

[Email reportedly sent by Bloomington Deputy Mayor Gretchen Knapp on May 1, 2026]

Dear Environmental Commission members,

First, thank you for your service. We greatly appreciate the time and dedication you provide to ensure that the commission is successful in its mission to advise the City. Second, I want to correct some misinformation you received at your last meeting. We were alarmed to discover that the wrong message has gotten out into the world, and that it's painting a very different picture from how things actually work and the role, values, and stance of the Office of the Mayor.

Attorneys from the City of Bloomington Legal Department have been working closely for many months with Jennifer Crossley, Deputy City Clerk, Communications and Outreach, to ensure that our boards and commissions are able to function effectively with clear and consistent guidelines while meeting all legal requirements for municipal boards and commissions. Deputy Clerk Crossley's role was created to train members and staff liaisons across the City's 50+ boards and commissions, and it's my understanding that she is currently scheduling dates for that training.

Ordinances may define which boards we have, their missions, and which bodies appoint various seats, but they usually don't define the operational details. Practices and legal guidance across 50+ boards have varied over many years spanning multiple administrations, hundreds of board members, and dozens of staff liaisons. We understand and share the desire for a clear, documented, consistent set of protocols. Issues around Open Door Law and operational functionality are among the topics on which Deputy Clerk Crossley will provide training.

Unfortunately, information shared in your last meeting didn't align with the protocols that the Deputy Clerk and City Legal attorneys have been developing. I don't know exactly where or how wires got crossed, but it's evident that they did. We're working to ensure this doesn't happen again in the future, and I am deeply sorry for the confusion, anger, and fear this has created.

I want to be clear: the Office of the Mayor is not seeking to preview every item from the City's 50+ boards and has no desire to establish gatekeeping measures to stifle board voices. Our interests lie in supporting implementation of recommendations in the 2022 organizational assessment of boards and commissions known as "the Novak report"; responding to staff and board members when they bring us areas of tension or confusion that need clarity; and most importantly, ensuring that all of you who serve have an enjoyable, effective experience, understand the mission of your commission, and can execute your roles successfully and in compliance with the law.

The Office of the Mayor is committed to staying informed on significant board and commission issues and activities, including board conclusions and recommendations; fiscal, operational, and other impacts; and public reactions to and expert staff positions on these matters. These materials are usually presented to us at the same time as everyone else—in the meeting

packets or minutes. The majority of memos and recommendations move forward with support and review from staff and their legal liaisons only. This will continue as standard practice moving forward.

To be completely clear, and to alleviate some concerns raised at your last meeting, the Office of the Mayor does not currently approve, deny, or censor board memos, recommendations, legislation, annual reports, etc., before they go to Council, the BZA, the Plan Commission, or other City bodies, nor do we seek to play that role. (Note: the BZA is subject to particular laws, including that no one may communicate with members in advance of a hearing to try to influence their decision. There is more to that law, but that may be the issue that led to the miscommunications in your meeting.)

The guidelines developed with Deputy Clerk Crossley do clarify a few points on external communications. At a minimum, we all want to ensure that if and when a board creates communications that are intended, for example, for state or federal legislators, media, or external organizations, that:

It is very clear that the opinions expressed are those of the Commission as a whole and not necessarily those of the City as an organization, the Office of the Mayor, Council, or any other body or individual;

Open Door Law has been followed in the creation, approval, and dissemination of the material; and

Content does not expose individual board members or the City to liability.

The training will help flesh out the details on the workflow and process for these and other potential situations. In addition, as you may know, boards and commissions now have Council liaisons, and members are welcome to reach out to them for support. This office does not speak for them or define their duties, but these new liaison roles can also be a resource.

We value and honor your time, commitment, and recommendations. The Mayor appoints members in the expectation that they will bring their own honest and informed perspectives to board service. I hope this letter provides some clarity and eases some concerns. I encourage you to give feedback on anything in the upcoming training that needs more clarification, so that we can continue to work toward a uniform, centralized, documented source of information for commission members.

I apologize again for the stress and inconvenience you've experienced, and I thank you for your service.

All best,

Gretchen