



Council Orientation

2015

The City of Stoughton Mission Statement

“We are dedicated to providing quality services in a fiscally responsible manner.”



**Alderson's
Handbook
for the
Stoughton
City Council**

ALDERPERSON'S HANDBOOK FOR THE STOUGHTON CITY COUNCIL

Congratulations on your election to the Stoughton City Council! You are a member of a select group of individuals who have chosen to accept city governance responsibilities.

History of the Stoughton City Government

The first meeting of the Village Board was held on April 9, 1868. Mr. James Norris was elected President and Frank Allen was appointed Clerk. Stoughton remained a village until February 6, 1882, when the City Charter was adopted. Mr. Jacob Wettleson was elected the first mayor. Since that date the form of city government has been the Mayor-Council type. This is the dominant type of government in Wisconsin and is used in 181 of the 190 cities in the state.

Organization

Stoughton politically is comprised of four (4) aldermanic districts. Three (3) alderpersons are elected from each district and serve a term of three (3) years. The Mayor is elected at large and serves a term of four (4) years. The Mayor's position became full-time in 1944.

Common Council Standing Committees and Their Areas of Responsibilities

Every department in the city has a corresponding governing group, known as its Standing Committee. Each Standing Committee is made up of one alderperson from each aldermanic district. Appointments to these committees are made annually by the Mayor at the organizational meeting of the Council in April. These appointments are subject to confirmation by the Council. Per Ordinance Sec. 2-66. - Established; meetings; responsibilities; here is an overview of the City of Stoughton's Standing Committees:

(a) Generally. The committees set out in this section shall constitute the standing committees of the council. Such committees shall be responsible for the areas provided in this section.

(b) Committees and their responsibilities.

(1) Public works committee. The oversight responsibilities of the public works committee include street department, streets and alleys, signing of streets, sidewalks, disposal of stormwater, maintenance of municipally owned property, permits, installation and maintenance of traffic signs, public transportation, tree commission, planning department, Main Street enhancement committee, cemetery board, and all ordinances and policies concerning or affecting such subjects.

(2) Community affairs/council policies committee. The oversight responsibilities of the community affairs/council policies committee include food pantry, hall of fame, holiday fund, opera house, cable commission, commission on aging, arts council, seniors in need, and other committees related to community or social projects, as well as rules and procedures to be followed by all standing committees and the council, policies to be followed by elected and appointed officials in the conduct of city business and all ordinances and policies concerning or affecting such subjects.

(3)Public safety committee. The oversight responsibilities of the public safety committee include licenses, ambulance, police, fire, judiciary, traffic regulation and related signage, safety committee, and all ordinances and policies concerning or affecting such subjects.

(4)Finance committee. The oversight responsibilities of the finance committee include finance department, financial transactions, treasurer's reports, claims for payment, claims for damages, contract approval/award/expenditure oversight, insurance purchasing and oversight, bonds, borrowing resolutions, financial policies, budgets, revenue generation, assessment/assessor selection/oversight, purchase, lease and sales of property, taxi grant, grant applications/expenditure oversight, facade improvement committee and all ordinances and policies affecting or concerning such subjects.

(5)Personnel committee. The oversight responsibilities of the personnel committee include the clerk's department, policy decisions and necessary interpretation of work rules and union agreements, all personnel policies, hearings or decisions related to employee hiring, discipline, and status as required by ordinance and/or city policy union and employee negotiation personnel position requests, payroll questions, position description creation and appeals, any matter dealing with firms retained for personnel purposes, exclusive of their contract, and all ordinances and policies concerning or affecting such subjects.

(6)Parks and recreation committee. The oversight responsibilities of the parks and recreation committee include parks and recreation department, parks, park development, recreation, river and trails task force, youth center, friends of Mandt Park, and all ordinances and policies concerning or affecting such subjects.

(Ord. No. 0-19-11, § 2, 9-13-2011)

Sec. 2-67. - Appointments.

(a)Appointments to the standing committees set out in section 2-66 will be comprised of four members, one from each aldermanic district. Whenever possible, the mayor will appoint a member of the previous year's committee as a hold over to insure committee continuity. Appointments to standing committees shall be made annually by the mayor at the reorganizational meeting of the city council, subject to confirmation by the council.

(b)Each committee shall elect its own chair and vice-chair at the first meeting following the reorganizational meeting. No alderperson shall serve as chair of more than one standing committee.

(Ord. No. 0-19-11, § 2, 9-13-2011)

Sec. 2-68. - Committee of the whole.

The council president may at any meeting of the council move that the council meet as a committee of the whole for informal discussion of any matter appearing on the agenda. This motion requires no record, shall not be debatable, and requires a two-thirds majority for passage. The council president shall be the chairperson of the committee of the whole.

Alderpersons' Responsibilities

Each Alderperson is elected by the voters of his or her district. The term of office is three (3) years. If an Alderperson moves from his/her district, s/he should notify the Mayor by letter of his/her resignation from the Council. If the resignation is after December 1st, the seat will remain vacant until filled at the next spring election.

As a member of the City Council, the Alderperson's chief responsibility is that of a policy maker; in a way, the Council is similar to the board of directors of a private company. In addition to setting policy, the Council approves and oversees the budget and City spending, is involved in community planning, establishing programs and review of those programs, is responsible for administrative oversight, and lastly, votes on final steps for conflict resolution. In general, an alderperson should not become involved in the day to day operation of the City departments, but should go through the proper channels if s/he has individual concerns.

Beyond participation at bi-monthly City Council meetings, alders are assigned to one or more Standing Committees and possibly other boards or commissions. Alders who serve on Standing Committees research, study, and discuss the myriad of issues that confront city departments. Based on a committee's investigations, it makes recommendations to the City Council. Alders on Standing Committees also work with department heads on budgetary and CIP issues.

Alder Committee Participation/Expectations

Committee appointments are made by the mayor and approved by the City Council. Alders should know their assigned committees by the installation meeting in early April. A newly elected alder should schedule an initial walking tour of all city departments with the City Clerk immediately following the installation meeting. This tour should occur within two weeks of the installation meeting. During this initial tour, the new alder will visit each city department and meet all department heads and available staff.

Alders need a detailed understanding of departmental duties and responsibilities to be effective on the standing committee(s) on which they serve. It is expected that all alders will establish a follow up meeting with the respective department head(s) for further edification. Returning alders should schedule their follow up meeting(s) within two weeks of the installation meeting. New alders should schedule their follow up meeting(s) within two weeks of their initial walking tour.

The First Committee Meeting

To prepare for the first committee meeting, alders should review the *Council Orientation Binder*. In addition to discussing regular business, the following occur during the first meeting of a committee:

- Elect committee chair and vice chair.
- Discuss questions resulting from the review of the *Council Orientation Binder*.
- Review departmental short term and long term plans.
- Review specific departmental policies that may affect the relationship between committee and department members.

Responsibilities of the Committee Chair & Vice Chair

The ability of city departments to successfully execute their duties is highly dependent on the committee chair doing his/her job diligently.

The responsibilities of a committee chair include the following:

- Establish monthly meeting agendas with the department head or appropriate staff member;
- Review any agenda suggestions from the public, the mayor, or any alder and place said items on the appropriate agendas. All requests for agenda items must be satisfied within two months of receipt. If an item is not appropriate for the committee, a written explanation should be provided;
- If an item is not appropriate for one committee but may be appropriate for another, the chair is responsible for forwarding the item to the chair of the correct committee expeditiously;
- Study all available information on noticed agenda items in preparation for the meeting;
- Call all meetings to order;
- Run the meeting in a timely, orderly fashion;
- Lead the discussion on noticed agenda items only;
- Recognize people interested in speaking;
- Impose time limits (if any) on citizens wishing to speak;
- Act as parliamentarian;
- Follow up on delegated work to ensure timely completion.

Through his/her leadership, the chair of a committee determines the quality of work achieved by the committee and its department. The chair is expected to commit all the time necessary to ensure the committee successfully completes its assigned duties.

ETHICS FOR A BETTER PUBLIC OFFICIAL

(written by Earl Rathe, who died while serving as Mayor of New Berlin, March 25, 1978)

- Don't act as a committee of one. Remember that your only authority lies in your membership on the board or council.
- Don't use your official position for personal gain or to promote your own interests. Disqualify yourself if your board or council is considering a matter in which you have a personal interest.
- Don't let honest differences of opinion degenerate into personality conflicts.
- Visit other communities, particularly those that have the reputation of being well run. If your community is about to undertake a special project, inspect similar projects in other communities.
- Keep the public informed. Issue frequent news releases; accept invitations to speak before local groups.
- Never accept gifts or favors from individuals or firms doing business with your municipality.
- Represent all the people in your community, not just your friends, neighbors, or business associates.
- Express your honest convictions, although you are in the minority, but support major decisions.
- Don't be misled by the vocal demands of special interest groups. When in doubt, ask yourself: "Is this in the best interest of the whole community?"
- Remember that there are at least two sides to each question. Listen politely, but reserve making a decision until you have all the facts.
- Don't try to be an expert on all phases of local government. Seek the advice of real experts.
- Cooperate with other public agencies and with all citizen groups working in the best interest of your community.
- Work for and insist that the affairs of your municipality be conducted on a sound businesslike basis.
- Don't be content to just "hold office." Use your office to provide the kind of dedicated, creative, forceful leadership that your citizens have a right to expect.

SOME ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Amendment: a separate motion to the main motion

Amendment, friendly: a slight change to an original motion

BFO: Budgeting for Outcomes—a budgeting method used to prioritize city services vs. available funds

CARPC: Capital Area Regional Planning Commission—an appointed body to facilitate land issues

CBGB: Community Development Block Grant—funds used for housing, economic development, and community service initiatives

CIP: Capital Improvement Process—budget for repairs to buildings and streets, typically using borrowed funds

COW: Committee of the Whole—meeting that includes Alders and City staff

Motion: a proposal to act on an item

Quorum: number of members needed to constitute a legal meeting

Resolution: an act to describe purpose and outcome of an action

Robert's Rules: parliamentary procedures and rules for conducting a meeting

Tabling a Motion: passage delays further action until a later date

TIF: Tax Incremental Financing— a method to use future gains in taxes to subsidize current improvements, which are projected to create the conditions for said gains