

# Are You Organized for Business?

by Michael Chandler

This column highlights an exercise used in Virginia's "certified planning commissioners" training program. The exercise serves several functions. First, it will give your planning commission an indication of how well it is set up to ensure that newly appointed commis-

sioners understand the commission's basic duties, responsibilities, and relationships.

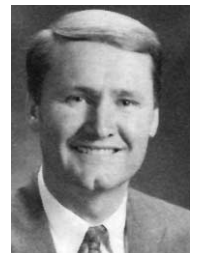
*[In an earlier column, I touched on the importance of providing new planning commission appointees with a solid orientation; see "Enhancing Your Commission's Productivity," PCJ, Issue 14].*

But the exercise should also be valuable to "veteran" commissioners — and to planning directors as well — because it can quickly identify some of the basics of good commission practice which may have gotten lost in the shuffle of keeping up with the hundred and one more pressing short-term things your commission needs to get done.

The exercise — like most of those I use — is rather simple in design. There are just twenty questions. The possible responses are: true, less true, or false. The questions can be completed as "homework" for commissioners between meetings, or can be addressed by the commission during a work session or retreat, or at the end of a short meeting (assuming you occasionally have short meetings!). It should take no more than fifteen minutes to answer the questions. Once completed, it is best to engage in a focused discussion of each element featured on the exercise. Allowing an hour for the discussion period is prudent. If the questions are taken home by commissioners to complete, make sure you allocate time at your next meeting for this discussion.

I hope that your commission will use this exercise as an opportunity for thinking about how well you're organized to do business. ♦

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The questions appearing on the exercise are as follows:

1. The role of the Commission is clearly defined. I fully understand what is expected of the Commission — what it should and should not do.  
 True  Less True  False
2. I know exactly what is expected of me personally on the Commission. My role, responsibilities, and "job description" were fully explained to me upon appointment.  
 True  Less True  False
3. Upon appointment, each Commissioner receives a copy of the local land use plan and related ordinances (subdivision, zoning).  
 True  Less True  False
4. Following a reasonable length of time, the Commission's Chairman determines whether the materials noted in question three have been read.  
 True  Less True  False
5. Upon appointment, each Commissioner receives a copy of the state's planning enabling legislation.  
 True  Less True  False
6. Upon appointment, each Commissioner receives a copy of their jurisdiction's enabling charter.  
 True  Less True  False
7. Following a reasonable length of time, the Commission Chairman determines whether the materials noted in questions five and six have been read.  
 True  Less True  False
8. The Commission is appropriately organized to carry out its mission. We have and use bylaws.  
 True  Less True  False
9. We always have good attendance by commissioners during commission meetings.  
 True  Less True  False
10. We always have good participation by commissioners during commission meetings.  
 True  Less True  False
11. Commission members have input in developing the meeting agenda.  
 True  Less True  False
12. Commission/staff relationships are good.  
 True  Less True  False
13. As a commissioner, I get adequate information from staff to help me prepare for meetings.  
 True  Less True  False
14. The Commission has in place (and uses) a structured procedure for hearings, rezoning requests, and the like.  
 True  Less True  False
15. As a Commission, we always critique/evaluate (debrief) our meetings before we adjourn.  
 True  Less True  False
16. The Commission has at least one meeting a year to review Commission activities and accomplishments.  
 True  False
17. The Commission meets, at least annually, with the governing body (Board or Council) to discuss matters of mutual interest.  
 True  False
18. The Commission has at least one meeting a year to plan future (the coming year) activities.  
 True  False
19. The Commission prepares and distributes an annual report.  
 True  False
20. You answered the first 19 questions honestly!  
 True  False