

Fox Point



by Douglas H. Frazer

THE VILLAGE BOARD



THE FOX POINT village board is the governing body of the Village for executive and legislative matters. By ordinance, the village board has delegated much of its executive authority to the village manager. The village board, like the formation of the Village itself, is authorized by Article XI, Section 3 of the Wisconsin constitution. This provision permits municipal “home rule” – that is to say a direct grant of legislative power for cities and villages to determine their local affairs and government. By act of delegation, the legislature worked out the details principally in Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 66 covering municipal law in general and in Chapter 61 covering villages in specific.

Chapter 61.20 sets the board at 7 members (trustees). By virtue of Fox Point’s charter ordinance No. 2, board members serve 3 year staggered terms.

Board members serve without compensation.

For its regular meetings, the board convenes on the second Tuesday of every month at 7pm sharp. The village president presides. A quorum consists of four members. Meetings are open to the public. From time-to-time, the board convenes in specially-called meetings, for instance to hold a public hearing on the proposed budget or consider an emergency permit application. In addition, each fall the board meets in six or seven special budget sessions where the proposed budget is reviewed and adjusted line-by-line.

Before each meeting staff posts an agenda as required by the open meetings law. The proceedings (minutes) of each meeting are recorded in writing. Agendas and minutes after approval by the board are posted to the Village website. Procedure at meetings is governed by Robert’s Rules of Order.

In a general sense, the board passes a budget and tax levy every year, considers and acts on contracts, permits, and legal matters, pays bills, borrows money, confirms appointments to boards, commissions, and committees, sets policy, holds statutorily-required public hearings on subjects such as the budget and land use regulations, and gives direction to staff. It may also enact zoning ordinances, create police or fire departments, and join with other villages or cities in cooperative arrangements in order to attain greater economy or efficiency.

More specifically, the powers of the village board are enumerated in Wis. Stat. 61.34. The village board manages and controls village property, finances, streets, navigable waters, and public services. Moreover, it has the power to act for the good order of the village, for its commercial benefit, and for the health, safety, welfare, and convenience of the public. It may carry out its powers into effect by license, regulation,

borrowing, taxation, special assessment, appropriation, fines, imprisonment, and other necessary or convenient means. The village board may acquire property, real or personal, for parks, libraries, recreation, beautification, streets, water systems, sewage or waste disposal, and for other public purposes. It may also acquire easements and property rights for the benefit of the public or for any public purpose.

Village board agendas (generally set by the village president) adhere to an order-of-business protocol informed by practicality and honed by custom. The village president calls the meeting to order. Individuals are given the chance to address the board on any topic not on the agenda. This is not a question-and-answer session; rather, it is an opportunity to state a view or make a comment. The village president often refers these individuals to staff for follow-up. Individuals are also permitted to address the board on items on the agenda as the item is taken up.

Next, the board hears committee reports, for instance, from the Plan Commission regarding recommendations concerning the issuance of conditional use permits to business owners. Then comes the consent agenda, which consists of action items determined by the village president to be straight-forward. This is a time-saver because it eliminates the need for each item to be taken up individually. However, any board member may, without debate or vote, request that an item be removed for individual discussion and possible action. Any item removed is considered at the start of new business.

The board then considers old and new business in that order. Since the agenda is set and published before the meeting, items must be taken up in the published order. The board may take up items out of order, but only if a motion to suspend the rules is made, seconded, and passed. Next come announcements. Each board member and the village manager, in turn, is given the opportunity to make announcements regarding actions taken since the previous meeting, future village activities, and communications received from residents.

From time to time the board convenes into closed session – meaning closed to the public. The subjects of these sessions usually involve employment matters, the buying or selling of real property, or litigation. The board reconvenes into open session and may take action on matters considered in the closed session. Often the board takes no action at all. Although the board may adjourn a meeting from closed session, the practice in Fox Point is to reconvene into open session even if the only business is adjournment.

Present and past village board members, as your elected officials, are and have been honored to serve. Tip O’Neill famously said that “all politics is local.” It’s true. We are grass roots. And local village politics means using common sense and judgment, and not partisanship, as guides for policy-setting and decision-making.

The village board would like to hear from you. It’s your village, after all. Come to a meeting or contact your trustees. It’s a government you can understand. It’s a government who will know your name. It’s a government that will hear your concerns. It’s the Village of Fox Point.

Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.