaign, put up a lawn sign, call friends and urge them to vote, deliver campaign literature, write letters in support of your candidate or volunteer to serve on a campaign committee.

Run For Office

If you're a citizen willing to commit time to organize a campaign, meet voters, raise campaign money, learn about issues and represent you constituents, you can run for office.



Keeping Informed

Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

- James Madison

There are many ways to keep informed about issues facing our community. Here are some ways you may learn about a proposal or issue.

Letters And Post Cards

The City of St. Louis Park does not send you “junk mail.” If you receive a letter or post card with the City of St. Louis Park’s logo on it (even if it’s addressed to “Resident” or “Postal Customer”), please take a few minutes to read it over. A mailing from the city may well be a notice that there’s an issue that could directly impact you!

Often, residents who live near an area being considered for a land use change to accommodate a redevelopment project will be mailed a letter or post card informing them of the proposed development. For larger projects, there may be an open house or meeting that you can attend to ask questions and learn more.

When a policy or service change is being considered, the city may send out a letter informing residents of the proposal. Often, there may be an open house or meeting that you can attend to ask questions and learn more.

City Web Site

The city’s official web site, located at www.stlouispark.org, has a section devoted to keeping residents informed about issues under consideration. The section, entitled “What’s New,” is updated every Friday afternoon and provides a glimpse into the week ahead. Once you’ve clicked on “What’s New,” you can click on “Meetings” to see the major meeting agenda topics or you can click on “Pending Decisions” to see major issues under consideration by the city.

City Newsletter

The City of St. Louis Park mails a newsletter, entitled *Park Perspective*, to all households five to six times per year. The newsletter provides information about upcoming issues and events as well as timely reminders. You do not need to subscribe or take any action to receive the newsletter. It is mailed to all addresses within St. Louis Park. In zip codes 55416 and 55426, it is addressed to “Postal Customer” with no street address. In other zip codes, it is addressed to “Resident” followed by a street address.

The most recent issue of the newsletter is also posted on the city’s web site at www.stlouispark.org in the “Reports & Publications” section. If you have problems receiving the newsletter, call 952/924-2521.

Independent Newspapers

St. Louis Park is served by the weekly *St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor* newspaper and the daily *StarTribune*. The *Sun-Sailor* is delivered free of charge to anyone in St. Louis Park who requests delivery. If you have just moved into a new home and are not receiving the paper, please call the circulation office at 952/392-6860. Copies are also available at the St. Louis Park Public Library. The paper is also available for sale at news stands. Portions of the paper can be viewed at www.mnsun.com.

The *StarTribune* covers the Twin Cities metropolitan area on a daily basis. Each Wednesday, it also publishes a special section, entitled *StarTribune West*, which offers more detailed coverage of the western suburbs of Minneapolis including St. Louis Park. If you would like to pay for a subscription, call 612/673-4343. The *StarTribune* is also for sale at news stands.

Legal notices from the City of St. Louis Park are published in the *St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor*, a weekly suburban newspaper published by Sun Newspapers. Legal notices are the city's official notification of certain actions such as the sale or disposal of public property, zoning changes or ordinance changes. Not all city council actions require a legal notice to be published.

Public Records

If you would like to research discussion of a particular issue at a city council meeting, you can read through city council minutes. The most recent minutes are posted on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Go to "Government" and click on "Agendas & Minutes;" then scroll down to "Minutes.") If you are unsure of which date a particular item was discussed or you want to review other official city documents, call the City Clerk's office at 952/924-2525. You can also come to city hall to view minutes.

The city code, which lists the ordinances or laws governing St. Louis Park, is also posted on the city's web site. (Go to "Government" and click on "City Code.")

Cable Television

If you subscribe to cable television service, you will receive locally originated channels, including Civic Channel 17. Channel 17 shows city council and planning commission meetings. Periodically, it also cablecasts a local program entitled *Park Perspective* which highlights current issues and events. Message reminders also appear run on this station.



City Services

The American city should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong. It should be a place where every man feels safe on his streets and in the house of his friends. It should be a place where each individual's dignity and self-respect is strengthened by the respect and affection of his neighbors. It should be a place where each of us can find the satisfaction and warmth which comes from being a member of the community of man. This is what man sought at the dawn of civilization. It is what we seek today.

- Lyndon Johnson

The services provided by cities impact our daily lives. City workers make it possible to get emergency help by dialing 911, drive to work on plowed streets, get safe drinking water from the tap, and take a stroll through the park.

Mission

The City of St. Louis Park's mission is to deliver responsive municipal services to ensure a safe, welcoming and vital community now and in the future.

Employee Values

This set of values sets the standard for public service in St. Louis Park.

Respect

We are stewards of the public trust who treat our colleagues and those we serve courteously, openly and equitably.

Contribution

We are committed to lifelong learning, personal accountability and collaboration to ensure our best contribution to this community.

Stewardship

We are responsible for the community's human, environmental and financial resources.

City Departments

The City of St. Louis Park employs approximately 240 full-time workers to serve St. Louis Park's 44,126 residents as well as the 44,000 people who come to jobs here each day. Here's an overview of the services provided by each department.

Police Department

The Police Department is responsible for –

- Enforcing motor vehicle laws
- Protecting lives and property from crime

- Preserving order
- Apprehending criminals
- Collecting and preserving evidence as well as maintaining criminal records
- Mediating conflicts
- Responding to medical emergencies and car accidents
- Preventing crime by identifying community problems, analyzing crime patterns and working with neighborhoods and community institutions to address concerns.

Fire Department

The Fire Department is responsible for –

- Putting out fires and investigating causes of fires
- Responding to medical emergencies and car accidents
- Overseeing clean-up of hazardous material spills
- Providing disaster recovery services
- Preventing fires by inspecting office and apartment buildings
- Enforcing fire code compliance.

Public Works Department

The Public Works Department is responsible for –

- Snowplowing streets, alleys and public parking lots and trails
- Repairing public sidewalks and trails
- Sweeping, repairing and sealcoating City streets
- Maintaining street lights, traffic signals and street signs
- Operating water treatment plants and water storage facilities
- Maintaining water/sewer lines and lift stations
- Maintaining city vehicles, equipment (police cars, snowplows, lawn mowers, etc.) and public buildings
- Designing and supervising construction projects
- Managing the City's contract for collection of garbage, recyclables and yard waste
- Managing surface water run-off and flood control projects.

Parks and Recreation Department

The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for –

- Coordinating youth and adult sports and recreational programs
- Operating the aquatic park, indoor ice arenas, skateboard park, and nature center
- Maintaining grounds, trails, buildings, ballfields, play equipment and ice rinks in city parks
- Identifying diseased trees and planting replacement trees on public property
- Renting meeting, party, picnic and athletic facilities
- Organizing summer concerts and seasonal special events
- Coordinating neighborhood summer playground programs and youth field trips.

Community Development Department

The Community Development Department is responsible for –

- Administering the zoning ordinance, comprehensive plan and other documents that guide land use
- Encouraging economic development and redevelopment projects
- Administering housing rehabilitation and first time-homebuyer programs
- Administering subsidized housing programs for qualifying residents
- Administering small business and commercial rehabilitation loan programs.

Inspections Department

The Inspections Department is responsible for –

- Inspecting remodeling and new construction for compliance with the building, plumbing, mechanical and electrical system standards in the Minnesota State Building Code.
- Licensing restaurants, hotels, dogs, tobacco sales and mechanical contractors
- Inspecting food service institutions and swimming pools for compliance with the Minnesota Health Code
- Inspecting homes and commercial buildings prior to sale to ensure buildings comply with property maintenance and building codes
- Enforcing nuisance and zoning provisions of the City Code
- Inspecting apartment buildings for safety.

Finance Department

The Finance Department is responsible for –

- Setting the annual tax valuation of all parcels of real estate and personal property
- Documenting residential real estate transactions and maintaining property records
- Administering special assessments, right-of-way classifications and real estate acquisitions
- Ensuring the short and long-term financial stability of the City by maintaining financial records, managing the City's investment portfolio and addressing risk-management issues
- Processing payroll and vendor claims
- Billing utility customers for water/sewer and refuse collection services.

Administration Department

The Administration Department is responsible for –

- Ensuring that policy decisions made by the City Council are carried out
- Overseeing operations of all city departments
- Maintaining official city records (agendas, minutes, resolutions, ordinances, contracts, bids, legal notices, etc.)
- Registering voters and conducting local, state and national elections
- Licensing liquor and gambling operations
- Disseminating information to residents via newsletters, calendar, handbook, web site, etc.
- Assisting neighborhood organizations.

Human Resources Department

The Human Resources Department is responsible for –

- Recruiting and hiring employees
- Managing benefits and compensation programs as well as personnel policies
- Providing on-going opportunities for professional development
- Handling labor negotiations and assisting with grievances, mediation and labor disputes.

Technology and Support Services Department

The Technology and Support Services Department is responsible for –

- Providing computer and technology support to City employees
- Imaging official City records
- Maintaining supplies and office equipment
- Helping civic and community groups with cable television video production
- Administering the cable television franchise for St. Louis Park
- Providing switchboard and visitor reception services.



City Government

The government is us; we are the government, you and I.

- Theodore Roosevelt

Knowing how city government works enables you to understand the process and participate effectively in local decision-making.

City Charter

Minnesota has two basic types of cities: home rule and statutory. The difference is the type of enabling legislation from which the municipality gains its authority. Home rule cities obtain their powers from a locally enacted home rule charter while statutory cities get their powers from Chapter 412 of Minnesota Statutes.

St. Louis Park is a home rule charter city. Our charter, which is the equivalent of a city constitution, is the enabling legislation that granted St. Louis Park the legal authority to enact laws governing our municipality.

Home rule charter cities can exercise any powers in their locally adopted charters as long as there's no conflict with state law. Conversely, charter provisions can restrict specific city powers. Consequently, voters in home rule cities have more control over their city's powers.

St. Louis Park was not always a charter city. St. Louis Park began as a village in 1886. The village structure remained about the same for 50 years. However, as the population grew, the village-trustee arrangement that was adequate to serve the needs of 7,000 people became less and less adequate. The members of the council, all serving part-time, found it difficult to be legislators, representatives and planners at the same time. Their solution was to take the administrative duties out of the hands of the elected officials and hire paid professionals to handle the day-to-day administrative duties. To accomplish that goal, a change from village government to the council/manager form of government was required. It took more than 15 years to accomplish that change.

Council/Manager Form of Government

The city manager plan of government was initiated in Dayton, Ohio in 1914. In 1935, the council/manager form of city management was a very new concept with only about 300 cities in the United States using this form of government.

Under this form of government, an elected city council sets the policy and overall direction for the city. The city council passes ordinances, makes appropriations, oversees development, and selects and discharges the manager. The city council and mayor do not handle administrative duties and, instead, spend time participating in policy deliberations. City workers, under the

direction of a professional city manager carry out council decisions and provide day-to-day city services.

With the support of the Better Government League, the district court appointed a charter commission comprised of 15 people. This commission selected a model charter. However, it was rejected by voters on September 10, 1940.

Another proposed charter was defeated in 1949. Opponents feared that a change in government would raise tax limits and create a “Super Man Government.” In the 1949 referendum, the mayor, most of the council and several civic groups supported a new charter. The business community, however, opposed it because businessmen were not given, according to Carroll L. Hurd, “their rightful spot in the formation of a charter.” In 1951, a third charter commission was appointed.

In 1952, Hurd was elected mayor on a platform to change from village to city status. Hurd appointed a new study group. With the support of Hurd’s group and vigorous campaigning by the League of Women Voters, voters passed the referendum for a home rule charter in November of 1954. The charter was adopted on December 7, 1954, and the village of St. Louis Park officially became the City of St. Louis Park on January 7, 1955.

City Council

St. Louis Park has a seven member city council who are elected to set the policy and overall direction for the city. They vote on the budget and pass laws that affect citizens. The mayor and the two at-large council members represent all residents, and the four ward council members are primarily responsible for representing their ward constituents. The mayor chairs the council meeting and represents the city at public functions.

The city council has jurisdiction only over municipal government within St. Louis Park. An ordinance enacted by the St. Louis Park City Council applies only within the boundaries of St. Louis Park and are not valid in other cities. The city council also does not exercise control over county or school district services even within St. Louis Park. For example, roadways such as Highway 7 or Minnetonka Boulevard are owned by Hennepin County. Therefore, the city council cannot enact speed laws or set up crosswalks on these streets. Some services you enjoy within St. Louis Park are not provided by the city; instead, they are provided other governing bodies. For example, the library in our community is operated by Hennepin County and is paid for by county taxes not city taxes. The schools within St. Louis Park are not operated or funded by the city; schools are run by Independent School District 283.

The names and contact information for the St. Louis Park City Council can be obtained by calling 952/924-2525 or checking the City’s web site at www.stlouispark.org (click on “Government.”)

Economic Development Authority

St. Louis Park City Council members also serve on the Economic Development Authority (EDA). Economic Development Authorities have powers that cities ordinarily do not have. Typically, cities only may issue independent bonds for each development project. An EDA, however, has the legal authority to pool bond reserves. With a single bond reserve fund, each project’s revenues go into a common fund. This pooling mechanism increases the bonds’

security and lowers borrowing costs. Under state law, an EDA can act only within an established economic development district.

Within established economic development districts, the St. Louis Park EDA promotes economic growth by providing business and economic development assistance, offering tax increment financing and public/private financial packages to promote redevelopment, and handle real estate transactions.

While the EDA is comprised of the seven City Council members, EDA officers may be different from City Council offices. For example, the president of the EDA need not be the mayor. EDA members elect their officers at their first meeting in December. EDA meetings are convened as necessary and are held just prior to the regular meetings of the City Council.

Board of Appeal and Equalization

St. Louis Park City Council members also convene each April as the Board of Appeal and Equalization to hear property valuation appeals. In this capacity, they can reduce or increase a property's market value or leave the valuation unchanged from the value set by the City Assessor. The board also has the power to reclassify homestead and non-homestead property. It can also add a tax-exempt property to the tax rolls or exempt a property from taxation.

During this meeting, board members listen to property owners who are contesting their valuation. Taxpayers who have made an appointment to appear before the board must complete a form outlining their complaint and their estimate of the property's market value. The board may ask property owners and the City Assessor for data about the property and comparable properties.

How An Idea Becomes A Local Law

A citizen, a city staff member or a city council member can suggest an idea for a city ordinance. However, only city council members can vote a proposal into law.

If the city council believes the idea has merit, it may ask city staff to research the issue. It could also refer the matter to a citizen committee or special task force for study. At the council's direction, a city staff member would be asked to draft the proposal into either an ordinance or resolution. An ordinance governs people or property, and provides a penalty for its violation. A resolution is a temporary, routine or administrative action.

Proposed ordinances and resolutions are discussed at city council meetings which are open to the public. When an ordinance goes before the council for the first time, a "first reading" occurs. At first reading, city staff may make a presentation outlining the proposal, citizens may speak to the issue, and the council then debates the issue. At the end of the discussion, the council has the option to refer the proposal back to staff for further study, defer taking action, vote down the matter, or vote to approve the proposal.

If the proposal passes first reading, it returns to the council for "second reading," usually within two weeks. The second reading is often perfunctory and is frequently contained in the "consent" portion of the agenda. Consent items are voted on by the council but not debated. However, a council member may move or a member of the audience can request to have an item

removed from the consent agenda so it can be debated. If this occurs, the proposal can be rejected even if it passed the first reading.

For an ordinance action to be legal, it needs a motion, vote and record of council members voting for and against the proposal at both the first and second readings. For an ordinance to become law, it must have a majority of council members voting for the motion. Mayors do not have veto power.

If a proposed ordinance passes the second reading, it becomes law 15 days after the new law is published in the City's legal newspaper. A resolution is effective immediately after a majority vote of the City Council.



City Council Meetings

Citizenship is the messy, everyday life work of solving problems.

- Peg Michels

City Council meetings are where your elected officials consider proposals and enact laws that impact the community.

Regular And Study Sessions

The City Council meets in regular session twice a month. At these meetings, formal action is taken. The Council often holds study sessions twice a month to hear briefings on upcoming issues and talk about issues. No legal action is taken at a study session.

Meeting Dates

The City Council holds regular meetings on the first and third Mondays of each month at 7:30 p.m. in City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Boulevard. When the first or third Monday falls on a holiday, the meeting is rescheduled to the same hour on the next Tuesday. If the next Tuesday is also a holiday, the meeting is moved to the same hour on the next Monday that is not a holiday. Study sessions are held on the second and fourth Monday of each month.

The City Council's policy is not to meet on New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day, Christmas Day, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot. For New Year's, Christmas and Yom Kippur this includes the evening before the holiday. For Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot this includes the first and second evenings of the holiday.

The agendas for upcoming City Council meetings can be found on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. (Open the "What's New" section and click on "Meetings" for highlights of major agenda items. Open the "Government" section to see the full agenda.)

Order Of Business

A City Council meeting may have some or all of these actions on the agenda.

Call to Order: Pledge of Allegiance followed by roll call

Presentations: Proclamations, award presentations, etc.

Minutes: Council members vote to approve or correct the minutes from a previous meeting.

Agenda and Consent Item Approval: Council members vote on whether to keep, add or remove topics that will be considered at this meeting. Council members may also vote to

remove an agenda from consent so it can be discussed. (Consent items are routine and need no discussion. All consent items are acted upon by one motion.) A member of the audience may also ask the Council to remove an item from the consent agenda.

Petitions from the Public: Individuals may contact the City Clerk's office prior to the council meeting to ask that an issue be placed on the agenda.

Public Hearings: A public discussion of an issue where audience members are invited to speak about the topic.

Ordinances, Resolutions and Motions: Council action on a proposal.

Boards and Committees: Council may receive a report from a board or commission, create a committee or appoint individual(s) to an advisory group.

Communications: Council members or City staff may raise an issue to be considered at a future meeting or simply share information of interest.

Adjournment: If there is no additional business, the meeting is closed.

City Council Agenda Terms

Here are some of the terms you may see on an agenda -

Consent: When the word "consent" is placed next to an agenda item, it indicates that this is a routine item and no discussion is anticipated prior to the vote. Before beginning the meeting's business, any City Council member may ask that an item be removed from the "consent" agenda so that it can be discussed during the meeting.

Public Hearings: A public hearing is held on matters of substantial community concern so that citizens can ask questions and speak for or against the issue. Usually, a public hearing begins with a staff report and recommendation on the issue. Then the City Council asks if there is anyone in the audience who wishes to speak about the topic. After citizens have spoken, the council can close the public hearing and vote to accept, reject or amend the proposal. They can also vote to postpone the vote to another date.

A notice of a public hearing is printed in the City's official newspaper, the St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor. Summaries of some public hearing issues are also placed in What's New /Pending Decisions. In some cases, letters may also be mailed to directly affected parties or those individuals who have asked to be notified about a particular topic.

Ordinance: An ordinance is a written law establishing a general or long-term regulation for the citizens of the city and the property within the city. There is a penalty for violating an ordinance. An ordinance can be repealed or amended only by a future ordinance. An ordinance must be considered at two separate City Council meetings and can be adopted by a majority vote of the council members. After adoption, a summary of the ordinance is published in the St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor newspaper. Most ordinances go into effect 15 days after adoption.

Resolution: A resolution is a formal written expression of the policy of the City Council. It can also direct certain types of administrative action by the city staff. A resolution is effective

immediately after a majority vote of the City Council. A resolution may be changed by a subsequent resolution.

Motion: A motion is used at a meeting to indicate approval of a procedural action or to authorize disposition of items of business on the agenda. It may also be used to authorize city staff to take certain actions. It is effective immediately after a majority vote of the City Council.

Attending Or Watching A Council Meeting

You are welcome to attend any City Council meeting. Meetings are held in the council chambers in St. Louis Park City Hall. Typically, regular meetings begin at 7:30 p.m.; study sessions begin at 7 p.m.

St. Louis Park cable subscribers also have the option of watching meetings at home. All regular meetings of the City Council are cablecast live on Civic Cable TV Channel 17. Meetings are also replayed on Tuesdays at 8 a.m., 2 p.m., 8 p.m. and 2 a.m. as well as Saturdays at 8 a.m., 2 p.m., 8 p.m. and 2 a.m.

Minnesota Open Meeting Law

The Minnesota Open Meeting Law prohibits lawmaking at secret meetings. This law ensures that citizens have an opportunity to hear elected officials' views during the lawmaking process.

Here's how the Minnesota Open Meeting Law typically affects the St. Louis Park City Council –

- All City Council meetings are open to the public.
- A “public meeting” occurs whenever four City Council members (a quorum) are present to conduct business.
- The public can be excluded from a meeting in limited circumstances. Executive sessions can be held when the council is discussing labor negotiations, litigation, a medical or employment issue regarding an individual, or an issue related to homeland security.

Speaking At A Council Meeting

Citizens are welcome to speak before the City Council about any item on that evening's meeting agenda.

To speak before the council, simply fill out a blue card (available in the meeting room) and take it to the council table. The mayor will call on you when that agenda item is discussed. If a very large audience is present, the council may impose time limits on speakers to ensure everyone is heard.

Arrangements for a sign language interpreter or other assistance can be made by contacting City Hall one week before the meeting. Call 952/924-2525 or e-mail kolson@stlouispark.org.

Presentation Pointers

Here are some suggestions for making effective, credible presentations before the City Council -

- Be prepared – think about the key points you want to make.
- Stick to your own first-hand observations — avoid rumor or unsupported speculation.
- Check your facts to ensure credibility.
- If you are opposing a proposal, consider offering an alternative solution.

- Rather than repeating the statements that other people have made, point out something different or simply state that you agree with previous speakers' major points.
- Be respectful of the people who do not share your viewpoint. Booing negates your credibility and lessens the impact of your position.
- Understand that not everyone will be in agreement on a controversial issue. Be prepared to compromise and seek solutions that offer the greatest community good.



Elections And Voting

Voting is one of the few things where boycotting in protest clearly makes the problem worse rather than better.

- Jane Auer

Voting is a privilege and a responsibility of citizenship. By voting, you select the people who govern you and the laws by which you are governed. If you don't vote, you let other people make decisions about the elected officials who will impact your life.

What's On The Ballot

Depending on the election, voters may be asked to vote for candidates, decide an issue or do both.

Candidates

To be on a ballot, candidates must formally file for election with the clerk of the appropriate jurisdiction. Individuals running for City Council, for example, file for office with the City Clerk. Individuals seeking a seat on the School Board file with the School District clerk. Individuals who wish to run for State office, file with the Minnesota Secretary of State.

When two or more candidates from the same party are seeking the same office, a primary election is held to narrow the slate of candidates down to one person per party. The winner then goes on to represent the party in the general election.

In a primary election, the ballot shows all major parties. Voters do not need to declare which political party they are voting for; however, each voter may vote for candidates within only one political party. Each major political party's candidates are listed in a separate column on the ballot. If you cross over the column and vote for candidates from more than one party, that vote will not be counted.

In the general election, the candidates from all parties vying for each office appear on the ballot. Unlike a primary, you may divide your vote among candidates representing various parties. For example, if you wish to, you could vote for a democrat for governor, a republican for attorney general, and an independent for house of representatives.

Issues

At times, an issue may be on the ballot. On the local level, this might be a referendum asking voters to authorize local government to raise money for a project or increase taxes. School districts might ask voters to allow it to raise money to cover general operating expenses, pay for new technology, build a new school, etc. Cities might ask voters to okay borrowing money to construct a new civic building or increase property taxes to pay for city services. On the state or federal level, voters might be asked to amend the constitution.

Voting

To vote on election day, you must go to your polling place. You may vote **ONLY** at your designated polling place (even if you think another polling place is more convenient). To find out where you vote in St. Louis Park –

- Ask a neighbor,
- Look at the map of polling places found on the City of St. Louis Park's web site located at www.stlouispark.org or
- Call the City Clerk's office at 952/924-2505.

When you enter the polling place there will be a station for registered voters and another station for individuals who wish to register on election day. Registered voters go to the table where their name is looked up on the roster of registered voters. Individuals who are registering at the polls must first stop at the table to register. To register at the polls, you must bring proof of your residence in the precinct. (See page 22 for details.)

Everyone who is certified as eligible to vote then goes to the table where an election judge demonstrates how to fill in the ballot. In St. Louis Park, paper ballots that are fed into optical scanning equipment are most often used. Voters fill in the oval next to the candidate or issue they wish to vote for.

Voters then proceed to a voting booth where they mark their ballot privately. Voters do not have to vote on everything on the ballot. Voters can vote only for those candidates they are familiar with and skip sections with candidates they are not familiar with. Voters may also write in a candidate.

If you make a mistake when marking your ballot, simply take the ballot to the election judge. The judge will give you a new ballot and set aside the spoiled ballot so it won't be counted.

If you wish, you may bring someone with you to help you vote. Or, you can ask an election judge to help you read or mark your ballot.

Once you've voted, take your ballot to the vote tabulator machine where it is inserted and automatically counted.

You may take time off work to vote. According to Minnesota law, every employee who is eligible to vote has the right to be absent from work to vote during the morning of election day without penalty or wage deduction.

Polling Place Rules

Campaigning is prohibited inside the polling place and within 100 feet of the building being used as a polling place. Campaign buttons cannot be worn in the polling place, and campaign signs cannot be displayed on cars or in yards near polling places.

Voters may take sample ballots from political parties into the voting booth for personal use; however, they must be careful not to display the sample ballot to anyone in the polling place.

Who Works At the Polls On Election Day

Election judges staff the polls on election day. You may also see challengers at the polling place.

Election Judges

Election judges set up the polling place, greet voters, verify voters are registered, register eligible citizens to vote, answer questions, demonstrate how to mark the ballot, hand out ballots, and take care of emergencies or problems that arise on election day. Once the polls have closed, election judges pack up unused ballots, count write-in votes, determine the number of people who voted that day, and deliver marked ballots and ballot counter tapes to City Hall. Depending on the election, vote tallies are then called in or electronically transmitted to Hennepin County.

Election judges receive training on the laws that protect voters' rights and ensure fair elections. Every effort is made to hire election judges who represent all parties so that all major political parties are represented at each polling place. Despite an election judge's personal party preference, election judges are required to act in an impartial manner and avoid any action that could influence how citizens vote.

Election judges are allowed to help a voter with a disability who asks for assistance in reading or marking their ballot. Election judges who help a voter are required to respect that person's privacy and protect the secrecy of that person's vote.

Challengers

Challengers are appointed by the candidates, parties or entities proposing a referendum. Challengers are allowed to be at the polling place to monitor voter eligibility. Challengers are allowed to question a person about whether he or she is eligible to vote; however, their challenge must be based on knowledge or reasonable suspicion that the person is not eligible to vote.

Challengers cannot obstruct the voting process by challenging everyone or challenging individuals without good cause. Challengers are not allowed to look at voter rosters or marked ballots. They may not attempt to influence voting or vouch for anyone attempting to register to vote on election day.

Election Preparation

The City Clerk's office is responsible for making preparations for every election. In St. Louis Park, this involves hiring and training approximately 100 to 250 election judges, finding suitable polling places, ordering ballots, testing voting machines, processing absentee ballots, and setting up voting machines at the polls.

When Are Elections

Minnesota law sets the date for a primary election as the first Tuesday after the second Monday in September. General elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

In the metropolitan area, polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Everyone who is in line inside the polling place before 8 p.m. is allowed to stay to cast their votes, even if it is after 8 p.m. Individuals who come to the polling place after 8 p.m., however, will not be allowed to enter and will not be able to vote.

State and federal elections take place in even-numbered years. In St. Louis Park, city council and school board elections take place in odd-numbered years.

Registering To Vote

To be eligible to vote, you must –

- Be 18 years of age or older,
- Be a United States citizen, and
- Have lived in Minnesota for at least 20 days

Anyone found by a court to be legally incompetent may not vote. Anyone who is under guardianship of another person keeps their right to vote unless the court specifically acts to remove voting rights during a guardianship proceeding. Anyone who has been convicted of a felony or treason may not vote. Voting rights for felons are automatically restored when the entire sentence, including probation, has been served.

You will need to fill out a voter registration card if you've –

- Never voted,
- Haven't voted in the past four years,
- Changed your name, or
- Moved (even to a different apartment in the same building).

Here's where to get a voter registration card –

- City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Boulevard, St. Louis Park
- Rec Center, 3700 Monterey Drive, St. Louis Park
- Hennepin County Government Center, 300 South 6th Street, Minneapolis
- County service centers
- County libraries
- Inside phone books (white pages)
- Attached to driver's license applications
- Attached to Minnesota income tax booklets.

When you preregister, you will be mailed a card listing your polling place.

You do not need to vote in every election; however, you must vote at least once every four years to keep your voter registration in effect. If it has been longer than four years since you last voted, you will need to re-register.

If you miss the preregistration deadline, you may register at the poll on election day if you can show proof of residence in your precinct. These are accepted as authorized proof –

- Valid Minnesota driver's license or learner's permit (or receipt),
- Valid Minnesota identification card (or receipt),
- Notice of late registration from the city clerk's office,
- College fee statement, student ID card or college registration card showing your current address and a photo ID,
- Utility bill dated within 30 days of the election and photo ID, or
- You may also bring along a registered voter from your precinct who will confirm your residence.

For more information, call the city clerk's office at 952/924-2505.

Voting By Absentee Ballot

You can vote by absentee ballot IF you can't vote in person because you are –

- Out of town,
- Ill or disabled,
- An election judge serving in another precinct, or
- Unable to go to the polling place due to religious belief or holiday.

If you qualify for absentee voting, you can vote in person at St. Louis Park City Hall in the 30 days prior to election day. In addition to regular weekday office hours (8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.), City Hall is open for absentee voting from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the Saturday before the election and until 5 p.m. on the Monday before the election.

Rather than coming to City Hall, you may download the form used to request that an absentee ballot be mailed to you. (You can also call 952/924-2525 to request the application.) You then fill out the Absentee Ballot Application and return it to City Hall. You will then be mailed an absentee ballot. Be sure to apply early enough to allow for mailing time.

Individuals serving in the military or outside the United States should allow plenty of time and apply early. You may apply for an absentee ballot or your parent, spouse or adult child may apply for an absentee ballot for you.

Please be aware that you cannot fill out the request for an absentee ballot on-line. Instead, you must fill out the form you downloaded (don't forget to sign the form!) and mail or fax the completed application to City Hall. Send the completed Absentee Ballot Application form to City Hall –

- Fax: 952/924-2170
- Mail: Elections, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd., St. Louis Park, MN 55416.



Effective Involvement

The democratic relationship of citizens to society is by choice. By making choices, we create social compacts about what is important and how we will nurture and maintain these areas.

- David Matthews

If you're thinking of getting involved in an issue or a long-term project, it's legitimate to ask yourself whether your time and effort will be well spent. As you know, anything involving major change, significant cost or controversy, is likely to be time-consuming. Fortunately, involvement needn't be an "all or nothing" proposition. Here are some considerations.*

Why Bother?

Getting involved can help you learn new skills and meet people of all ages, interests and points of view. Participating in the civic process can help you learn to argue artfully, think strategically and work across lines of difference, note the authors of *Reinventing Citizenship*.

At the outset, you may not have all the facts or you may not have heard the other side of the argument. By getting involved, you'll become more knowledgeable about the issue. Any time spent thinking through an issue or goal is time well spent.

While you have no guarantee that your effort will net you precisely the result you want, you'll have the personal knowledge that you fought "the good fight." Your involvement may also help you meet people and make contacts who could help you in the future or with another effort.

Match Your Effort To Your Resources

By weighing the complexity of the task against your time and resources, you can decide how much of an effort you wish to make. But remember, any effort is better than none!

To effect change, you have to be organized and you need relationships with people who have an interest in the issue. It also helps to have a solution to propose. Here are a range of options adapted from the OMB Watch's suggestions for involvement.

Level One Effort – Low Impact

Basic first steps are to understand the issue and begin building relationships with others who agree with your position.

- Learn about your issue.
- Enlist a friend. Get someone you know interested in your issue.
- Inform a stranger: carry on a conversation in public, post a fact sheet, use a bumper sticker or ask policy-makers to form a task force to study the issue.

Level One effort won't wear you out. Nonetheless, you—and possibly others—will be better informed.

Level Two Effort – Medium Impact

Do everything in Level One and then –

- Write or e-mail a policy maker
- Call a policy maker
- Visit a policy maker.

Level Two can make a difference. If everyone who claimed to care about an issue wrote, called or visited a policymaker, their issue would receive much more attention.

Level Three Effort – High Impact

Do everything in Levels One and Two and then –

- Write, call, e-mail or visit others. Re-use your work to inform and activate more people.
- Work for a visionary goal. Never lose sight of your goal of creating a better community.

Critical Steps

How you proceed will vary with the issue or opportunity. To help ensure your effectiveness, here are some steps you may wish to consider.

Identify The Issue Or Opportunity

An issue is a problem that affects a number of people. A goal is what you hope to accomplish. Your goal should be achievable: too grand a goal can doom the effort. Define the problem or opportunity in relationship to larger civic issues or the greater community good.

Get The Facts

Once you've defined the problem or identified the goal, you need to do some groundwork. Find out what other people think about the issue. Learn what resources are available to address the problem or take advantage of the opportunity. Determine where leadership might come from and how the "system" works. Acknowledge your own self-interest and why you want to be at the table. Then, determine the self-interests of other people who might get involved.

Remember that effective advocacy is based on solid facts—not anecdotes, guesses or whatever made the 10 p.m. news. Your credibility will be hurt if your argument relies on statements that are less than truthful.

Develop A Strategy

Be proactive: draw up a plan, set goals, make deadlines and list resources. Break the task down into manageable parts. Be honest about your capabilities.

Think about what you can do alone and what kind of help you need to recruit. Think about how to engage diverse participants. Involving people with a wide variety of interests will help you better understand the different perspectives on the issue and will ultimately lead to a better strategy.

As you set your strategy, keep the greater community in mind. Try to offer a solution that addresses a viable community need—not just your limited interest. Offer an alternative solution—not just your opposition. Point out the good that can be accomplished.

Make Contacts

Contact everyone you know who might be an ally. Recruit people who are committed to your cause. Enlist people who, at first glance, appear to be your opponents but would support your project if they believe your solution addresses their needs as well.

Remember, it's easier to say "no" to a stranger so build relationships with policy-makers and elected officials. Meeting with an elected official for a few minutes with no particular agenda other than to get to know one another and introduce yourself can net rewards later. Should you ever be on opposite sides of an issue, having some kind of relationship will be helpful. A difference of opinion among friends or colleagues is a better position than a difference of opinion among strangers.

Learn How The System Works

Learn how the process works. Understand the rules for participation in meetings and stick to them. That will keep the attention focused on the issue not your behavior.

Present Your View

Different approaches may be required for different audiences. Don't get stuck with one presentation for all audiences. Some audiences know more, others less. Some audiences may have different interests that merit different appeals. Some people will be swayed by statistics and facts. Others will be swayed by facts that have been humanized by talking about people who are impacted by your issue.

When making your presentation, stick to the point and make it clear what action you want. Stick to the facts. If you're part of a group, consider having the most polished, succinct speaker present your view: people can get turned off by ten people saying the same thing.

If you're writing a letter or e-mail, use your own words—not a form letter.

Policy-makers appreciate an effort to tell them "why" you support or oppose an issue. Are there issues of fundamental fairness at stake? Is there an erroneous assumption? A person who cares and has accurate facts and figures can make a compelling argument.

Be Realistic

Be realistic and understand that there will be people on the opposite side who care just as passionately as you do. Expect to compromise. Dividing your neighbors or burning bridges will not improve the situation and can net long-lasting harm to your cause or the community.

The authors of *Reinventing Citizenship* point out that the public world is different from our private life and includes people from many different communities. In public life, we are not always linked by common values, histories, cultures or interests. Instead, public life links people through common problems and opportunities. Self-interest is what brings people to the public world. Each participant in the public problem-solving process must accept that others don't have your self-interest as their first concern or their self-interest is different from yours. While interests are not always shared, people can still be engaged around common problems or opportunities. Understanding diverse self-interests can lead to creative action.

Understand Decision-makers

Policy-makers and elected officials are like everyone else: they don't want to be approached only when something is needed of them. Effective advocates cultivate relationships with decision-makers and their staff over a long period of time and understand the process well enough to know when to ask and when to back off.

Effective advocates understand that berating policy-makers or making unfounded accusations is counter-productive. Policy-makers and elected officials understand that people will sometimes vehemently oppose their actions or proposals. In these instances, a persuasive argument is one that is forceful while still being fair and civil.

Decision-makers will appreciate it if you understand the constraints they face. They must address fiscal realities, legal constraints, levy limits, and mandates from the state or federal government. They must also weigh long-term needs against short-term hardships. They have obligations, not just to you, but also to your opponents and the larger community. They must listen to your argument but they must also hear other views and remember the people who, because they are reasonably satisfied with the status quo or support the proposal, do not feel the need to attend a meeting.

Broaden Your Base Of Support

Success often depends on being able to show a broad range of support and little or no opposition. It's okay to start with a small core of activists. They'll do the work and infuse others with their passion. Find people who will sustain efforts over the long haul. Look for people who care about your issue for the right reasons.

Say Thank You

Be sure to thank your volunteers, the people who listened to your arguments and the people who supported your effort.

* Editor's Note: Much of this chapter is based upon information and excerpts from *Reinventing Citizenship – The Practice of Public Work*, published by the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota and the OMB Watch's publication "*So You Want To Make A Difference.*"



Citizen Leadership

Leadership is about how you bring out the best in other people. Leadership is what you give to the community you live in...and the world. Leadership is how you live an honest life...You will be more credible and more powerful if you do not separate the life you live from the words you speak..

- Paul Wellstone

Citizen leaders work with others to solve problems and improve their community. One type of leadership—termed “transforming leadership” by historian James MacGregor Burns—requires leaders to look beyond self-interest and take action for the broader common good. Tom O’Connell, Metropolitan State University, writes that, “Transforming leadership is a requirement for health community life.” O’Connell believes that transforming leadership is not the sole province of movement heroes or powerful politicians: it’s also found in the everyday acts of community involvement that take place in PTA’s, park associations, neighborhood groups and civic organizations. Involvement at this level can provide a first step toward a broader awareness of the concerns of others and give a larger purpose to public decision-making.

To make transforming leadership a reality, there must be a commitment to a larger purpose by both citizens and the people they choose to represent them. The ideals* listed below can provide a context for transforming leadership whether in an organization, a neighborhood, a community or nation.

Leaders Foster Participation

Citizen leaders are democratic and participatory. They understand that the more they nurture leadership in others, the greater power their initiative will have. Democratic leadership doesn’t mean that all the people participate all the time or in the same way. Democratic leadership means there is a consistent and realistic commitment to fostering participation.

Leaders Are Realistic

Leaders must deeply care about issues and want to make a difference; however, they must be realistic enough to develop effective strategies to accomplish their goals. Effective leaders understand that important change won’t always occur quickly.

Leaders Do What’s Right

Citizen leaders do more than “get things done.” As citizen leaders help move members toward shared goals, they stop to ask whether those goals are just. When there are conflicts between what participants want and what is right, a leader works creatively to resolve them. Leaders who take a hard look at the ethical dimensions of their positions can help moderate the tension between narrow self-interest and the broader public good.

Leaders understand that there will be times when they must detach themselves from their constituent group to formulate a decision based on careful reasoning and sound strategy. In some cases, that may mean telling supporters that their approach is off base. Nonetheless, they remain attached to their constituents and carefully listen to them.

Leaders Continue To Grow

Effective citizen leaders are not afraid to acknowledge that they have things to learn. They are open to constructive criticism, and they value their own growth as well as the growth of others.

Leaders must be humble enough to admit that a decision may prove to be only half right or, in some cases, entirely wrong. Healthy leaders are humble enough to laugh at themselves and listen to others.

Leaders Tap The Strengths Of Others

Effective leaders are aware of the skills they possess as well as the skills they need to develop. They also build strong teams of people who have complementary skills to accomplish the organization's goals.

In evaluating your own leadership abilities and the leadership needs of your organization, consider these four types of leaders and what each brings to the table. (These descriptions, which were adapted from *The Vocation of Politics – A Citizen's View*, are taken from the Camp Wellstone manual.)

The Process Leader

The process leader builds community by creating an organization in which members develop their ability to participate in decision-making and resolve conflict. Participants in this type of organization or effort feel a strong sense of belonging.

A process leader has skills in communication, community-building, conflict resolution, group facilitation and decision-making.

The Task Leader

The task leader serves as a manager. This leader focuses on goals, objectives and outcomes in order to create an effective organization that meets participants' shared goals.

A task leader is efficient, accountable, organized, task-oriented and persistent.

The Strategic Leader

The strategic leader is a change agent. This leader develops effective approaches to change and works with people to put those strategies into action.

A strategic leader has vision, analytic skills and planning skills. This leader is future-directed, yet retains a sense of history.

The Ethical Leader

The ethical leader challenges the group to pursue goals that are just and insists that the group act with honesty and integrity.

The ethical leader must have long term vision, ethical sensibility and moral courage.

* Editor's Note: Much of this chapter is based upon information and excerpts from the *Camp Wellstone Workbook*, published by The Wellstone Action Organizing and Campaign Training Center and America Coming Together, and an essay by Tom O'Connell entitled, "The Vocation of Politics: A Citizen's View."



Organizing A Neighborhood

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been — a place half-remembered and half-envisioned. Community. Strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of friends.

- Starhawk

Most people wish they could change something in their neighborhood. Some people want more sidewalks, new playground equipment or run-down houses fixed up. Many just want to get to know their neighbors better. The best way to make these changes is for you and your neighbors to form a neighborhood organization. The City of St. Louis Park's neighborhood outreach coordinator is available to help you with many activities related to neighborhood organizations. For details, call 952/924-2613.

Getting Started

In many cases, it's a small group that decides to organize the neighborhood. Sometimes it's just one person. In any case, the challenge is to recruit help. One way to begin is by organizing a core group that will arrange and advertise the first organizational meeting.

When setting your agenda, be clear about what you want to accomplish. Will it be informational? Will you be trying to judge the level of interest for a neighborhood group? Will you be trying to get your neighbors excited about forming a group? Will you immediately jump into defining neighborhood issues and suggesting solutions?

An agenda might include these topics –

- Introductions (Be sure to ask attendees to sign in with their names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses so they can be contacted at a future date.)
- Discussion of issues facing the neighborhood. (At a future meeting, you can prioritize issues, decide on possible solutions and form committees to implement solutions.)
- Brainstorm activities that a neighborhood association could offer (block parties, picnics, holiday parties, service swaps, neighborhood cleanups, beautification efforts, etc.)
- Set the date and agenda for the next meeting
- Social time for meeting and greeting one another.

Publicize your meeting with a flier listing the date, time, place and purpose. The City of St. Louis Park will print the fliers. Drop fliers inside doors: don't place fliers in mailboxes (a violation of federal law). You could also ask neighborhood merchants and apartment building owners to post a flier.

Organizational Structure

Most neighborhood groups start with a volunteer steering committee that serves as the leadership body until the organization gets off the ground. After several general meetings, elections could be held for leaders. Elected leaders can meet in between the general meetings to make sure that work is getting done.

There is no single model of organizational structure. Some organizations elect a set of officers such as a president, one or two vice-presidents, a secretary and a treasurer. Others expand their leadership group to include committee chairs. Some organizations choose to have a steering committee made up of one or two representatives of each committee, plus a chair and two co-chairs. The chair can rotate every six months to a year, giving the most active members a chance to develop their leadership skills and preventing one person from burning out.

Committees allow participants to get involved in specific projects that interest them. Committees make it more likely that the work of the group doesn't fall on a few people. Also, problems usually can be solved more efficiently in small groups. Committees also allow members to develop leadership skills and feel more of a stake in the organization.

The City of St. Louis Park has samples of organizational structures. For more information, contact the community outreach coordinator at 952/924-2613.

Neighborhood Grants

Neighborhood organizations may apply to the City Council for small grants to help fund activities aimed at promoting a sense of community within their neighborhood. Examples of eligible grant activities include meeting expenses, neighborhood picnics or garage sales, children's activities, new neighbor welcome materials, or special events such as ice cream socials or hayrides.

To qualify for a grant, the neighborhood must be organized into a formal neighborhood association with bylaws and methods of transferring leadership from year-to-year. The neighborhood must also match the grant money with either a financial contribution or volunteer labor.

Neighborhood Signs

Newly organized neighborhoods may also design their own neighborhood identification signs. Once the neighborhood has created a rough design, the City will fabricate and install the signs.

Neighborhood Newsletters

Neighborhood newsletters enable your group to maintain contact with residents, enlist their support and let everyone know what you're doing and what you've accomplished. A newsletter might contain notices of meetings and events, progress reports on neighborhood association activities, recognition of volunteers, advertisements, etc.

One way to begin a newsletter is to designate an editor. The editor can determine content and format, set up a publication schedule, arrange for printing and determine a way to distribute the newsletter to residents. Volunteers can then submit articles.

The City of St. Louis Park will print neighborhood association newsletters at no charge.

Possible Projects

Here are a few ideas for projects that can help your group address neighborhood problems and promote neighborhood togetherness.

Plant Exchange

Neighbors can share their love of gardening by sponsoring a plant exchange. Choose a date and location and designate a time period of one or two hours to trade plants. Invite all neighbors to bring perennials from their yards. Plants must be separated and marked with the plant name. Display the plants by sun or shade needs. You can organize a free for all swap where neighbors can leave or take what they want. Or, you can give out cards or tokens, one for each donated plant that neighbors then exchange for other plants. Either way, the goal is not to have any plants left at the end.

Babysitting Exchange

In a babysitting exchange, a group of families agree to babysit for each other at no cost. In exchange for having access to free babysitting, each participating family agrees to babysit for other members of the exchange. A record keeper is needed to keep track of how many hours of babysitting each family receives and how many hours each family gives.

Play Groups

A play group brings together children of the same age and their parents at different houses. Parents can get to know each other while their children play. Each member agrees to host the play group at his or her home at a regular interval.

Members should decide how often to meet, the size of the group, and who will be a contact person for people interested in joining. Your neighborhood organization may want to keep a list of play groups that have formed for different age children so that new neighbors can join.

Education Nights

A series of education nights can be used to teach residents about crime and fire prevention, lawn care or other topics of interest to the neighborhood. An education night could be used to share information about a problem the neighborhood is facing.

Block Parties

Block parties offer a great way to meet neighbors, share food and have fun. Organizers may apply for a street closure permit at the main reception desk in City Hall or by calling 952/924-2500. Organizers should apply for the permit at least seven working days before the party. If the block party application is approved, city staff will notify the Police and Fire Departments as well as bus service providers about the street closure. Live bands may require a temporary noise permit; call 952/924-2589 for more information.

Block parties for National Night Out Against Crime (first Tuesday in August) are coordinated by the Police Department. For more information, call 952/924-2661.

Neighborhood Olympics

Neighborhood Olympics can be a fun activity for all ages. Set up events, prizes and age or ability divisions and have fun. Possible events include: 50, 100 and 200 yard dashes, 400 yard relay, softball throw for accuracy and distance, long jump, target games, rope jumping, potato race, egg and spoon race, sack race, three-legged race, etc.

Neighborhood Clean-up

Your neighborhood group can organize a neighborhood cleanup to pick up trash in alleys, yards, vacant lots, parks, streets and sidewalks. Once most of the litter has been cleared, you can maintain the cleanliness of your neighborhood by having regular sidewalk sweeps once every three to six months. Contact the Public Works Department at 952/924-2554 to arrange for trash bags and collection of the full bags.



Citizen Advisory Groups

It is not the function of our Government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the Government from falling into error.

- Robert H. Jackson

Serving on an advisory group is an excellent opportunity for citizens to share their talents, learn about city issues, and influence government policies.

Boards And Commissions

St. Louis Park boards and commissions research issues, provide citizen input on pending decisions, and bring issues to the attention of local leaders. Most commissions serve solely in an advisory capacity to the city council. The Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals and Fire Civil Service Commission do have decision-making authority; however, their decisions can be overruled by the city council.

With the exception of the Charter Commission, board and commission appointments are made by the city council. (Charter Commission members are appointed by the Chief Justice of District Court.) Appointments are made as vacancies arise.

Individuals interested in applying for a board or commission, can fill out an application form. If no vacancies exist, the application will be kept on file for one year. Applications forms are available by calling 952/924-2525 or visiting the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org (go to "Applications & Forms" section). If you're thinking of applying for a board or commission, it's a good idea to attend several meetings to verify the group really deals with the issues you're interested in.

Board of Zoning Appeals

The Board of Zoning Appeals hears appeals to zoning, variance and permit decisions made by City staff who are interpreting St. Louis Park's zoning ordinance.

The board's five members meet on the fourth Thursday evening of every month. Members serve three year terms and are appointed by the city council.

Charter Commission

The Charter Commission is responsible for the continuing study of St. Louis Park's Home Rule Charter which is the equivalent of St. Louis Park's "constitution." The Charter Commission solicits ideas from citizens, city staff and elected officials in its review. It may then develop proposals to change the charter or update charter language to ensure consistency with state law. Typically, changes proposed by the commission must be approved by a unanimous vote of the city council.

The commission's 15 members meet at least once a year, more often if needed. Members serve four year terms and are appointed by the Chief Justice of District Court.

Fire Civil Service Commission

This commission oversees the personnel operations of the Fire Department including recruiting, testing and selecting candidates, and certifying eligible individuals for appointment and promotion.

Its three members meet on an “as needed” basis. Members are appointed by the city council.

Housing Authority Board

The board oversees the operation of the St. Louis Park Housing Authority which helps ensure the availability of safe and desirable housing options in St. Louis Park by providing public housing or rent vouchers for low income elderly, families and disabled individuals. The Housing Authority also offers home improvement loans to help homeowners with renovations, redevelops blighted residential properties, and works with developers to meet the community’s affordable housing needs.

The five Housing Authority Board members meet on the second Wednesday of each month. Members serve five year terms and are appointed by the city council.

Human Rights Commission

The commission advises the city council on how to ensure equal opportunity, thwart discrimination and encourage an appreciation for diversity in St. Louis Park. Their recommendations must be approved by the city council.

The commission meets on the third Wednesday of each month. Ten of its 11 voting members are appointed by the city council, and one member is appointed by the school board. These commissioners serve three year terms. In addition, there are two slots for student members who serve one year terms.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

This group advises the city on acquiring property, developing park facilities and improving recreation programs.

Its eight members meet on the third Wednesday of each month. Adult members serve three year terms; the student member serves a one year term. The city council appoints five members, and three members are appointed by the school board.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission reviews development plans and advises the city council on all aspects of growth and development in St. Louis Park. It reviews amendments to the comprehensive plan, considers proposals to change zoning and platting, and discusses other community development issues.

Its seven members meet on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Members serve three year terms. Six members are appointed by the city council, and one member is appointed by the school board.

Police Advisory Commission

This commission group advises the city on non-emergency police service priorities, broad policy issues, Police Department annual goals, and ways to enhance the relationship between the police and citizens.

The Police Advisory Commission meets approximately six times a year. Its eleven adult members serve three year terms; the student member serves a one year term. All members are appointed by the city council.

Telecommunications Advisory Council

This commission advises the city council about the cable TV franchise serving St. Louis Park and other telecommunications issues. It receives citizen comments about cable services and makes recommendations to the city council about franchise terms and the annual grant to School District 283.

Its seven members meet at least quarterly, more often if needed. Commissioners serve three year terms and are appointed by the city council.

Representation In Other Organizations' Advisory Groups

The City of St. Louis Park also appoints representatives to other entities' advisory committees.

Community Education Advisory Council

The Community Education Advisory Council advises the St. Louis Park School Board on adult education, child care and other community education programs. The council identifies community needs and recommends programs and budget policies.

Of the 24-member advisory council, four citizens are appointed by the St. Louis Park City Council to two year terms. (The remainder are appointed by the school board.) The council meets on the third Tuesday of each month except July. For more information, contact the Community Education Director at 952/928-6063.

Bassett Creek Water Management Commission

The Bassett Creek Water Management Commission develops systems to manage stormwater, improve water quality, alleviate flood damage and improve the creek channel. Nine cities are represented on the commission, and the St. Louis Park City Council appoints one delegate and one alternate to three year terms on the commission.

The commission meets at noon on the third Thursday of each month. For more information, call the St. Louis Park City Clerk's office at 952/924-2525 or the Bassett Creek Watershed District at 952/832-2652.

Task Forces

Occasionally, the St. Louis Park City Council will form a special task force to study a particular issue and formulate recommendations for it to consider. Depending on the issue, a task force could be asked to meet for a period of weeks or months.

- Whenever a task force is created, a notice will be published in the *St. Louis Park Sun-Sailor* newspaper and posted on the city's web site at www.stlouispark.org. The notice will describe the task force's charge and how to apply.



Run For Office Or Work On A Campaign

You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.

- Mario Cuomo

While a great deal of attention is focused on national and state elections, don't forget that there are campaigns for local offices such as city council, school board, county commissioner and more. Whether you're interested in helping out on someone else's campaign or running for office yourself, here are a few considerations. *

Filing For Office

To be on a ballot, candidates must formally file for election with the clerk of the appropriate jurisdiction. Individuals running for city council, for example, file for office with the city clerk. Individuals seeking a seat on the school board file with the school district clerk. Individuals who wish to run for state office, file with the Minnesota Secretary of State.

When candidates file for office, they sign an affidavit stating the office they are seeking and declaring that they meet the qualifications of the office. At that time, they also pay a filing fee which varies with the office they are seeking.

Candidates filing for a ward position on the St. Louis Park City Council must live in that ward. Their nominating petition must contain the signatures of 15 registered voters who live in that ward. Candidates filing for mayor or an at-large position must obtain the signatures of 15 registered voters who live in St. Louis Park. When collecting signatures, it's a good idea to get extra signatures in case any of the signatories is disqualified (not a registered voter, residency, etc.).

Filing is not open year-round. Instead, filing opens a few months before the election and extends only for a few weeks. In St. Louis Park, filing for city council usually occurs in July of odd-numbered years. Filing for school board usually opens in September. To learn when filing opens and closes, call the clerk of the office you seeking.

Plan Your Campaign

Successful campaigns are planned efforts. Setting your goals at the outset will help you develop a campaign road map that will keep you focused. A clear plan will make it easier to energize volunteers and donors as well as ensure that your activities match your resources. Aim to create a plan that focuses on doing a few things well rather than doing a little of everything.

Planning elements include –

- Setting goals and objectives
- Identifying your resources (time, money and people)
- Building the organizational structure to reach your goals/vision
- Creating messages to communicate with voters
- Determining activities to reach voters.

Research Your Issues And Develop Your Message

Take the time to define the issue and possible solutions. Rather than try to communicate too much about too many issues, develop a few clear and concise messages.

Once you've clarified your issues, develop your message. Your message should be consistent, credible and respectful. It should also respond to what people are feeling. Your message should answer these questions –

- Why are you running?
- What are you trying to change?
- Why should I care?

Plan And Report A Campaign Budget

Even small, local campaigns cost money. Determine what it will cost to run your campaign (supplies, coffee and doughnuts for volunteers, advertising, printing, postage, etc.) Since it's unlikely you can afford to do everything, make sure your budget reflects your campaign's priorities.

With your projected costs in hand, determine how you will raise the money to run your campaign (direct solicitation, special events, house parties, etc.). Be sure to adjust your budget to match projected revenue. Create a cash flow sheet to guide you through the campaign expenditures to ensure your fundraising is on track. Fundraising requires the willingness to directly ask people to contribute and the ability to organize others to raise money on your behalf.

Candidates for all offices are required by Minnesota law to file campaign expenditure reports. Failure to file reports is a misdemeanor. Where the reports are filed depends on the office being sought. Candidates for city council file reports with the city clerk, school board candidates file with the school district clerk, and candidates for county offices file with the county auditor.

Typically, candidates must file reports once they begin receiving contributions, prior to the primary and general elections, and after the election. Additional requirements may apply. Check with the clerk of the office you are seeking or with the Secretary of State's office.

Recruit Volunteers

Volunteers can help organize events, write letters to the editor, call voters, drop literature, run errands, put up and collect yard signs, walk in parades, solicit funds, give voters rides to the polls, etc.

People volunteer for a variety of reasons, and your volunteer activities should meet those needs and interests. Among the reasons people volunteer –

- They're concerned about an issue
- They share your view
- It's a way to meet other people
- They want something from you: a skill to list on a résumé, school credit, a promise of help on something they're interested in, etc.
- They're a friend or relative who just wants to help you succeed
- They want to earn recognition.

Creating meaningful and enjoyable activities that address these needs will help you attract and retain volunteers.

Make Yourself Visible

Determine what methods you'll use to make your campaign visible: lawn signs, literature drops, special events, advertisements, news releases, letters to the editor, web site, etc.

Campaign Literature

Minnesota law governs the content and dissemination of paid political advertising or literature. Making intentionally false statements can be subject to misdemeanor charges. Campaign literature must include a "prepared and paid for" statement. Advertisements must include the words "paid advertisement." Requirements are available by contacting the Minnesota Secretary of State's office.

Campaign material that is not circulated on behalf of a particular candidate or ballot question must also include in the disclaimer either that this publication is "in opposition to (candidate's name or ballot question)" or "is not circulated on behalf of any candidate or ballot question."

Contact Voters

Identify where your votes are likely to come from and set a strategy to reach these people. How can you expand this base? Then determine how you can engage new voters and undecided voters.

Will you door knock by yourself or will you ask volunteers to knock on doors as well? If you're door knocking, set a timetable so you reach each household by election day. If you're planning on using phone banks, have you recruited enough volunteers?

Candidates for political office may request a list of registered voters by contacting the Minnesota Secretary of State's office. There is a small fee for the lists, which are available in a number of formats (paper lists, mailing labels, CD Rom).

Prepare For The Time Commitment

If you're elected, you'll need to prepare for the time commitment. You'll need to allocate time for learning about issues, talking with constituents, attending formal meetings as well as "unofficial" gatherings such as pancake breakfasts and open forums, and communicating with staff and other elected officials.

* Editor's Note: Much of this material is condensed from the *Camp Wellstone Workbook* created by The Wellstone Action Organizing and Campaign Training Center and ACT (America Coming Together).



To Learn More

It is not up to you to complete the task, but neither should you shy away from it altogether.

- Pirkei Avot

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League of Minnesota Cities 651/281-1200 www.lmnc.org		Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board 651/296-5148 www.cfboard.state.mn.us
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Association of Minnesota Counties 651/224-3344 www.mncounties.org		Green Party 612/871-4585 www.mngreens.org
State of Minnesota www.state.mn.us		Independence Party 651/487-9700 www.mnip.org
		Republican Party 651/222-0022 www.mngop.com
		Camp Wellstone 651/645-3939 www.wellstone.org



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I found Rome brick; I left it marble.

- Caesar Augustus

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