

Making Final Decision

Dear Reader:

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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No city council may delegate final decision-making authority to an unelected citizen advisory committee. From start to finish, this simple fact must be understood clearly by everyone involved in the issue: the committee members, the news media, the general public, the staff, and the governing board members themselves. Even when the committee report is brilliantly written and the committee members worked especially hard, it is the city's governing board that must make the final decision on the recommendations.

This often is a difficult fact for members of a citizen committee to accept, and it is not unusual for members to feel let down if the city council rejects the committee's recommendations goes in a different direction. This underscores the importance of the governing board's initial instructions to the citizen committee, that every member of the committee knows from the outset that the governing board very well may pass on the advice it receives.

When an advisory committee's advice is rejected, it is important that it be done in a way that does not embarrass the citizens who volunteered their time to help the city. The governing board may want to emphasize that their final decision is the result of interpretational differences (politics) rather than the scholarship of the committee members.

Conclusion

However helpful they can be, there are inherent risks associated with appointing citizen groups to advise the city. Considerable care must be taken selecting committee members, and it is even more important that the committee is given specific instructions about their purpose, role and methods. Otherwise, the advice provided by these committees likely will be no more valuable to the city than the advice of any randomly selected group of citizens. A well-chosen group of citizen advisors, given clear and specific direction on the help sought by the governing board, can provide valuable suggestions to city hall and help resolve difficult problems.

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