

# Elections Handbook 2004



**City of San Diego Planning Department**

The handbook represents a compilation of current Council Policy 600-24, the Administrative Guidelines, current community planning committee bylaws, and references from Robert's rules of Order. The Election Handbook will be revised to reflect any changes to Council Policy and the Administrative Guidelines.

## ***Introduction***

The purpose of the Elections Handbook is to help promote effective elections within the City of San Diego's recognized community planning committees. Council Policy 600-24, Standard Operating Procedures and Responsibilities of Recognized Community Planning Committees, is the guiding policy that frames the roles and responsibilities for all committees and their members. The City Attorney and Planning Departments have prepared Administrative Guidelines to help explain the Council Policy provisions and provide more detailed guidance to community planning committees. All committees have generated their own sets of bylaws that are tailored from Council Policy 600-24. Within the Policy statement of Council Policy 600-24, committees' bylaws must follow the format and be in conformance with the criteria of CP 600-24 as a condition of recognition. As self-governing private organizations, the planning committees have modified their bylaws to fit the uniqueness of their community planning areas.

An important component of committee bylaws is the procedure for the election of community planning committee members. In order to operate successfully with broad community participation, elections must reflect the integrity of the committee, the bylaws, Council Policy 600-24, and the membership. When the committee bylaws explicitly detail election procedures and contain contingency procedures for the broad spectrum of election nuances, elections are run smoothly and there is a seamless transition as the committee changes composition. Election procedures are more likely to be successful if a sincere effort is made by the planning committee to disclose election details early and to make the process open and accessible to the community.

The handbook is a collection of election details that have been collected from Council Policy 600-24 and the bylaws of the community planning committees. The discussion focuses on who the Council Policy recognizes – the 12-20 elected committee members. Some committees go on to identify a general membership category – discussions of eligibility for which are not discussed within the handbook. The handbook provides a glimpse of the spectrum of specificity that is contained within the bylaws of the community planning committees and provides staff advice based upon our election experience with all community planning committees.

One of the most important points for committee members to take from this handbook is that members should have a clear understanding of their bylaws. After the 2004 elections and upon review of the committee's bylaws, your committee may determine to strengthen election procedures and provide further details through bylaw augmentation and amendment. The ultimate goal is a smooth election, a seamless transition, and broad community participation.

## **Community Planning Committee Elections**

Council Policy 600-24 requires that all bylaws include a procedure for election of committee members (Article VIII Section 1 (1)). Bylaws must incorporate requirements for planning committee candidacy, and clearly define general and elected membership and voting eligibility, including membership application or registration. Within the bylaws, a method of review of voter qualification as well as a method of cross-checking voting eligibility at the time of election must be included to eliminate qualification confusion. Pre-election procedures vary among the 42 planning committees. The Election Handbook depicts the spectrum of how different planning committees structure their bylaws to address pre-elections procedures and membership qualifications, thus showing the range of specificity throughout the bylaws of all of the planning committees.

## **Pre-Election Preparations**

- **Member Eligibility Requirements**

Basic member eligibility requirements are the same for all 42 planning committees and are dictated by Council Policy 600-24. CP 600-24 states that community planning committee members shall be elected by and from eligible members of the community. To be an eligible community member, an individual must be at least eighteen (18) years of age, and shall be affiliated with the community as a property owner or resident or local business person with a business address in the community at which employees or operators of the business are located.

Eligibility may be further defined in committee bylaws. Some committees have gone on to have more specifically defined categories. It is fundamentally important to know from inception of the category how to qualify someone for this category. Community planning committee members shall to the extent possible, represent the broad community and diversified community interests. Most community planning committees have adopted this same language within their bylaws.

- **Soliciting new planning committee members/eligible candidates on an ongoing basis**

In order to ensure that meeting attendees understand the roles and duties of the community planning committee, the Chairperson can provide a brief introduction on the purpose and duties of the planning committee at the beginning of each meeting. The introduction assists individuals interested in participating in the planning committee with a clear understanding of the overall duties and purpose of the Committee. The introduction can include a brief statement of the overall purpose set forth by Council Policy 600-24 and the committee's bylaws as well as the planning area boundaries. As committee members introduce themselves, they

can state their name, seat and, if pertinent, the area of the community they represent.

### ❖ **Sample Chair Intro**

The  [insert committee name]  is the officially recognized land use advisory committee to the San Diego City Council. Our role is to review and provide recommendations to the City on land use and development-related projects and issues that fall within the [insert area name] Community Planning Area. While we are an advisory body we are not a decision making body – we provide advice to city officials and decision makers, the Planning Commission and City Council.

The [insert area name] community is made up of the neighborhoods bounded by... [provide general geographic description].

My name is [insert name] and I am the chair of [insert committee name]. All of the committee members are [residents, business owners, etc.] in the [insert name] area and elected by the community during general elections that are normally held in March. The other elected committee members will now introduce themselves.....

Many committees do not have eligibility requirements or attendance requirements or membership requirements for voting in a community planning committee elections. In general, voter eligibility in the committee elections is based upon proof of residency or a business address within the community at the time of the election. Committees without membership requirements have determined that planning committee voter eligibility should be no more restrictive than voter eligibility in a City election.

Where committees have membership requirements, membership forms can be made available at planning committee meetings. The forms need to clearly indicate eligibility categories according to the adopted bylaws. The forms can be placed on the sign-in table as individuals enter the room. In the event of a committee vacancy, membership forms can be included with the agenda in the monthly mail out. The bylaws can state which committee member will maintain the membership applications on file, or individual forms can identify to whom the form can be returned.

While not mandatory, a sign-in sheet can be utilized at each planning committee meeting. Sign-in sheet information is used to send monthly agendas to individuals interested in planning committee activities. The information is also used to determine eligibility for general membership and candidacy. Normally, it is the Secretary's duty to maintain the sign-in sheets. When an election sub-committee is formed, the sign-in information is provided to the sub-committee for election purposes. If the applicable bylaws have attendance requirements for

candidates, the sign-in sheets must include an area for the person's name, mailing address, email address and phone number to be used for contact purposes and establishing eligibility. As a note, privacy issues have arisen regarding these sheets and it is at the discretion of the committee to provide this information to the general public.

Candidacy requirements may be different from general membership requirements. The bylaws can clearly state attendance or eligibility requirements that go beyond general membership and voting requirements.

In summary, if the community planning committee has established a general membership category to which individuals need to belong in order to vote for elections of new community planning committee members, requirements for being a general member must be clearly written in the committee's bylaws.

- **Noticing regular elections to attract new planning committee members as candidates**

Actively noticing elections encourages broad community participation and attracts new candidates for planning committee membership. Noticing can reach a broad range of community interests and reach a wide geographical area. Individual committees may have specific criteria for qualification as a voter or as a candidate; therefore, early noticing of the elections will inform the community of these procedures in time for their participation in the election. Council Policy 600-24 states that it shall be the duty of the community planning committee to make a good faith effort to contact community newspapers and utilize other means appropriate to their communities to publicize the elections (Article V Section 2). Other than the newspapers, the policy leaves it up to individual committee bylaws to provide additional provisions for the noticing of the elections.

The Administrative Guidelines, under the General Election Procedures (Admin. Guidelines Sec. 6), recommend that the election policies in the bylaws or in procedures are readily available to the public and presented consistently. Detailed instructions that can be distributed in writing will be useful to present to the public. There are a variety of avenues for noticing, including the local community newspaper, local home owners' association newsletters, and on the planning committee website. Information can also be dispersed through emails and server committees as well as through flyers posted in appropriate locations such as the local library, public meeting places, churches, recreation centers, community-based organizations or institutions. While assistance from the Planning Department is available through the community planner for the area, community planning committees know their communities and may determine the most effective measures to utilize in order to reach a broad range of people in the community to encourage participation in the election process.

If a committee has eligibility requirements, an excellent approach to ensuring that individuals are aware of such requirements for both candidacy and general membership is to start noticing the March election in the fall. Following are examples of how some community planning committee bylaws address noticing elections and general membership, a first step in candidacy qualification.

The **Greater North Park** committee includes election and voting information on the monthly agenda beginning in September of each year and also posts it on the North Park Community Association Website. The **Torrey Pines Community Planning Board** bylaws allows for posting of election notices on web sites. The committee maintains its own website available for public access, which can be utilized to advertise elections. The **Linda Vista Community Planning Committee** bylaws provide for flyers to be posted announcing the upcoming Committee election in prominent places, as legally permitted, throughout the community; including notices of the election posted at the Linda Vista Library and at the community Bulletin Board in the Linda Vista Plaza. The **Clairemont Mesa Planning Committee** bylaws identify notices of elections to be posted at the Clairemont Friendship Center, The South Clairemont Recreation Center, the Clairemont Public Libraries and Churches as allowed. The **Eastern Area Community Planning Committee** bylaw provisions include noticing the elections in prominent places in the community, such as: Community councils, libraries, shopping centers, Chollas Lake Park, PTA meetings, community council newsletters and public service radio announcements, where possible. The **College Area Community Council** bylaws provide for the general membership to be notified of the date, time, and location of the election through the newsletter or other written notice mailed to the general membership at least fifteen (15) days prior to the election. The **Mission Beach Precise Planning Board** bylaws indicate that the secretary provides notice in the community press requesting candidate nominations prior to the February meeting, and announcing member elections and candidates prior to the March meeting. The **Normal Heights Community Planning Committee** bylaw provisions include posting of notices at the regular meeting location and at the post office at least two (2) weeks prior to the election; and oral or written notification of business and community committees to the greatest extent practical. The **Midway Community Planning Advisory Committee** bylaws state to advertise the elections through mailing of flyers and posting notices in area businesses. Also, the **Southeastern San Diego Planning Committee** bylaws include the provision of noticing elections through direct mail notice to all general members.

- **Election Committee**

In general, pre-election procedures are tailored to the needs of each community planning committee through its bylaws or standing election procedures. Although not required, committees seem to function best when the work leading up to the election is distributed among the election committee members and does not fall to one person. Many bylaws state that members up for re-election cannot be

selected to serve on the election committee. This is a good practice which helps the community planning committees maintain the appearance of a fair and balanced election and avoid the perception of impropriety and entrenched membership.

The bylaws can provide clear guidelines in relation to eligibility requirements, attendance requirements, membership application deadline, nominations from the floor, write-ins, as well as parameters to create an easily understandable ballot. Bylaws can clearly indicate the duties of the election committee and can specify how to deal with ballots, lists, and incumbents. The **San Ysidro Planning and Development Group** bylaws allow for a nominating committee, composed of members not up for reelection, to prepare a ballot of candidates from eligible persons, to announce the proposed ballot, and to accept qualified nominations from the floor. Nominations are then closed and the nominating committee disbanded, with election responsibilities turned over to an Election Committee. According to the **Uptown Planning Committee** bylaws, at the January meeting, the Secretary reports to the planning committee the names of persons deemed automatically eligible for election at the following February meeting.

As the bylaws or election procedures state, the primary purpose of the election committee is to supervise the election preparations as well as the election itself. In order to have an effective election committee, individuals serving on the committee must have a clear understanding of the election process itself.

Both floor nominations as well as write-ins are allowed by many committee bylaws. An election committee's understanding of how nominations from the floor are handled and the process for writing in candidates is essential for the election procedures to run as smoothly as possible. In order to be eligible to run for a seat, the election committee must verify that a nominee has fulfilled the eligibility requirements set forth in the bylaws.

In conjunction with candidate eligibility, it is important for the election committee to understand the composition of the committee with respect to member term limits. As an exception to the eight or nine year limit of consecutive service, Council Policy 600-24 does allow for further consecutive service if the board's composition does not exceed 25% of termed out members and if the reelected member(s) receive two-thirds majority of the votes cast in a regular election. For further discussion of term limits and the exception, see Determining eligibility of candidates.

An important duty of the election committee includes the review of eligibility of candidates between the time a candidate applies to run and the date of the election. Eligibility must be monitored by the election committee in order to ensure that candidates on the ballot have maintained eligibility and the election runs smoothly. If a candidate becomes ineligible between the time of nomination

and the election, the election committee must revise the ballots so voters clearly understand that the ineligible candidate is not a choice on the ballot.

Polling can take place at the regularly scheduled March meeting per the Council Policy (Article V Sec.1). The location must be accessible to all persons and be advertised well in advance of the election date through the avenues discussed in the previous section on noticing. If the bylaws or operating procedures stipulate that multiple polling times and locations are acceptable, it must be clearly identified how voters are tracked in order to avoid multiple ballots being cast by an individual voter.

Election committee members can reference the bylaws to determine what voting qualifications are required. In most instances, a form of identification is required in order to be eligible to vote. Ballots can be distributed to an individual only after eligibility as well as identity has been verified. Voting is done by secret ballot placed in a box, with the election committee monitoring to ensure voters their ballot have been cast in secrecy.

Election committee members should have a clear understanding on whether a plurality or majority of votes cast determines election of candidate (see Post Elections – Counting the ballots). Normally, a plurality of the votes determines the election. This should be stated at the start of the election to all voting members.

- **Determining eligibility of candidates**

Many bylaws include a requirement that defines membership seats by particular categories or geographic areas. The particular categories must be clearly defined to avoid controversy. For example, if a business representative from the community is required, the parameters of a business seat must be clearly defined in the bylaws. Bylaws can specifically outline meeting attendance requirements to ensure that both candidates and elected members understand the time they are committing to the planning committee. Membership application filing deadline can be incorporated into the bylaws as well as clearly stated on the membership application forms.

Council Policy 600-24 states that no person may serve on a committee for more than eight or nine consecutive years, but that after a one year break in service, the individual is again eligible for election to the committee (Article III Sec. 4). An exception clause was added to the Council Policy in 1989, in order to allow committees with low community participation to continue to have representation with persons willing to serve in excess of eight or nine years. The bylaws can provide a clear understanding of the exception clause that is embodied within Council Policy 600-24. The clause states a committee member may serve in excess of eight or nine consecutive years if that person is reelected to a new term provided that they receive a two-thirds majority of the votes cast by eligible

community members participating in a regular election. The number of individuals on a planning committee serving more than eight or nine consecutive years shall in no case exceed twenty-five percent of the voting committee membership. If there is broad based community participation in the elections and enough new, eligible candidates are on the ballot, use of the exception clause is not necessary. Persons who have served for eight or nine years can fulfill the Council Policy's break in service requirement, while allowing new individuals the opportunity to serve on the planning committee.

Candidate forums are encouraged at the beginning of the election so voting members have an opportunity to understand each candidate's qualifications. All candidates must be given equal opportunity and equal time to present their qualifications. Space could be made available on the February agenda to include written candidate statements for all candidates.

In no case shall a slate be created or provided to the elected or general membership prior or during the election. A "slate of candidates" occurs when candidate names, especially candidates up for reelection, are portrayed in a way that gives voters the impression that one single vote is a vote for all candidates on the slate.

## **Elections**

- **Polling Locations and Times**

The Election Committee must provide ample notification of all election procedures. The times and locations(s) of the polls are dependent on the number of members of the Election Committee, the amount of time they can volunteer for the elections, and the estimated turnout for the election.. Most elections occur during the regularly scheduled March meeting – with perhaps some time before and/or after for voting and tabulation purposes. When advertising the elections, the times and locations can be clearly stated.

Polling locations that are stipulated in bylaws or standard operating procedures ensure the Election Committee can announce polling sites and times well in advance of the elections, and that there are enough Election Committee members to handle multiple polling locations and times.

- **Ballot Clarity**

To reduce confusion and the opportunity for challenging the elections, the election committee must create a clear and simple ballot. The ballot must clearly state the number of open seats available and how many candidates to vote for. It can also state whether voters can use pencils or pens when marking the ballot. The stipulation of pens only will help alleviate erasure interpretation when the

ballots are counted. If there are category restrictions, candidates can be separated by categories.

Write-in restrictions can be clearly denoted on the ballot. If write-in candidates are allowed, space can be made available for a write-in and can clearly state any limitations pertaining to the write-in process. Ballots that are well written and easy to use will help to reduce election challenges by the public.

Election Committees are responsible for determining the validity of the ballots. While creating the ballot prior to the election, the Election Committee can determine what constitutes an invalid ballot. If a ballot is to be considered invalid due to voting for too many candidates, the ballot can boldly state how many candidates can be chosen. If a ballot has a write-in candidate and the bylaws state that write-ins are not accepted, the ballot can clearly state that write-ins will invalidate the ballot.

- **Verification of voter eligibility**

Group bylaws can stipulate identification requirements needed as proof of voter eligibility. Some bylaws only require proof of identity and address at the polls, while other bylaws can have prior certification restrictions. The **Torrey Hills Community Planning Board** bylaws state that the general election voting is open to General Members over eighteen years of age who meet voter qualifications and sign a roster with qualifying address to cross check voting eligibility.

- **Proxies and Absentee Ballots**

A proxy is the authority given by one person to another to vote in his/her stead. Per Robert's Rules of Order, proxy voting is incompatible with the essential characteristics of a deliberative assembly in which membership is individual, personal, and nontransferable. Council Policy 600-24 does not address proxy voting as it pertains to elections. The policy does state that "a quorum, defined as a majority of non-vacant seats of the planning committee and/or to vote on projects or actions at regular committee meetings must be present in order to conduct business." (Article VI, Section 2) Consequently, proxies (the authority of another person to act for an absent director) are not permitted during the transactions of the group meetings. Because planning groups abide by Council Policy 600-24, their bylaws, and the intent of Robert's Rules of Order, proxy voting in either elections or on agenda action items is not allowed. Unless specifically incorporated in a group's bylaws, proxies are not permitted for any actions a planning group may take.

Several planning groups do allow for absentee ballots. Often times, a small fraction of the general membership attend meetings on a regular basis. Because the election of committee members is an important issue for the planning group,

an absentee ballot process can be authorized within the group's bylaws. It is important that the absentee ballot process is clearly understood by the Election Committee, and that information regarding absentee voting is disbursed to the general membership in a timely fashion. The **Rancho Bernardo Community Planning Board** bylaws state that absentee ballots shall be provided by the Election Committee and notices published at least 21 days prior to election day as to availability of absentee ballots, where obtained and procedure for casting an absentee ballot. All absentee ballots are to be returned in a sealed envelope signed by the absentee voter and received by the Election Committee before the election date.

- **Closing the polling place/s**

Prior to the close of elections, a general announcement should go out soliciting any outstanding ballots. If the election takes place during a regularly scheduled committee meeting, the Chairperson should announce the close of the elections and state that ballots will not be accepted after the polls close. Normally this should be done half way through the meeting in order to ensure adequate time for the counting of the ballots. If the bylaws state and the election committee has determined that there may be several polling locations, the date and time for the polls to be open and closed must be clearly publicized early in the election process. All ballots must be gathered into one place and counted all together, even if multiple polling times and places are used.

It can be made clear prior to the election who will be counting the ballots, and how many ballot counters will be needed based on the estimated turnout for the election. If there is an election committee established, it is often the members of the election committee that collect and count the ballots. No candidate can be present during the counting of the ballots.

### **Post-Election**

- **Counting the Ballots**

The basic method for determining how many votes cast will determine the election of a candidate is a *plurality vote*, except where bylaws state otherwise. A plurality vote is the largest number of votes to be given any candidate. Determining election by a plurality of votes is the method most often used in community planning committee elections because there are three or more candidate choices possible. The candidate having the largest number of votes has a plurality and is declared the winner.

If bylaws state that a *majority vote* determines a candidate's election, majority means "more than half". A *majority vote* then means that a candidate will need to receive more than half of the votes cast to be declared the winner. If there are more than three candidates for a seat on the planning committee, a candidate

would have to obtain more than half of the votes cast for that seat. For example, if 19 votes are cast, a majority (more than  $9 \frac{1}{2}$ ) is 10. If 20 votes are cast, a majority (more than 10) is 11. If 21 votes are cast, a majority (more than  $10 \frac{1}{2}$ ) is 11. If any seat(s) remains unfilled after the election because a candidate did not receive a majority vote, the balloting needs to be repeated as many times as necessary to obtain a majority vote for the seat(s). When repeated balloting for a seat is necessary, the names of all nominees are kept on the ballot. The nominee receiving the lowest number of votes is never removed from the ballot unless the bylaws require such action, as the nominee may turn out to be a “dark horse” on whom voters may prefer to elect to the committee (Robert’s Rules of Order pages 425-427).

In the event that the number of votes cast for candidates for the same seat is close, a recount could be done to ensure the ballots cast for each candidate is accurate. In numerous bylaws, the task of counting ballots is the duty of the election committee, and may include City staff persons or council representatives. The counting is done at the regularly scheduled meeting, with the final determination of the legality of all ballots cast reported to the Chairperson who announces the results at the end of the planning committee meeting.

Council Policy 600-24 states that a committee member may serve in excess of eight or nine consecutive years if that person is elected to a new term provided that they receive a two-thirds *majority* of the votes cast by eligible community members participating in a regular election. New candidates or committee members seeking reelection and are not termed out may need only a plurality or simple majority of votes to be elected. The ballot counters need to have a clear understanding of determining the number of votes each candidate needs in order to be elected to the committee.

Very few committee bylaws address tie-breaking procedures, nor are they addressed in Robert’s Rules of Order as they relate to election of candidates. Prior to the election, the planning committee can establish a procedure for resolving a tie-vote situation. The **Centre City Advisory Committee** bylaws state a coin toss or the drawing of straws will determine the winner in the event of a tie vote, with both candidates having the opportunity to be present for the coin toss or drawing of straws.

Upon final verification of the count, the election committee reports the election results to the Planning Committee Chairperson, then certifies and publishes the results. A community planning committee’s election procedures can identify when ballots will be counted and the reporting, certification and notification of the results so that the planning committee and the community may know when to expect the results of the election. The **Rancho Bernardo Community Planning Board** bylaws state that the ballot counting, certification and notification process shall be completed within twenty-four (24) hours of the closing of the polls unless for good cause the election committee deems it necessary to extend the time, but

in no event shall the counting, reporting, certification and notification process be delayed more than seventy-two (72) hours after the close of the polls. The **San Ysidro Planning and Development Group** bylaws state that following the close of elections, the Election Committee will count the ballots, report the results, seal and retain the ballots for ninety (90) days, and then disband.

The Chairperson is responsible for preparing and certifying the report of the election committee and ensuring that it is forwarded to the Planning Department. In order to contend with a contested election, the bylaws can assign who shall keep the ballots and for how long the ballots may be kept. The bylaws can state that an independent authority may review and verify the ballots.

- **Installation of new committee members**

Bylaws or election procedures can also state when newly elected committee members will be seated. Often times new committee members are not seated until the next planning group meeting. The seating of committee members as the first order of business at the meeting following the March elections allows for an uninterrupted planning committee meeting in March. This also allows time for Planning Department staff to provide new committee members with community and financing plans so that they may become familiar with the documents prior to their first meeting. The **Normal Heights Community Planning Committee** bylaws state that newly elected Committee members shall be installed at the beginning of the April meeting. Installation at the beginning of the first meeting following the elections assures the earliest possible implementation of the election results.

Article IV of Council Policy 600-24 states that if vacancies exist on the committee, the vacancies shall be filled in a manner specified by the planning group's bylaws. If there are vacancies that exist on the committee at the time of an election, the bylaws can state that the planning group may have the vacancy identified on the ballot and solicit candidates to fill the seat for the duration of the vacated seat. This is consistent with Council Policy 600-24, Article IV, Section 2, which states that the term of office of any member filling a vacancy shall be for the balance of the vacated term. If the bylaws allow and the planning committee decides to fill a vacancy at the time of the March elections, this course of action can be clearly stated in the election procedures.

- **Unfilled seats**

If there are unfilled seats after an election, bylaws can establish the course of action. For most groups, a vacancy is declared, and the normal process for filling a vacancy is followed. An example of another course of action is found in the **Centre City Advisory Committee** bylaws which state that in the event there are an insufficient number of candidates elected to each category of membership,

such seats may remain vacant until qualified candidates apply and a subsequent election is held.

- **Challenges to election procedures or to ballot tabulation**

The method of challenging an election can be clearly delineated in the group bylaws. The bylaws can clearly state the Election Committee responsibilities for handling challenges to the election. Remember, challenges may be a direct result of unclear election procedures, with elections not appearing to be open and orderly to voters, members, and the public. If challenges occur regularly, groups can consider bylaw revisions to include procedures for challenges. The best method for reducing or preventing challenges to elections is to have clear, detailed, and comprehensive election procedures.

- **New member responsibilities**

All newly elected committee members are required by City Council Policy 600-24 to attend a Community Orientation Workshop (COW) training session as soon as possible after the elections. The Planning Department hosts several sessions throughout the year, with one scheduled for April 24, 2004 to train all newly elected committee members. The workshop focuses on members understanding the roles and responsibilities outlined in Council Policy 600-24, as your committee's actions are legally indemnified by your having attended this workshop and acting in accordance with Council Policy 600-24. It is important for members to understand that attendance at a COW session AND the continuance of valid operating procedures insure indemnification on authorized agenda items.

- **Roles of the Planning Department and City Attorney**

In the spirit of self-governance and committee credibility, community planning committees are responsible for the interpretation of their committee bylaws. The Planning Department is available to assist and to help frame bylaw interpretation at any time, but bylaw interpretation is ultimately the committee's responsibility. Ideally, questions and concerns regarding elections can be presented to the Planning Department in the late summer and early fall to ensure that issues are discussed and resolved early and prior to the March elections. At the request of the committee Chairperson, staff is available to meet with the Chairperson and Election committee in order to recommend resolutions to bylaw issues and concerns. If an issue cannot be resolved prior to the election, the Planning Department is always available to review and discuss election issues and potential solutions with the committee Chairperson and Election Committee. The City Attorney's office does not become directly involved in issues pertaining to the planning committees. Rather, the Planning Department consults the City Attorney's office for direction on a matter if it cannot be resolved by the planning committee working with the Planning Department.

## *Conclusion*

The Planning Department, in close collaboration with a subcommittee of the Community Planners Committee, has prepared the Election Handbook to help facilitate balanced and effective planning committee elections. The handbook, a collection of election details gathered from Council Policy 600-24 and the committees' bylaws, provides both a range of current bylaw procedures and staff advice based upon our election experience with all community planning committees.

Every planning committee can experience smooth elections with an election committee that closely follows explicit election procedures and committee bylaws. Again, one of the most important points for committee members to take from this handbook is that members should have a clear understanding of their bylaws and election procedures. Supported by Council Policy 600-24, the committee's bylaws and election procedures, and good faith effort, the ultimate goal of an election with broad community participation and without controversy can be achieved by the recognized planning committees.