

October 12, 2023

Dear City Commissioners,

In 2022, the City Commission [asked for a plan](#) to help better align the City's volunteer boards and commissions to the work of the Lawrence Strategic Plan. Over the last ten months, the [Board and Commissions Structure Committee](#) (BCSC) has worked diligently to understand the current structure and operations of the City's many volunteer boards and commissions and the policies and procedures that guide their work.

The current state of our boards and commissions is similar to many other cities in the country. They came into being either because of a state requirement, were formed to respond to a situation or condition in the history of the city, were implemented as part of a new program, tax, or law, or were brought forward as an innovation that may have swept through nationally or regionally.

Regardless of their origin story, nearly all of our boards and commissions were created before the adoption of the City's strategic plan in 2019-2020. Without recent conversations about the purpose and mission of each board and commission, and without alignment to the City's strategic plan, even the best-intended volunteers may get frustrated and distract resources and attention from the most important priorities.

Given that reality, the challenge of the BCSC was to determine how to use our resources to achieve the outcomes and commitments identified as the top priorities during the drafting of the City's strategic plan. Throughout our work together, members of the BCSC asked ourselves: how can we create a structure for boards and commissions that allows for meaningful community participation while also ensuring that volunteer contributions are aligned to the Outcomes, Commitments, and Progress Indicators of the Lawrence Strategic Plan, maximized in their impact, and sustainable in their operations.

In the following pages, you will find the BCSC's recommendation for eight boards that we believe will set us on a path to achieve this charge, plus a new set of policies and procedures that will apply to all City boards.

Alongside the more formal policy boards, the BCSC is also recommending the use of operational boards, which would give staff access to additional technical insights for specific areas of City operations that do not necessarily lead to policy changes.

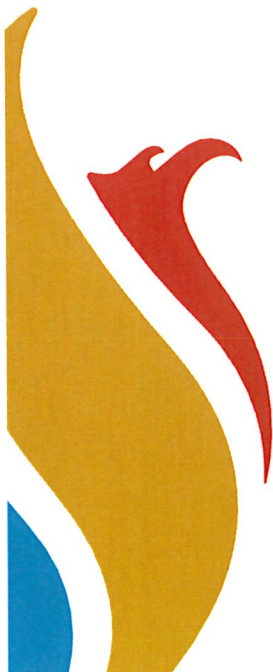
It is important to note that these recommendations are informed by multiple rounds of engagement with the community, including:

- In January 2023, the BCSC launched an online questionnaire for current board and commission [members](#) and [staff liaisons](#). The BCSC digested the results of this questionnaire during our [February 9 meeting](#). Most broadly, we heard that many board members and staff liaisons experienced confusion around their scope, purpose, and roles and responsibilities. This critical early feedback served as a foundation for the work of the BCSC and informed the draft recommendations that were provided to the community for feedback in May and June 2023.

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- In May and June 2023, the BCSC released another [online questionnaire](#) seeking feedback on our first round of draft recommendations. Alongside this questionnaire, we also hosted [two listening sessions](#) (one in-person, one virtual) with the community. We digested this feedback during our [July 12 meeting](#) and we used what we heard to refine our proposal.
- The BCSC met again on August 21 and October 12. At these meetings, the BCSC took public comment. The public comment was considered by the Committee and, as a result, our recommendations were once again revised, leading to the draft proposal in front of you today.

The BCSC submits these recommendations for input and discussion by the City Commission to ensure that we are meeting our charge and headed in an appropriate direction. After receiving Commission feedback, staff will begin work on the transition plan for existing boards and commissions.

In closing, the BCSC would like to extend sincere gratitude to every community member who has served on a board, commission, committee, or task force. As you are already aware, our boards and commissions are populated by dedicated and engaged residents who care deeply about the future of our community. As board and commission members ourselves, we acknowledge that change can be difficult, but we hope that our recommendations speak to our shared community priorities and that those affected by these changes will understand that they remain critically important and highly valued in the City's decision-making processes. Through the City's commitments – to Community Engagement, Equity and Inclusion, Efficient and Effective Processes, and more – the opportunity for community participation in government will only increase.

The BCSC would also like to express our appreciation to the hundreds of individuals who provided feedback as part of this process. These recommendations are deeply informed by what we heard from our fellow community members and volunteers.

Best wishes,



Chair Sharon Ashworth, on behalf of the Board and Commissions Structure Committee

Members of the Board and Commission Structure Committee:

Sharon Ashworth, Chair  
Katie Barnett  
Sharon Ellenbecker  
Travis Harrod  
Christopher Kohart  
John Nalbandian  
Stanley Rasmussen  
Daniel Smith



## Boards and Commissions Realignment Proposal, July 2023

The Lawrence Strategic Plan has five Outcomes of what the City plans to accomplish for our community. Accordingly, the BCSC recommendations alignment to the five Outcomes as follows:

- Unmistakable Identify
- Strong Welcoming Neighborhoods
- Safe and Secure
- Prosperity and Economic Security
- Connected City

In the analysis provided below, the current purpose for each board is summarized. It is assumed that the City Commission will adjust and/or revise the purpose for each Board as applicable.

### UNMISTAKABLE IDENTITY

**Strategic Plan Outcome:** Lawrence is a welcoming community, synonymous with arts, diverse culture, fun, and a quintessential downtown. City parks and community events contribute to the vibrancy experienced by all people in Lawrence.

Based on the statement of purpose set forth in the applicable authorizing ordinance or bylaws, the unique duties of the board, the specialized skills needed for an effective board, and public comment, the BCSC recommends that the following Boards and Commissions be aligned to the Unmistakable Identity Outcome but remain separate and not be combined with another Board or otherwise changed.

- **Parks and Recreation Advisory Board** (standalone board) *(Purpose: Make recommendations to the City Commission regarding the construction, reconstruction, and improvement of public parks and recreation facilities including the acquisition of land and major equipment and facilities.)*
- **Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission** (standalone board) *(Purpose: Promote, encourage, and coordinate the artistic and cultural activities of the community through recommendations made to the City Commission and through coordinating endeavors of those groups and organizations which identify themselves as primarily concerned with the artistic environment of Lawrence.)*

Because the **Sustainability Advisory Board** does not regularly take up issues brought to it by the City Commission or City Staff and does not typically have actionable agenda items, it does not appear to currently function like most of the other City Advisory Boards. As a board that tends to initiate its own agenda priorities, some of



its actions may not be in alignment with the City's Strategic Plan and not in alignment with the recommended policies and procedures for advisory boards. Accordingly, the BCSC recommends that the Sustainability Advisory Board be dissolved.

Because Environmental Sustainability is an essential commitment of the City's Strategic plan that is incorporated into all the Strategic Plan Outcomes, the BCSC recommends that the City Commission consider how to better align Environmental Sustainability with the Strategic Plan.

Recognizing the functional importance of the Sustainability Advisory Board and how we can incorporate it into the Unmistakable Identity Outcome, the BCSC recommends that the City Commission consider restructuring or reformatting the SAB to more closely align it with other advisory boards, City Commission needs and goals, City Manager support, and the achievement of our City's Strategic Plan outcomes.

## STRONG, WELCOMING NEIGHBORHOODS

**Strategic Plan Outcome:** All people in Lawrence live in safe, functional, and aesthetically unique neighborhoods that provide opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles with access to safe and affordable housing and essential services that help them thrive.

It is anticipated that one of the primary benefits from the ongoing effort to revise and update the city's development code is a substantial reduction in variances. As a result, it is expected that the workload will be substantially reduced for the Board of Zoning Appeals/Sign Code Board of Appeals and the Building Code Board of Appeals. In addition, the Boards generally serve overlapping purposes associated with land use, building construction, and property development. For this reason, the BCSC recommends that the following Boards and Commissions remain aligned with the Strong, Welcoming Neighborhoods Outcome of the strategic plan, but be combined into a new separate advisory board.

- **Board of Zoning Appeals/Sign Code Board of Appeals** (*Purpose: Serve as a quasi-judicial body to provide interpretations and variances under City land use regulations.*)
- **Building Code Board of Appeals** (*Purpose: Hear and to decide appeals from decisions made by the Building Official or the Fire Code Official, relative to building construction and enforcement of the Building Code, Residential Code, Energy Conservation Code, Electrical Code, Mechanical Code, Plumbing Code, Fuel Gas Code, and Fire Code, Residential Rental Property Code, and Contractor Licensing Regulations.*)



Based on the statement of purpose set forth in the applicable authorizing ordinance or bylaws, the specialized skills needed for an effective board, and public comment, the BCSC recommends that the following Boards and Commissions be recognized as being aligned to the Strong, Welcoming Neighborhoods Outcome of the strategic plan but remain separate and not be combined with another Board.

- **Historic Resources Commission** (standalone board) *(Purpose: Conduct hearings and reviews applications concerning proposed changes to historic landmarks or districts or properties within their environs, nominates properties for designation to historic registers, and advises the City Commission on historic conservation matters. The Commission also acts as Certified Local Government (CLG) Review Board, making determinations on projects which fall under State Historic Preservation Law as established by agreement with the State Historic Preservation office.)*
- **Affordable Housing Advisory Board** (standalone board) *(Purpose: 1. Advise the City Commission regarding issues affecting affordable housing and supportive services in the community; 2. Oversee and facilitate the purpose of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund; 3. Make recommendations to the City Commission regarding the expenditure of money from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund; and 4. Make recommendations to the City Commission regarding the cultivation and maintenance of steady and various streams of income to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.)*

## SAFE AND SECURE

**Strategic Plan Outcome:** Lawrence is a community where all people feel safe and secure and have access to trusted public and community-based safety resources.

Because of the overlapping statement of purpose for the following Boards and Commissions, the BCSC recommends that they be recognized as being aligned to the Safe and Secure Outcome of the strategic plan but be combined into a new advisory board.

- **Community Police Review Board** *(Purpose: advise and assist the City of Lawrence and its police department in policy development, education, community outreach and communications related to racial or other bias-based policing.)*
- **Human Relations Commission** *(Purpose: Endeavor to eliminate prejudice among the various racial, ethnic, and other groups within the city and to further goodwill among all people of Lawrence.)*



The **Bodywork Advisory Board** responsibilities pertain to the health, sanitary operations, training, licensure, etc. of bodywork professionals (e.g., massage therapists, manual therapists, reflexologist, etc.). After reviewing the statement of purpose for the Bodywork Advisory Board, and after considering the level of activity performed by the Board, the BCSC is of the opinion that the Board duties can be carried out administratively. Accordingly, the BCSC recommends that the duties and responsibilities of the Bodywork Advisory Board be moved to and carried out administratively by the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department, which could report to the City Commission on Bodywork issues as appropriate.

## PROSPERITY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

**Strategic Plan Outcome:** The City of Lawrence fosters an environment that provides all people and businesses the opportunity for economic security and intentionally acknowledges, removes, and prevents barriers created by systemic and institutional injustice. Our community succeeds because of collective prosperity and a vibrant, sustainable local economy.

Because of the overlapping statements of purpose for and the primarily administrative duties associated with the following Boards and Commissions, the BCSC recommends that they be dissolved, and their duties be transferred to the City Manager's office.

- **Transient Guest Tax Grant Program Advisory Board** (*Purpose: review applications for and provide recommendations to the City Commission for city grant funds through the Transient Guest Tax Program.*)
- **Public Incentives Review Committee** (*Purpose: review economic development incentive requests and makes recommendations to the City Commission and other governing bodies as appropriate.*)
- **Sales Tax Audit Committee** (*Purpose: review the revenues and expenditures of the special sales taxes and verify that the approved special sales tax revenues are being used properly and in accordance with the purposes for which said City special sales taxes were authorized.*)
- **Special Alcohol Fund Advisory Board** (*Purpose: review requests and make recommendations to the City Commission on the use of Special Alcohol Funds.*)

At this time, the BCSC recognizes that the City Commission may have future opportunities to create a new advisory board that aligns with Prosperity and Economic Security Outcome of the strategic plan.

## CONNECTED CITY



**Strategic Plan Outcome:** The City of Lawrence has well-maintained, functional, and efficient infrastructure, facilities, and other assets. Connectivity supports accessible, sustainable methods for safely moving people and information throughout the community and the region. Investment in these assets reflects the City's commitment to contribute to the well-being of all people.

Because of the overlapping statement of purpose for the following Boards and Commissions, and their interconnected issues, the BCSC recommends that they be recognized as being aligned to the Connected City Outcome of the strategic plan but be combined into a new advisory board.

- **Public Transit Advisory Committee** (*Purpose: Advise on all matters regarding the city public transit system, such as proposed routes, service changes, ridership policies, fare structures, funding, and budgets.*)
- **Multi-Modal Transportation Commission** (*Purpose: Advise the City Commission regarding issues affecting transportation including planning, programs, safety, priorities, design, and expenditure of funds.*)

Based on the statement of purpose set forth in the applicable authorizing ordinance and bylaws, the specialized skills needed for an effective board, and public comment, the BCSC recommends that the Aviation Advisory Board be recognized as being aligned to the Connected City Outcome of the strategic plan but that it should remain separate and not be combined with another Board or otherwise changed.

- **Aviation Advisory Board** (standalone board) (*Purpose: 1. To promote general and commercial aviation activities and interests in Lawrence; 2. To seek means of more fully utilizing and improving aviation facilities for Lawrence; 3. To aid the city and users of the aviation facilities in Lawrence in obtaining and improving services subject to approval by the City Commission; 4. To receive and evaluate reports of poor or improper service by the contractual base operator (line operator), unsafe or dangerous conditions, or failure of parties or persons to observe the airport rules and regulation.*)

