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# **Salt Lake City Boards and Commissions Review**

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*Report of Findings and Recommendations  
July 2008*

## **Special Thanks**

*This review could not been possible without the countless hours donated by the following individuals:*

Shane Carlson  
*Greater Avenues Community Council*

Karen Halladay  
*Salt Lake City Council*

Steve Klass  
*Klass Strategies*

Karen Okabe  
*Deputy Mayor, Salt Lake County*

Staff  
Matt Lyon  
*Salt Lake City Mayor's Office*

## **Introduction**

Citizen boards and commissions serve an important role for the public. Boards are often viewed as part of the front line of City government. They provide an opportunity for public concerns to be transmitted to agency line managers and elected officials. They also provide representation and a place for interest groups and residents to have their concerns heard and acknowledged.

These boards and commissions also serve an important role for the Administration. Citizen boards serve as a source of advice and a place to gauge public reaction to policies. Boards can also assist local government by building community support for new or emerging policies as well as relieving some pressure between interest groups and policy makers. A well-functioning board features a diverse membership where alternatives and frequently competing perspectives are discussed and applied to public policy development work. By doing so, boards often provide a venue to negotiate agreements and/or produce compromises on contentious issues.

It is the hope of the Salt Lake City Boards and Commissions Review Committee (BCRC) that the new administration can use this report to increase the effectiveness of city government by improving the manner in which the City's constituent boards, commissions, and advisory committees (all are hereafter referred to as "boards") function. Constituent engagement, broad stakeholder input, transparency of public decision making processes, and responsiveness of elected and appointed representatives are values a great American city should work to achieve. It is the committee's intent that this report contribute to strengthening these values in Salt Lake City government.

## **Background and Overview**

In January 2008, Mayor Ralph Becker - on the recommendation of Rebecca Chavez-Houck, Chair of the Boards and Commission Transition Team - convened the Boards and Commissions Review Committee (BCRC) to complete the transition team's review of Salt Lake City's constituent boards and commissions (see appendix a for the Transition Teams Report). This committee's scope was intended to be general, providing a broad overview of Salt Lake City's boards and commissions. The study was not intended to analyze or assess any specific board; rather, it was the committee's goal to explore, in general terms, ways in which the administration can and should interact with Salt Lake City's various boards and commissions. Finally, due to time constraints and available resources, the BCRC was unfortunately unable to engage public perceptions of Salt Lake City's boards and commissions in a significant way. The BCRC believes this is an important area regarding the City's boards and notes that this should be an area of future study.

The BCRC was made up of five individuals with backgrounds ranging from decades of experience in government administration to high caliber non-profit board consultants. The project was completed with staff support from both the Salt Lake City Council and Salt Lake City Mayor's office. The group met almost weekly to discuss their research from January to July, 2008. During this time period, volumes of research were compiled, much of which exists in the appendix of this report. For additional information, contact Matt Lyon at [matt.lyon@slcgov.com](mailto:matt.lyon@slcgov.com).

The Mayor of Salt Lake City appoints members to twenty-five active citizen boards and commissions. This study limited its review to boards and commissions whose charters are defined by ordinance, and for which the Mayor directly appoints the members for a specific term with City Council advice and consent. Other appointments where the Mayor's office has been allocated a representative position, such as the Community Action Program; committees that are created ad hoc, like the Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Committee; and entities whose membership is composed primarily of Salt Lake City staff members, i.e. the Technology Steering Committee, did not participate in this study. These groups were excluded because they are not established by statute and do not involve City Council consent for appointment to membership.

Based on the BCRC's review of existing scholarly research and professional association publications, there is no commonly understood definition of what constitutes a "board," nor are there specific "types" or "categories" of government boards and commissions. In general, the BCRC has found it useful to use Henry and Harms' (1987) categorization of boards. In their work, they describe boards as advisory, quasi-judicial (regulatory), or supervisory.

**Advisory boards** advise, coordinate, represent, and/or advocate a position within an administration. These boards are often issue or interest group specific, but they do not have any formal or official policy making or governing power.

**Quasi-judicial (regulatory) boards** are granted some level of regulatory, judicial, or appellate power by ordinance or statute. These boards have the ability to make a ruling that can be enforceable by law. Appeals from these bodies are either handled by a City appellate body, such as the Land Use Appeals Board or the Utah State Third District Court.

**Supervisory boards** have the power to manage and oversee an agency or various tasks of government. These boards often have a wide range of responsibilities, including budget approval, appointing/employing personnel, adopting operational plans, defining and creating policy, etc. In some cases, decisions of these boards are considered "advisory to the Mayor." However, in general, the bulk of decision making occurs at the board level and decisions are only overturned by elected officials with cause.

The above descriptions are just one categorization of boards and commissions the BCRC found useful. Several cities and counties in the U.S. have devoted extensive resources to categorize, define, and analyze their boards. BCRC reviewed practices in, among others, Laredo, Texas, Salt Lake County, Utah, and Portland, Oregon. The reports and recommendations of these efforts provided a sound foundation for the methodology of the study. This final report shares key recommendations and promotes similar best practices pioneered by other jurisdictions.

## Methods

Salt Lake City board chairs and staff liaisons were targeted as key resources in the research of this study. Each group was given the opportunity to respond to a written questionnaire and participate in a focus group. Fourteen board chairs and twenty-two staff liaisons responded to the survey. See appendix d for a summary of their responses.

Twenty-three board liaisons, department heads, and city staff attended the staff liaison focus group on March 6, 2008. The group was split and two separate focus groups were conducted. Additionally, nineteen board chairs participated in a single focus group, held on March 20, 2008. Focus group agendas and meeting notes are located in appendix e.

Along with probing the clarity of the study focus and perceived effectiveness of the planned approach, discussions with respondents covered these general issues concerning their individual boards:

- Purpose and scope
- Board member recruitment
- Board member support
- Board effectiveness and accountability
- Involvement with community members
- Board communication with other bodies
- Liaison preparation and workload.

## **Findings**

### Purpose, Mission, and Accountability

In general, board chairs and liaisons thought they had a reasonable understanding of their board's purpose and mission. Most respondents felt their board was accomplishing what it was chartered to do. This was demonstrated in both the focus groups and questionnaires. In addition, most board chairs and liaisons had a strong awareness of how their board was chartered, often citing a specific ordinance or state statute, and to which department their board was accountable. However, the BCRC observed some slight dissonance and differing understandings of a board's purview when talking to board members, liaisons, and/or departments. Although this did not present a major problem for most boards, issues surrounding differ understandings of scope have caused concerns in the past.

### Recruitment and Appointment Process

The recruitment and appointment process of board members consistently ranked as the top concern for both board chairs and staff liaisons. Common complaints included the length of time the process took, unclear procedures and expectations for who was responsible for recruitment, and restrictive and/or limiting definitions of qualified or eligible candidates. Multiple respondents mentioned that their board required additional new appointments to make a quorum to conduct business, but the Mayor's Office was not moving forward on their recommendations. Finally, board chairs and staff liaisons expressed a desire for the City to maintain a larger database of potential board members. The hope was that this potential board member candidate list would provide a more efficient and timely method to appoint qualified individuals to boards and commissions.

### Board Communication with Mayor's Office, City Council, and Departments

Board members' primary line of communication with City government is through their staff liaison and staff reports. Throughout the review committee's research, communication with other City government entities emerged as a point of tension among board chairs and liaisons. Many respondents noted they were unclear if their concerns were received by elected officials,

especially the Mayor's Office. Board chairs repeatedly expressed an interest in learning the administration's priorities, understanding how the board fit into that vision, and meeting with the Mayor. Finally, there was a desire on the part of multiple boards to increase communication with other boards. The hope was this interaction could provide coordination on issues shared by more than one board.

#### Training, Orientation, and Professional Development

In general, board liaisons differed on their opinion of training. Although some felt they were adequately prepared, others did not. There was considerable discussion around the notion of "training and preparation" for board members and leaders. This training was characterized as basic orientation, which included parliamentary procedure, meeting motions, and how to conduct a meeting. There was discussion that few resources are available to provide board and liaison training. In addition, legal training was a specific concern, a point especially noted by the regulatory boards.

#### Additional Media Outreach and Promotions

During the focus groups, both the board chairs and liaisons expressed interest in receiving additional media attention. Some boards noted that they were only in the press when "bad things" were happening. Board chairs and liaisons also expressed a desire for the media exposure to magnify recruitment efforts.

#### Information and Public Research Tools

The members of the BCRC found it difficult to find detailed information regarding each of the boards and commissions during preliminary research. The committee found it difficult to determine basic facts, such as the assigned responsibilities of each board, current board membership, and time/location of board meetings. Although the information could be found internally, publically available information was limited. When this information was available, the details were inconsistent or of little value. Board chairs echoed this information gap problem during their focus group, stating that they did not know how to get in touch with each other and, in some cases, they were not aware of the existence and responsibilities of other boards.

### **Analysis**

#### Recruitment and appointment issues are driving board chair and liaisons perspective of the Administration

The BCRC noted general worries and feelings of uncertainty on the part of the board chairs and liaisons regarding the past and current Administration's interest and involvement in the City's boards and commissions. The most prevalent concerns were related to communication between board and commissions and City officials: Were the boards' concerns heard? Did the Mayor and City Council have an understanding of the issues facing each board? To what extent was a board's advice and recommendations considered by policy makers?

Almost all of these concerns arose in regard to two issues: recruitment and the indeterminate length of the appointment process. It is the BCRC's belief that, in the past, lack of a response from the Mayor's Office, department heads, and other City entities has created a perception among board members and liaisons that the City does not value its boards. It is the BCRC's

belief that this is a reaction to inadequate communication rather than actual neglect. A few steps to improve communication and feedback between the board and City Administration during the appointment process, general transmittals, and reports of official board actions would go a long way towards mitigating these concerns.

#### General willingness and desire to work with Mayor on priorities and vision

Board members have contact with the City primarily through their department chairs and staff liaisons. The BCRC's analysis suggests that board chairs and liaisons want to meet with the Mayor and understand his priorities, direction, and vision for their specific board. Some chairs, although not all, seemed to question how well their staff's perspective was aligned with the administration. Again, increased communication and feedback between the City and the boards, no matter how small, would help address this concern.

#### There is a need to highlight "less well-known" boards

Many boards expressed a desire to be "more like the planning commission" or noted that they only received media attention when there was a problem. In the view of the BCRC, these statements appear to be linked with the desire of individual boards to become more visible. Many board representatives believe additional public attention will lead to new resources including, more qualified candidates for appointment, which could result in quality outcomes and effectiveness for the City. Working periodically to highlight the less known boards would significantly improve board members' perceptions of themselves and their work and increase board morale.

#### Board members have a desire to learn where they fit within City government

During the focus group activity, many of the board chairs expressed an interest in meeting with other chairs to learn about the issues confronting other boards, especially in cases where various boards faced overlapping or conflict issues. Collaboration with others, the boards chairs believe, might lead to alternative ways to address these issues. There was also mention that board chairs did not know whether their suggestions were heard or acted upon, both at the department level and in the Mayor's Office.

#### Recruiting and marketing standards are unclear

Different boards and commissions display a range of involvement and interest in the recruitment of potential board members. In general, there was a feeling among board chairs and liaisons that the City was not doing an adequate job to stimulate interest among the public for serving on boards or commissions. The BCRC observed a general feeling that outreach into all communities, as opposed to targeted recruitment to specific groups, and to the mass media was not occurring. There was a consensus that in order for the City to recruit and retain high quality board members, more attention needs to be given to outreach processes and practices.

## **Recommendations**

The BCRC received a great deal of support and enthusiasm from the board chairs and liaisons while conducting this research. It is important that concerns of the boards are addressed quickly to capitalize on this energy. To help the Administration address the findings of this report, the

Boards and Commissions Review Committee would like to offer the following recommendations:

### **Board Role and Support**

- 1) **Embrace and utilize Salt Lake City's board and commissions as a central feature of city government, public involvement, and administration.** Salt Lake City's boards and commissions display a tremendous amount of talent and expertise. These individuals have a desire to work with the Mayor and implement his vision for a Great American City. A commitment on behalf of all levels of the administration, from the Mayor's Office down through to the division level, to utilize boards and commissions will greatly improve the level of public input in Salt Lake City government. Although the BCRC recognizes utilizing boards effectively requires a large amount of work, both on part of the administration and the boards themselves, a significant push from the new administration can significantly change the culture and attitude within the City regarding boards and commissions.
- 2) **Establish high-quality, effective staff support for boards and commissions.** Assign a part or full-time staff member to work directly with boards and commissions. This person should *be the face of the Mayor's office* at board meetings and to all board members. A specific point of contact for board members and staff liaisons, within the Mayor's Office, would significantly improve the communication concerns mentioned by board chairs and liaisons alike. This individual should periodically touch base with chairs and liaisons, manage board member recruitment, walk applicants through the appointment process, shepherd general transmittals and board and commission action items through administrative process, and manage board-related web-based tools/information. In addition, this individual should report to the Mayor's office regarding key board issues and actions, allowing the Mayor's office to work proactively with the City's boards, rather than solely responding to them. Standards and means of assessment should be developed to ensure the board staff support person is accountable to meet the needs of the Mayor and the various boards. These standards could include: responsiveness to board liaison, recruitment, and communication.
- 3) **Prepare individualized statements describing ways each board can contribute to the Mayor's overall vision for Salt Lake City.** Brief letters from the Mayor describing his/her vision and priorities for the City and how the board can be helpful in achieving, and being effective partners in the realization of the City's vision. The BCRC perceives that boards will feel more connected to the Mayor and the City, and, hopefully, the Mayor and City will utilize boards more effectively. See appendix i for examples and ideas the BCRC thought would be helpful.
- 4) **Emphasize and promote ongoing, professional development practices for board and commission liaisons and chairs.** Currently most training occurs externally at conferences or seminars. Salt Lake City could greatly improve the effectiveness of its boards and commission by offering ongoing professional development to its liaisons and chairs. These courses could cover staff reports, managing board members, legal concerns, drafting meeting minutes, and other specific board needs (ie: arts topics for arts boards, planning for planning boards). In addition, these courses need not be directly related to the board; rather the topics should be diverse with an eye on improving board members and liaisons critical thinking and analysis skills. Professional development

sessions also would provide an opportunity for board members and liaison to network, learn about common issues, and work together to address common concerns.

### **Recruitment and Appointment**

- 1) **Develop and communicate to the public the recruitment and appointment process.** Within the process, provide for areas where boards must notify Mayor's office of planned and unexpected vacancies and the Mayor's office should update boards on where an applicant is in the process. Creating a transparent and effective communication process will engender more realistic and positive expectations regarding board appointments for board members, Department heads, the City Council, and Mayor's Office. The process should include steps which ensure that applicants with appropriate, diverse, unique, and varied perspectives and skills are incorporated into the City's boards.
- 2) **Conduct continuous recruitment and outreach.** Board recruitment should involve more than targeted recruitment to fill a specific position. It should be a multifaceted, cooperative effort involving the Mayor's Office, City Council, department chairs, board liaisons, and board members. The BCRC recommends that all of these entities work on continuous board member outreach through traditional and non-traditional means and have these efforts tracked and managed in a central database. Examples of traditional means include community councils, business coalitions, professional and trade associations, interest groups, and referrals. The BCRC also recommends the City consider recruiting board members through college and trade schools, website invitations, speeches, list serves, focus groups, surveys, direct mail, public open houses, and SLC TV. The City should also solicit and encourage community councils, professional associations, and other traditional groups to reach out to their membership and into their neighborhoods to increase referrals of board candidates to the administration.

### **Board Accountability**

- 1) **Develop a process for annual or semi-annual review of each board and commission.** Periodic visits would be invaluable for the Mayor's Office as a means to learn the needs of each board and commission. It is important that this monitoring is not cumbersome or seen as a burden. In addition, the enhanced communication process would serve as a means for the Mayor's Office to "check in" with each board, receive an update on issues and concerns the board is working on, and help define goals and priorities for both the board and the Mayor's office.
- 2) **Provide yearly or every other year boards and commission updates to the Mayor and City Council.** Board chairs and City Council members expressed an interest in providing updates to the City Council and Mayor's Office regarding current tasks. Considering the number of the boards and commissions, this is a time consuming but important task. An annual report prepared by each board and/or an occasional 3 – 5 minute presentation by each board in front of the City Council and/or Mayor would go a long way to strengthen a perception of connection and greater accountability to the City and the elected officials.

### **Tools and Resources**

- 1) **Build and maintain a detailed database that can be used for board member outreach and recruitment.** The database should be searchable, allowing specific qualities or skills to be targeted and identified. Recommended fields should include occupation, gender, ethnicity, age, and council district. In addition, database maintenance, management, and upkeep are key elements in establishing long-term success of board recruitment. It should be understood that significant time will need to be dedicated to ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of this tool.
- 2) **Develop a Board Member Handbook.** This handbook, available in a searchable and downloadable format online, should be an orientation manual and provide a broad overview of the role of boards and commissions in City government. Board best practices, general parliamentary procedures, and board ethics statement should be included as content in the handbook. This handbook should not be considered a policy manual, but rather a reference guide for how board members can serve effectively. The BCRC has already begun drafting outlines and ideas for this book. See appendix m for additional information.
- 3) **Build a Board and Commissions Website.** The website should be searchable, allowing the public to easily find boards, meeting schedules, agendas, and staff contact information. The website should provide information that will allow people to easily find and apply for boards that interest them. Finally, the website could highlight one board each month, or another defined timeframe, which would allow all boards to become more visible to the City and its residents. Like the handbook, the BCRC has already drafted a site map and layout for the website (appendix m).

### **Policy Considerations**

- 1) **Standardize language/policy for similar boards.** – Developing standard practices for all boards and commissions will help the public and City employees gain a better understanding of how boards and commissions work. These standards could be as simple as the length of board terms or a systematic process by which advisory boards can transmit suggestions to the Mayor's office. See attached Laredo, Texas's Boards and Commissions outline for more information.
- 2) **Provide provisions for forfeiture of office.** Many cities have board member performance requirements and a process for a board member to be removed from board positions if minimum standards are not met. These standards often include attendance requirements and ethical violations.
- 3) **Establish board member renewal criteria.** The City currently seems to have a practice of automatically renewing board members for a second term. In the view of the BCRC, each applicant should be reviewed in detail regardless if this is a first or second term. This will help strengthen board members connection to the Administration and ensure that the most qualified candidates serve.
- 4) **Develop a sunset clause for boards and commissions.** Many cities have sunset provisions within each board ordinance. Although these provisions are not acted on with any level of frequency, having a sunset provision essentially requires the City and each board to assess its purpose and validity during regular intervals. By doing so, boards remain effective and the Administration stays connected to each board, reviewing it and

utilizing it for its strengths and thereby helping keep each board effective and a valuable part of City government.

**5) Consider the Addition of Committees.**

- a. Parks and Recreation** – Many cities have a Parks and Recreation Board which helps manage public comment and input regarding the City’s parks. In light of recent public interest in City parks, establishing a Parks Board would be an appropriate improvement in community involvement.
- b. Sustainability** – Given the Mayor’s interest and the new Division of Sustainability, some type of sustainability advisory committee would be a great way to engage the community. There are many skilled professionals with diverse and progressive perspectives which could be utilized to enhance outcomes for Salt Lake City business owners, residents, government employees, other key community members.

## **Needs for Future Study**

- 1) Soliciting input from the general public regarding boards and commissions.** Due to time constraints and resources, the BCRC was unable to solicit feedback on the City’s boards and commissions from the general public. The BCRC suggests a basic survey be developed which can be placed at all board and commission meetings, given to community council, and mailed to a sample of constituents. This could provide valuable information on the way the City and its boards and commissions are viewed from the outside.
- 2) Consider and assess board size, function, and effectiveness.** Multiple board liaisons expressed difficulty in managing their board, either in not having enough members to make quorum or having too many people to manage. Assessing each board individually in regard to its size could increase the effectiveness of various boards. When assessing the size of each board, the BCRC feels it important to weigh how each board functions in terms of the way it represents its various stakeholders and fulfills its overall mission.
- 3) Investigate board compositions.** Each board is different in terms of what constitutes ideal membership. The BCRC recommends researching the needs and requirements of each board on an individual basis. Those conducting the review would explore the needs of various stakeholder groups that would have an interest in board decisions. They would also assess what types of qualifications board members should have in order to best serve the needs of the board, both in terms of the ordinance and in an “ideal world” context.

## **Conclusion**

The Report of Findings and Recommendations is intended to provide a comprehensive status of Boards and Commissions in Salt Lake City. The initial review was conducted by Mayor Becker's Transition Team. Because of the important role boards and commissions serve, it was decided to extend the work of the Transition Team and convene an ad hoc group to study this issue in more detail. This group is the BCRC (Boards and Commission Review Committee).

Under the direction and support of the Mayor's Office, the BCRC began to construct a strategy on how this Review would be conducted. The early research was principally academic. Other public jurisdictions were studied for their applicability to Salt Lake City. As part of the data collection, it was decided to look at a variety of data sources including the construction of surveys, questionnaires, conduct focus groups with City staff and Board and Commission Chairs. All this information is reflected in this Report. This Report has made recommendations to the Mayor, line staff and to Boards and Commissions. Future projects, operational and procedural recommendations are also included.

The publication and distribution of this Report does not mean that all the work for boards and commissions have been identified. Rather, this Report provides a base-line and captures a point in time. It is understood that for boards and commissions to be effective, efficient, and provide an important role for the public, they must continuously evolve and advance. It is the view of the BCRC that improvement is not a destination; it must be a process that rises to meet the changing conditions and demands of a growing and vibrant community.

A final special thanks is owed to Shane Carlson, Karen Halladay, Steve Klass and Karen Okabe for the countless hours they dedicated to this project. Any questions regarding this report may be directed at any of committee member or:

Matt Lyon  
Assistant Chief of Staff  
Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker  
801-535-7931

## **Appendix**

- a) Transition Team Report
- b) BCRC – Process Charts
- c) Preliminary Report
- d) Summaries of Surveys
- e) Focus Group Notes
- f) Recruitment/Appointment Process Outline
- g) Suggested Communication Process Chart
- h) Example of a Board Members Qualification Matrix
- i) Template Letter for Mayor's vision for each board
- j) Board Descriptions
- k) Current Board Membership List
- l) Board Member Database Layout
- m) Website Materials
- n) Salt Lake County's Board Member Handbook
- o) Survey Responses – Board Liaisons
- p) Survey Responses – Board Chairs