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***So...  
you're joining  
The  
Planning Board***



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**A**s a Citizen Planner you are looking forward to a rich and challenging experience! To help you get started, here is a short job description of a typical Planning Board member in Massachusetts.

Being an effective Planning Board member requires you to get involved in your community, become informed, and use common sense, fairness, and objectivity towards all that comes before you. It is your responsibility to balance the public good with private rights and interests.

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# Being a local official and a member of your town/city government

All local officials are subject to certain rules of conduct; you have the trust of the public invested in you.

- Recognize and avoid or make public any conflict of interest your position may place you in; don't pursue special privileges; maintain confidentiality; and let your behavior contribute to the smooth operation of your board. Much acrimony can be avoided this way.
- Become familiar with the law that covers public open meetings and hearings and review the materials you were given when you were sworn in.

Since so much of your time is spent in meetings, you can help them run efficiently following clear rules and agreements.

You will become conversant in planning lingo: new terms, acronyms, and legal citations such as RPA, SPGA, DHCD, ANR or Chapter 40A will be rolling off your tongue. (Never be afraid to ask for explanations of terms you don't understand.)

You will form new relationships with other boards and commissions in town or city hall, work with the city/town clerk, your local media, town counsel, your regional planning agency and legislators. This will help maintain a sense of the overall community you serve.

You will learn to write legally binding decisions; these may be challenged in court or written up in the local paper. You'll get used to being thought of as a villain by some and a hero by others.

You will want to take advantage of training sessions offered by a variety of players in your region to learn all about your job and keep up with the latest in local planning.



***Don't pursue special privileges***

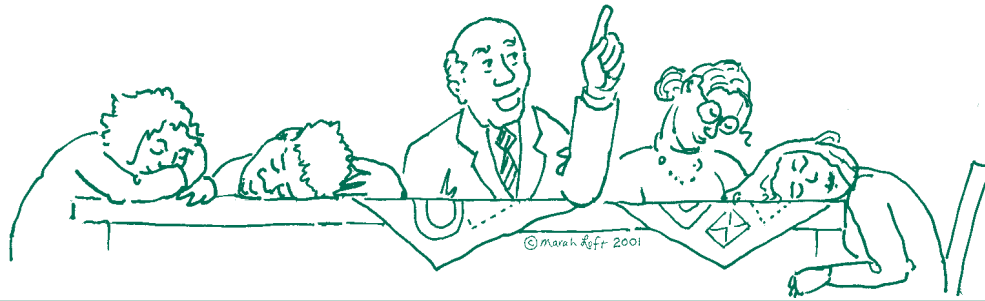


***You'll learn to write legally binding decisions***

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# Planning Board members spend much of their time in meetings

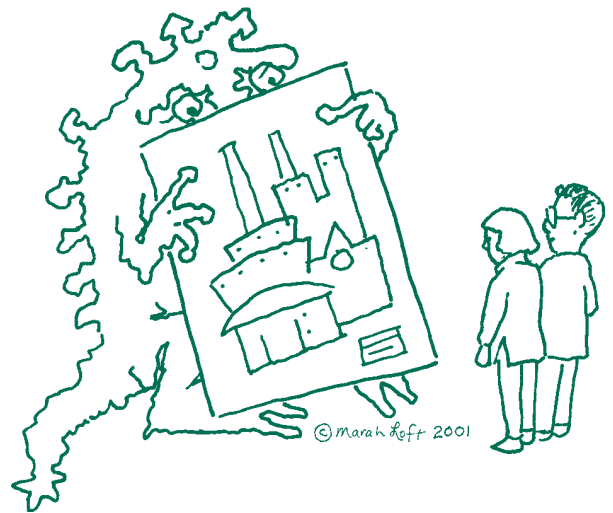


## *They Review Development Plans:*

**P**lans are submitted to the Board by applicants who want to develop their land for residential, commercial or other uses.

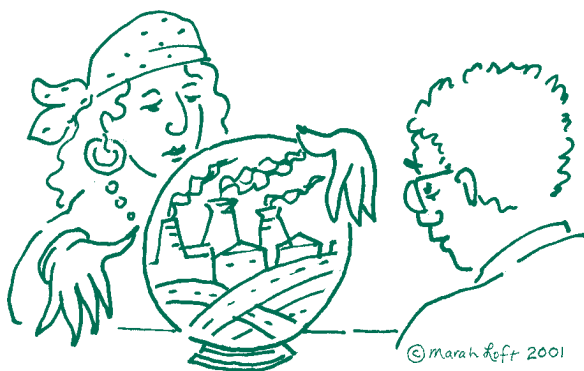
The procedures you have to follow in reviewing such plans are clearly spelled out in state laws (or statutes) and in your own local bylaws or ordinances. (You will find out that Planning Boards do not have the kind of discretion to approve or deny a specific project that residents often think they have.)

Your major tools here are the state and local zoning and the subdivision regulations. The project may involve the need for a Site Plan Review, a Special Permit, a Variance or a simple signing of an Approval-Not-Required (ANR) plan.



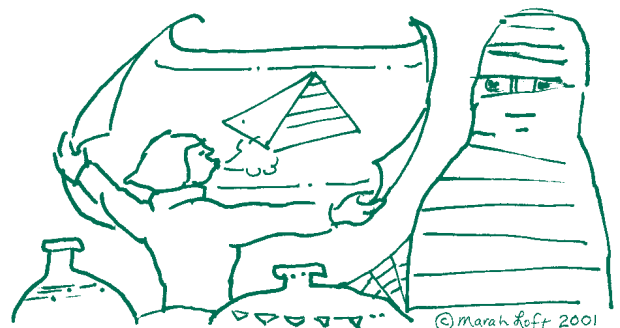
## *They Guide the Process of Zoning Amendments:*

**I**f your bylaws no longer reflect the vision of how your town/city wants to grow, then either you or residents can initiate the process of amending your zoning. Zoning amendments have to follow detailed procedures to make sure the public has sufficient opportunity to provide input. The final changes have to be voted on by town meeting/city council. The Attorney General's office has to approve them for towns.



## *...And They Certainly Plan!*

**Y**our Board is responsible for creating and updating the Master or Comprehensive Plan. It should be created with broad public involvement. Having a Master Plan is helpful towards updating zoning amendments, identifying open space priorities and economic development goals, addressing housing and transportation issues, and bringing all aspects of town government together under one coordinated plan. Dust off your most recent plan and review it!



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# Administration

**T**he Planning Board has certain organizational tasks:

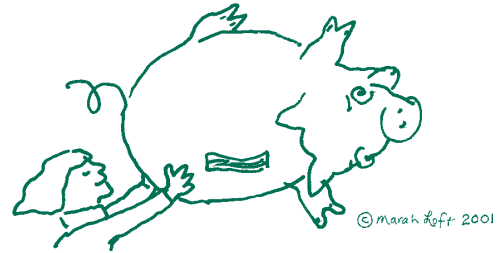
Boards elect their own officers, set rules and procedures, create and administer a budget, hire and supervise consultants, and form subcommittees.

You may work with and supervise your staff.

You may be handling grants or contracts with consultants, etc. Clearly spelled out rules and procedures will save your Board from many disagreements and create time for planning.

Your Board may need to prepare a budget and defend it before the Finance Committee or Town/City manager.

*defending a budget*



*handling a grant*

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## Who is there to help?

Here are your primary pillars of support:

- More experienced board members and/or your planning department staff
  - Your Regional Planning Agency/Commission
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- The State Department of Housing and Community Development (617/727-7001 x 443) [www.mass.gov/dhcd](http://www.mass.gov/dhcd)
  - The Citizen Planner Training Collaborative (413/545-2188, <http://www.umass.edu/masscptc>)
  - The Massachusetts Federation of Planning and Appeals Boards at 508/754-3068
  - Your town counsel/city solicitor
  - UMass Extension and the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at 413/545-2188
  - The State Ethics Commission: 617/727-0060 <http://www.mass.gov/ethics>

**Y**our involvement and service are critical components in shaping your community's future. Never forget that you are serving the common good of all the residents of your community.

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