CHAPTER 3

Structure and Operation of an Environmental Advisory Council

Once your municipality has passed an ordinance enabling the creation of a municipal EAC and appointed members, your EAC will have to establish an organizational structure.

Bylaws

Your council should develop a set of bylaws as one of its first actions in order to provide detail on the council's organization and operation. Bylaws can include information on membership, attendance, meetings, order of business and other details. See Appendix V for a sample set of bylaws (this example is for a multi-municipal EAC; however, it can be modified for a single municipality).

Committees

Organization of standing and special committees may enable EACs to be more effective, by allowing a smaller group to focus on a particular issue. Standing committees relating to specific municipal functions, such as land use, parks and public open space, water resources and areas of ongoing interest, such as public education, may also be useful.

Associate Members

Act 148 allows up to seven members on an EAC. To include more people, consider the establishment of an associate members program. Associate members do not vote but may participate in all other council activities and serve on standing and special committees. It may be desirable to have an associate member serve as recording secretary for the council to ensure that all appointed voting members will be able to fully participate in meetings. Associate members can be an important source of expertise, and should be given high priority for appointment to the EAC when vacancies occur. Associate members may be drawn from the community, watershed associations, schools, and other environmental organizations.

Multi-Municipal EACs

Act 148 also gives individual municipalities the authority to join with neighbors to form regional, multi-municipal EACs. Multi-municipal EACs are desirable and effective because they provide a mechanism for neighboring local governments to join together to focus on natural systems such as watersheds, forests or aquifer recharge areas as units rather than as fragments. The regional perspective offered by a multi-municipal EAC establishes a cohesive, long-term vision as the group plans for natural resource protection. See Appendix IV and V for sample ordinances.

Scheduling Meetings

EAC meetings need to be scheduled on a regular basis, usually monthly, in a public place, on a day that does not conflict with other municipal meetings.

Right: Lower Makefield Township, Bucks County, EAC, Community Day.
Left to right: Lisa Grayson, Geoff Goll, Alan Dresser, Laura Brandt and Jim Bray.

The Sunshine Law

The Pennsylvania Sunshine Law requires all public agencies, including EACs, to present all official actions and conduct all deliberations leading up to official actions at advertised public meetings. Under the law, municipalities must:

• **Post notice of scheduled public meetings** at the municipal building, or the location of the offices of the municipality's governing body.

• **Advertise scheduled public meetings** in a local newspaper at least three days prior to the date of any meetings.

• **File notice of public meetings** with the municipal secretary, manager or county clerk.

With the ability to communicate electronically by sending emails to several recipients, or even to "chat," it is important to remember that the discussion of issues or revisions to proposed documents over the internet could be construed as deliberation outside a meeting and should be avoided.

Meeting Organization

Even if you choose to run your meetings in an informal manner, as many EACs do, consider using *Roberts Rules of Order* to guide the overall organization of meetings and voting procedures. In many cases, informal discussion and decision by consensus will suffice—but you may want to be prepared to handle contentious or complex issues with a standard format. An easy guide to Roberts Rules can be found at the EmPower LA™ website: empowerla.org.
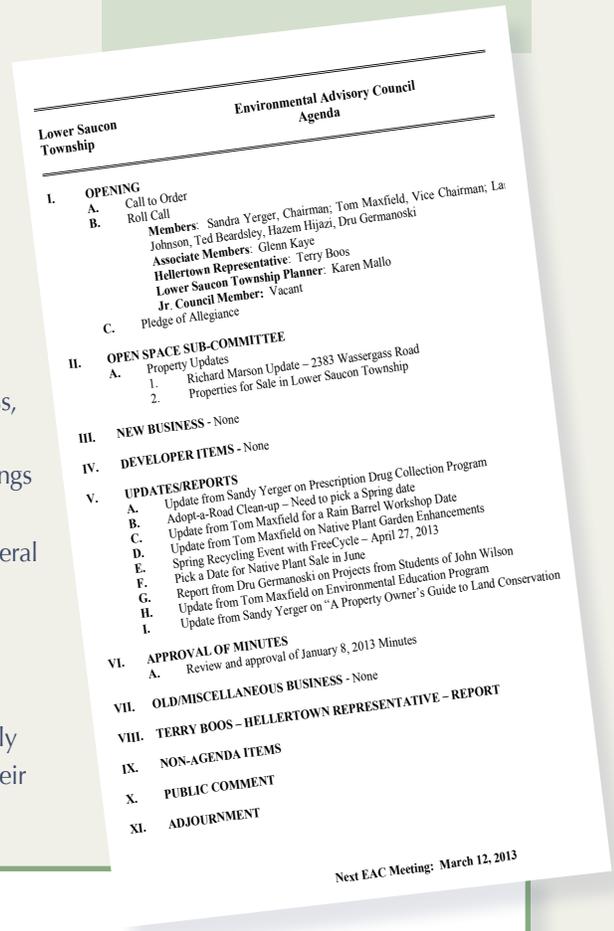
Meeting Agenda

An agenda is an important tool for running an effective meeting.
Keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Use a printed agenda, preferably agreed to at the conclusion of the last meeting and added to by members in the interim between meetings.
- Send the meeting agenda to members in advance of the meeting date, both as a reminder of the meeting and to enable them to prepare for discussion of agenda items.
- Make agenda length reasonable. Except when there are extenuating circumstances, long late-night meetings are not productive.
- If individual meeting agendas are frequently lengthy due to pressing business, the council may want to choose between long meetings, or shorter, more frequent meetings. In any case, it is the chair's responsibility to keep the meetings focused on agenda items and to conduct business in a timely manner.
- Agendas should always allow time for public comment, new business and general comments from members.

Record Keeping

For those new to municipal government, it is essential to understand that keeping accurate records and providing meeting minutes in a timely way is extremely important. Even the most effective, energetic EAC will have problems within their municipality if they fail at this very basic municipal responsibility.

Priorities

The first few EAC meetings are often "brainstorming" sessions, where members discuss their interests and backgrounds, and determine what issues need immediate attention. Over subsequent early sessions, a prioritized plan should evolve to include a list of projects and activities to address. Section 5 is devoted to this topic.

Environmental Advisory Council
Agenda

Lower Saucon
Township

I. OPENING
  A. Call to Order
  B. Roll Call
    Members: Sandra Yerger, Chairman; Tom Maxfield, Vice Chairman; La
    Johnson, Ted Beardsley, Hazem Hijazi, Dru Germanoski
    Associate Members: Glenn Kaye
    Hellertown Representative: Terry Boos
    Lower Saucon Township Planner: Karen Mallo
    Jr. Council Member: Vacant
  C. Pledge of Allegiance

II. OPEN SPACE SUB-COMMITTEE
  A. Property Updates
    1. Richard Marson Update – 2383 Wassergass Road
    2. Properties for Sale in Lower Saucon Township

III. NEW BUSINESS - None

IV. DEVELOPER ITEMS - None

V. UPDATES/REPORTS
  A. Update from Sandy Yerger on Prescription Drug Collection Program
  B. Adopt-a-Road Clean-up – Need to pick a Spring date
  C. Update from Tom Maxfield for a Rain Barrel Workshop Date
  D. Update from Tom Maxfield on Native Plant Garden Enhancements
  E. Spring Recycling Event with FreeCycle – April 27, 2013
  F. Pick a Date for Native Plant Sale in June
  G. Report from Dru Germanoski on Projects from Students of John Wilson
  H. Update from Tom Maxfield on Environmental Education Program
  I. Update from Sandy Yerger on "A Property Owner's Guide to Land Conservation

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  A. Review and approval of January 8, 2013 Minutes

VII. OLD/MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS - None

VIII. TERRY BOOS – HELLERTOWN REPRESENTATIVE – REPORT

IX. NON-AGENDA ITEMS

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Next EAC Meeting: March 12, 2013

Minutes

Minutes are an important tool in operating an effective council. Keep the following points in mind:

- Designate a secretary. Some EACs use the municipal secretary, and others designate or elect an EAC member.
- No matter who is designated recording secretary, he/she should attend every council meeting to take minutes.
- Minutes generally include the date, time and location of the meeting, members present, subjects considered, decisions made, actions taken and tasks assigned.
- Minutes are most useful when they are sent to members, with the agenda of the upcoming meeting, within a reasonable time following the meeting.
- To facilitate communication, consider sending your minutes to designated contacts on the governing body, planning commission, recreation and park board and other appropriate government agencies.
- Minutes posted on the EAC website or municipal website, a public bulletin board, in the municipal building or public library can promote communication with the public.
- The secretary of the EAC should maintain a file of EAC minutes, and one copy of the minutes should be kept by the municipal secretary as a permanent record.

Communicating with the Public

The EAC is a component of local elected government, and is therefore charged with being responsible and responsive to the community it serves. It is therefore important that EACs have effective communication with their citizens, in both directions: educating and informing the public of issues of environmental and ecological importance, while also ensuring that the EAC members understand the concerns and opinions of local residents on natural resource issues. Some ideas for EAC/community communication include:

- Carry out a survey asking residents what they believe to be the most important environmental issues facing their community. Remember that the way questions are asked on a survey can greatly influence results; the EAC may wish to consider seeking professional input on the design of survey questions.
- Speak one-on-one to municipal governing body members to find out where their environmental concerns and considerations lay.
- Connect with the local community watershed association(s) to find out what projects and issues they consider to be important for the EAC to know about.
- Make sure that EAC members are listed on the municipal website and, if possible, have EAC meeting minutes posted on the website as well.
- Consider developing a separate webpage for the EAC linked to the municipal website.
- Write press releases for major EAC events and initiatives. Make sure to notify local press about your events and provide articles for them to use afterwards.

Abington Township, Montgomery County, Environmental Advisory Council community booth.

Anatomy of an EAC:

Although Act 148 sets the basic parameters for the structure of an EAC, each EAC is different, as each municipality differs.

Here is a look at the structure of one EAC:

Lower Saucon Township Environmental Advisory Council

- twelve person volunteer board
- appointed by the Township Manager and Supervisors/Council
- seven voting members (three year terms; staggered)
- five are associates, or non-voting members (one year terms)
- one high school student serves as a Junior Council Member (non-voting member, one year term)
- one representative from the neighboring borough (non-voting)

EAC board members include one supervisor, two planning commissioners, the township historian, and watershed association members. Although not specifically required, the inclusion of these dedicated volunteers serves as an important communication link to the other township boards and helps to bring a level of knowlege to EAC that can be very useful.

A Special Committee of three voting members makes up the Open Space Committee, who works in conjunction with a land conservationist (consultant) to review properties under consideration for preservation. The subcommittee makes recommendations to the EAC.

Successes: 340+ acres were preserved through 10 years of resident supported Earned Income Tax dedication (Open Space Referendum).

Responsibilities:

- involved in local and regional environmental issues on many levels
- meet monthly and discuss a variety of environmental issues facing the township and provide advice and recommendations to the Council
- plan review, public education, research, promotion of programs such as preservation of natural areas and water quality
- planning for a viable approach to natural resource protection
- partners with local watershed association for outreach programs
- holds annual electonics recycling event, annual native plant sale, native plant demonstration garden, Community Day educational booth