

Information for Advisory Committee Policy Direction

1. Number of Voting Members

Across Chatham County's advisory committees, the number of voting members has historically varied, often based on the committee's original structure, function, or the need for municipal appointments. Some committees include as few as six members, while others are significantly larger. Recognizing that some local governments have moved toward standardizing voting membership across their advisory bodies, staff wanted to bring this forward for Board discussion.

Standardizing the number of voting members would provide several benefits, including easier administration, greater equity among committees, a more streamlined appointment process, and improved quorum management. However, standardization also has downsides. It could limit the ability to tailor committee size to an advisory committee's specific mission, reduce flexibility in representation, and overlook the fact that different committees naturally have different structural needs.

At the April 17th meeting of the Board of Commissioners, there seemed to be consensus for retaining flexible committee membership numbers, but with a preference for advisory committees to have odd membership numbers.

2. Appointment Representation

Currently, advisory committee appointments are made based on individual commissioner recommendations followed by full Board approval, though practices have varied over time. Staff research into other North Carolina local governments' procedures has identified several models used for advisory committee appointments:

1. The chair of the BOC makes all advisory appointments.
2. Individual commissioner appointments and approval.
3. Individual commissioner recommendations for appointments and whole board approval.
4. Whole board consideration and approval for all appointments.

Given this variation, Board guidance is needed on how advisory appointments should be handled moving forward. Should commissioners continue to recommend candidates for specific seats, with final approval from the full Board? Should appointments be made collectively without

individual nominations? Or should an alternative model be considered? To note, the Climate Change Advisory Committee is an outlier, as currently all members are considered at-large and are approved by the whole board without individual commissioner recommendations.

During the April 17th meeting, there appeared to be consensus among the Board to retain the current practice of individual recommendations, with final approval by the full Board.

3. Residency and Eligibility Preferences

Chatham County's current advisory committee policy permits not only residents but also business owners and landowners who are not residents but have ties to the county to serve on advisory committees. This broader eligibility was originally intended to ensure that individuals with vested economic and community interests could participate. Guidance is needed on whether to continue this practice, or to only allow residents to serve.

Additionally, Board direction is needed on whether district residency preferences should continue to apply. Some committees have mixed needs, with certain boards benefitting from district representation and others operating more effectively through county-wide appointments.

At the April 17th meeting, there seemed to be consensus to retain the current practices. Allowing business owners and landowners who are not residents to serve on advisory committees, as well as continuing district residency preference.

4. Service on Multiple Advisory Committees

The current advisory committee policy does not restrict individuals from serving on multiple advisory committees simultaneously. Board direction is needed on whether to establish limits on concurrent service. If the Board chooses to set limitations, exceptions could be considered in cases where specific expertise is needed or when applicant pools are limited based on board direction.

At the April 17th meeting there seemed to be consensus of the board to continue the allowance of members serving on multiple advisory committees.

5. Term Lengths

All of Chatham County's advisory committees currently use staggered three-year terms, with roughly one-third of members rotating off each year. The Board is asked to consider whether to retain the current three-year structure or transition to staggered four-year terms. A four-year term model would align with commissioner election cycles, allowing appointments to roll off at the

end of a commissioner's term. This would give newly elected or re-elected commissioners the ability to make recommendations at the start of their term.

This decision will directly influence the procedural structure outlined in the final advisory committee policy, including how appointments, onboarding, and transitions are managed.

6. Timing of Appointments

Advisory committee appointments in Chatham County currently follow a July 1 to June 30 cycle, aligning with the fiscal year. This structure can present administrative challenges, particularly because it overlaps with budget adoption, end-of-year reporting, and major grant deadlines.

Board direction is needed regarding which cycle to use, as this decision will inform how terms are structured and how onboarding, training, and transitions are coordinated in the final advisory committee policy.

Options include:

- **Maintain the July 1 – June 30 cycle:**
This keeps the current structure and aligns committee terms with the fiscal year. However, it can conflict with other major county processes and does not align with commissioner election cycles.
- **Shift to a January 1 – December 31 cycle:**
Aligning terms with the calendar year could simplify public communication, improve consistency with other county timelines, and allow newly elected commissioners, who are typically seated in December, to be ready to make appointments shortly after taking office. This approach would help ensure that appointees reflect current Board representation and priorities.
- **Shift to a March 1 – February 28/29 cycle:**
This model provides a brief transition period following the November elections and December Board swearing-in. It offers commissioners additional time to consider appointments and ensures that new members are not making immediate decisions before they are fully oriented.

7. Reappointment Eligibility

Chatham County currently does not impose term limits for advisory committee members. Individuals may be reappointed to serve additional terms, subject to Board approval. The Board is asked to consider whether to maintain this practice or establish term limits.

If term limits were to be enacted, several policy decisions would need to be made by the Board of Commissioners. These include: the total number of terms a member may serve; whether terms must be consecutive or whether non-consecutive terms would be allowed; whether a required break in service would apply before reappointment; and whether exceptions should be permitted in cases where specific expertise is needed or where applicant pools are limited.

8. Interim Service

Current policy allows advisory committee members to continue serving beyond the expiration of their term until a successor is appointed, or for up to one year, whichever comes first.

The Board is asked to provide direction on whether to retain this policy or move toward a firm term cutoff. While a strict end date could add pressure for timely appointments, it could also disrupt operations if successors are not immediately available. Interim service provides flexibility but may reduce the urgency of filling vacancies.

9. Remote Participation

The current advisory committee policy permits remote and hybrid meetings, a flexibility originally adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several committees continue to meet in this way, though there is no standardized countywide approach to how these meetings are conducted in practice outside of allowance by the current advisory committee policy.

Recent case law has raised legal questions regarding quorum, voting, and public access in remote and hybrid settings. As a result, Board direction is needed on whether to continue allowing this form of participation and under what conditions. Considerations include balancing accessibility and flexibility with legal clarity and consistency across committees.

10. Committee Reporting

The Board is asked to consider how it would prefer to receive updates from advisory committees moving forward. While the current policy references written reports, in practice most committees provide in-person annual presentations to the Board.

This is an opportunity to clarify expectations and ensure that reporting to the Board meets the commissioner's needs. Options could include continuing with in-person updates, requiring written reports, or others as the Board sees fit.

In addition to format, Board direction is needed on the desired reporting frequency whether quarterly, biannually, annually, or some other schedule and whether timelines should vary by committee.