

WHY AND HOW TO APPLY FOR A LOCAL BOARD OR COMMISSION SEAT

WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Information on each City or the County boards and commissions can be found on the city or county website. For example, Redwood City's Boards and Commissions are managed by the City Clerk's office and can be found here:

<https://www.redwoodcity.org/departments/city-clerk/advisory-boards-commissions-and-committees>

The San Mateo County boards and commissions can be found here: <https://bnc.smcgov.org/>
Any local appointment lists, vacancies, application procedures and recruitment efforts will be found on these sites. Recruitment efforts happen year-round, so check the sites often.

WHY

- Boards and Commissions are where much of the work in your city and the county gets done.
- While advisory, Board and Commission seats allow for citizen input into important decision-making.
- A Board and Commission seat can be the first step toward elective office or dedicated non-elected civic participation.

WIRE's Pitch

- Women are underrepresented in government.
- Research from Rutgers' Center for Women and Politics confirms that women govern differently from men; they are more goal-oriented and less partisan. As a result, women can more readily develop areas of compromise that enable solutions to our most intractable problems.
- WIRE is building a pipeline of women into government. Serving on a local board or commission is a great way to start!

If you want your voice heard and to get something done – you are the first step to make it happen!

WIRE has compiled a list of local contacts such as City Clerks for both San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties for local boards and commissions. Link here <to be shared once complete>.

GETTING STARTED

Consider your background:

- Education, life experiences, career, community activity that might be relevant to the commission or as a commission member.
- Your skills and talents: communication and listening, creative thinking and ideas, follow through, public speaking, collaboration, and teamwork. Any special perspective you might bring, and the passion to press the issues of most importance to you or to learn the technical considerations of the position.

Prepare for your application and potential interview:

- Identify your reasons for wanting to serve.

- Meet with present/past Commissioners for an informational interview (a cold call or email is fine).
- Attend commission or school board meetings in person/Zoom. Introduce yourself to the current members. Email the chairperson ahead to introduce yourself and make sure you have read the agenda accurately about when to introduce yourself (often during the public comment portion of the agenda).
- Network: attend local events pertinent to the commission's focus (or that interest you) and city council meetings. Introduce yourself to local officials.
- Review past minutes or (if available) watch videos of past meetings online.
- Research past agenda topics or issues currently facing the commission – e.g. *Park Proposal: costs and benefits of building a park in a nearby community.*
- Review downstream effects of the Board or Commission's recommendation and efforts – e.g. *How did the city council vote; was the community center built; how did the community react?*

Determine whether you are a sound candidate for this role or whether the role is relevant to your goals and personal situation:

- Review the meeting schedule and time commitment of the position - be certain you can carry out the responsibilities of the role, especially meeting attendance requirements.
- Consider public visibility versus privacy issues, financial considerations (potential expenses connected with serving) and verify that you do not have any conflicts of interest. Depending on the role, you may have to file a publicly available Form 700 (Statement of Economic Interests) of your and your spouses' financial information.
- Ask a friend, a past commissioner, or a WIRE member for advice.

APPLICATION PROCESS*

Application:

- Anyone can apply. Most applications are available online and are posted with the details for the open position.
- Complete the application – incorporate information from your research, conversations with the current or former board members, and other networking efforts.
- Have friend(s) and/or WIRE member(s) review your application.
- Carefully consider who you will list for your references. They will be called to speak about your ability to lead and work on a team.
- Submit application.
- The city may provide you with the names and applications of the other applicants. You can ask for this information if it is not provided.
- (If Applicable) Reach out to the city council / school board members or commission members seeking a recommendation of your candidacy. Supply them with your application. This step particularly applies to cities where the vote is held the same day as the interviews. Offer to answer any questions they might have.

*The application process varies across each city, county, board, or commission. This is a generalized, not exhaustive list. Not all steps are applicable. Review the process for the role in which you are interested either online or in your conversations with knowledgeable parties (e.g. current commission members). Examples are invented for the sake of illustration.

City Council and/or School Board Meeting/Interview:

- Prepare a brief (1-2 min) statement to introduce yourself and supplement your application. Have others review this statement.
- Interview (brief 10-15 mins) with the City Council or School Board. Lead with your personal statement. (The County may have a personnel review board. City and school boards typically do not have a personnel review board.) The panel is usually all the city council or school board members. All applicants are typically interviewed (regardless of the quality of their application). The panelists will ask questions about your reasons for applying, your experience, and your thoughts regarding issues relevant to the commission. They expect substantive responses.
- Following the interviews, the city council members may nominate applicants to be voted upon – especially if there are multiple applicants for a limited number of openings.
- If the vote is not held the same day, follow up with each of the interviewers with a call or email (including those that were unable to attend the interview). Thank them for the opportunity to speak, offer to answer any additional questions they might have, and reiterate your interest in the position.
- A vote is taken and it is public. If someone did not vote for you, you may contact that person.

Interview advice:

- Be prepared! Know what the position entails. Attend meetings and network. Have clear thoughts regarding or solutions for past or current issues under consideration by the board or commission.
- Have a good answer to the question “Why are you applying?” Cite specific goals (beyond “To serve my community”) or interests (education, transportation).
- Cite specific professional experience or personal background that is relevant to the board or commission’s mission.
- Be clear that you will represent the city or county well. Be positive, thoughtful and confident.
- Clearly indicate that you will be an active and engaged participant in the activities and discussion of the committee.

WIRE is compiling a list of mentors who can provide resources, help you prepare for your application and interview, and give advice regarding appointments in both San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties for local boards and commissions. Link here <to be shared once complete>.

Regarding School Board Appointments:

Information on school board appointments may not be as easy to find as city and county appointments. Please contact a WIRE mentor for help in identifying school board appointments.

Regarding State Appointments:

WIRE for Women does not operate at the state level. The non-partisan organization that does this work is California Women Lead. If you find women interested in state appointments, please refer them to:

California Women Lead
1017 L Street #418
Sacramento, CA 95814

916 551 1920

Admin@CaWomenLead.com

CaWomenLead.org

GOOD LUCK!

Prepared by the WIRE Appointments Sub-Committee;
submitted by Lisa Hicks-Dumanske, v. 2/21/2021