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COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

COMMUNITY
ADVISORY
COUNCIL
HANDBOOK



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*** Advisory council members should sign and return these forms to the Records Management Orientation Coordinator with the Department of Planning & Building.*

Overview of This Handbook

*The Board of Supervisors (Board) heartfully thanks those who participate on a Board-recognized Community Advisory Council (advisory council).
The civic process is at its best when the voices of the communities are heard.*

The County of San Luis Obispo has many different communities, thanks to the dedication and involvement of many caring residents who have participated in the planning process.

This handbook is designed for members of the San Luis Obispo County Community Advisory Councils to aid in community engagement and provide recommendations to the District Supervisors regarding the land use process. It outlines the advisory council's role in the planning process and provides suggestions on procedures and conduct for the council.

Additionally, the Department of Planning and Building has created an annual advisory council orientation to help advisory council members understand and effectively participate in the review of projects and policies within the context of planning department processes. This orientation program will be held annually for advisory council members.

We hope this handbook will help advisory councils understand the roles and responsibilities of their members, County staff, and County decision-makers. By working together, the County can receive input from the community on projects to help our decision-makers shape the future of our community and county.

The Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, and the Department of Planning and Building would like to thank all past and present advisory council members for their tremendous efforts in voicing their community's input. The County of San Luis Obispo is fortunate to have such a robust grassroots program. The civic process is at its best when the voices of the communities are heard.

What is a Community Advisory Council?

Community Advisory Councils are independent bodies that are authorized to represent their communities by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors. Advisory councils review and make non-binding recommendations on planning matters such as land use policies, programs, permitting, environmental review and zoning for the unincorporated areas within the County of San Luis Obispo.

Land use recommendations made by the advisory councils are provided to the Planning Commission and the County review authority and the respective District Supervisors. At their sole discretion, the Board of Supervisors and the review authority will review and consider advisory council recommendations in the decision-making process.

Advisory councils may provide input and recommendations to decision-makers on matters beyond land use policy and projects. However, it is the prerogative of their District Supervisor, the Board of Supervisors, the Planning Commission, or any other decision-making body to consider any advisory council input that is outside of the scope of land use policy.

Board of Supervisors Adopted Policy

The Board of Supervisors adopted a policy that formally established criteria for “Board-Recognized Community Advisory Councils” through the adoption of Resolution No. 96-485 on December 10, 1996.

The resolution states that for a Community Advisory Council to be recognized by the Board of Supervisors it must meet the following **five criteria**:

1

Must be based in and represent a defined community within an established Urban or Village Reserve Lines*, which can include representatives from outlying or surrounding unincorporated areas associated with the community.

2

Membership should reflect a broad cross-section of the community.

3

Community Advisory Council meetings should occur regularly and be publicly noticed in a timely manner and be open to all members of the public.

4

By-laws should be established and maintained which direct the organization and protocol of the council. These should include a statement of purpose, the rules of order, the frequency of meetings, and the appointment or election of members.

5

Recommendations made by the Community Advisory Council and forwarded to the Board of Supervisors or the Planning Commission should be arrived at by a majority vote of the quorum of the membership with as much public input as feasible.

**The County's Urban and Village Reserve Lines are defined in the County's Official Land Use Element maps. These are areas with community services and infrastructure to support a range of parcel sizes, land uses, and development types.*

Current Community Advisory Councils

As of 2023, the County of San Luis Obispo has eleven Community Advisory Councils recognized by the Board of Supervisors.



These advisory councils represent various communities and their surroundings. Their responsibilities vary, with some reviewing all proposed projects in their area of interest, while others focus on larger developments or have specialized "land use committees" that select certain projects to present to the entire council. Advisory committees have discretion on their scope.

Recognition / Unrecognition of a Community Advisory Council

The Board of Supervisors' resolution set forth a procedure by which advisory councils can be recognized, and the Board of Supervisors has discretion as to which advisory councils it will recognize.

Thus, the Board of Supervisors has the discretion to unrecognize an advisory council if the Board finds that the advisory council is not meeting the criteria set forth in the resolution or if it is determined that the advisory council is not functioning in a manner that promotes a civil and civic process.

If an advisory council is unrecognizeed by the Board of Supervisors, such advisory council will no longer receive referral packages and County staff will not be made available at their meetings or to provide information on projects.

Member Orientation

All new advisory council members should participate in the Community Advisory Council Member Orientation, which is offered annually by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Planning and Building. The purpose of the orientation is to help advisory council members become effective advocates for their community by educating them on County land use processes so that they may provide meaningful input.

The member orientation includes:

Board of Supervisors

Overview of Community Advisory Councils

County Counsel

Discussion of Community Advisory Councils' Legal Requirements

Planning Commissioners

Overview of Community Advisory Councils' Project Reviews

County Staff

Discussion of Land Use Planning Process and Referrals

Upon completion of council orientation, each advisory council member should sign the Orientation and Handbook Acknowledgement Form and submit to the Records Management Orientation Coordinator with the Department of Planning and Building (**see Appendix G**).

Code of Civility

In order to promote civil discourse, meaningful discussion, and sensible decision-making, all advisory council members are expected to abide by the attached Code of Civility (**see Appendix F**).

Unprofessional and disrespectful behavior directed toward County staff will not be tolerated at any time. County staff has the discretion to disengage from advisory council meetings upon any incidences of incivility, and inappropriate behavior will be reported to County leadership and the District Supervisor.

Engagement and support from the County is contingent upon advisory councils maintaining professional and respectful decorum with staff, project applicants, fellow advisory council members, and the public.

Upon joining an advisory council, each member should sign and return the Code of Civility Form to the Records Management Orientation Coordinator with the Department of Planning and Building (**see Appendix F**).

To conduct an effective and civil meeting, the following procedures can be helpful:

- Create a welcoming environment and allow for the fair and unbiased exchange of ideas between council members, the public, applicants, and county staff.
- Treat all meeting participants with respect and courtesy and ensure the meetings are open where all points of view are encouraged.
- Make timely decisions on matters brought before the council .
- Keep discussions focused and on track.
- Maintain a sense of timing and know when to end testimony, conduct deliberations, and make final recommendations.

County Engagement

Overview

The advisory council's role is to comment on a project from a community perspective. County department staff consider comments received during the application process and forward comments to applicable hearing bodies. Only discretionary projects (e.g. land use permits, subdivisions, general plan amendments, etc.) are referred to advisory councils.

County employees do not report to and are not employed by the advisory council. County staff are not obligated to respond to any requests for additional information.

It is the responsibility of the advisory council to communicate with project applicants and provide advanced notice before they review a project so that they may attend respective meetings.

Process Summary

- The project application package is provided to the advisory council within the 60-day initial Completeness Review period to allow for early input.
- All comments on projects should be formally submitted in writing to the Planning Liaison through the advisory council Chairperson or designee within 60 days of referral receipt.
- If an applicant's proposed project description changes substantially, at the discretion of the Planning Liaison, the updated application materials will be re-referred to the advisory council for comment on the newly revised project.
- The advisory council should request to be notified of future public hearings on projects as an interested party.

Overview of Roles

ADVISORY COUNCIL

SLO COUNTY

Receive referral package from Planning and Building Department and complete recommendation form, if applicable. **Add project discussion to the next advisory council meeting agenda.**



Receive agenda and recommendation form from advisory council. Add advisory council as interested party and **attach comments to project packet.**

Expected to make a recommendation within the required **60-day timeframe**, upon receipt of the first iteration of a project. If re-referred, council has 45-days to review and submit additional comments.



If the project is substantially modified after the advisory council's review, the Planning and Building Department may **re-refer a project to the council for additional comments.**

Send advisory council meeting agenda and any project questions to the Planning Liaison **one week prior to the meeting.** For projects requiring other County departments, council will coordinate with District Legislative Assistant.*



Planning Liaison will attend the meeting with prepared responses and additional staff as needed. Planning Liaison **will attend one meeting per month**, if requested by the advisory council.

It is recommended that planning items be placed toward the beginning of the agenda. Staff presence at advisory council meetings is always subject to staff availability.



When possible, the Planning Liaison will provide updates from the department on other items relevant to their community (i.e. ordinance updates, general plan updates, etc.).

*A District Legislative Assistant works directly with the District Supervisor, and assists with advisory council coordination of County department staff attendance for meetings.

Providing Input and Recommendations

In order to help advisory councils provide more effective input into the planning process, the Department of Planning and Building has created a standard comment form (**see Appendix C**). The more thorough the input an advisory council provides, the more useful their input will be to County department staff, decision-makers, and the project applicant. After the advisory council has reviewed an item, a recommendation form should be completed for each project that is referred to them and formally submitted to their Planning Liaison or applicable staff project manager through the Chair or designee.

If the advisory council is requested to be included as an interested party, staff will notify the advisory council once the project has been scheduled for public hearing before a County Review Authority (i.e. Planning Department Hearing, Planning Commission Hearing, or Subdivision Review Board Hearing). The hearing notice will describe how to access the project staff report which contains the staff recommendation as well as the summary of the advisory council's comments. Advisory council comments and recommendations are included as an attachment to the staff report, titled *Referral Response*.

Role of Board of Supervisors

Each Supervisor or their District Legislative Assistant may participate in their district's advisory council meetings. It is the advisory council's responsibility for requesting participation of County department staff. Questions that require County department staff (e.g., regarding road maintenance) may be directed to the Legislative Assistant for coordinating with County departments in advance (**see Appendix D**).

The Board of Supervisors will review and consider advisory council recommendations in the decision-making process at their sole discretion.

By-Laws

Each advisory council should develop and adopt its own set of by-laws. At a minimum, these by-laws should include the following components:

MISSION STATEMENT



Community Advisory Councils should create and adopt a Mission Statement to define their purpose. This should also be included in the by-laws.

Adopting a Mission Statement clarifies the role and purpose of the council to its members and to the public who attend meetings.

Missions Statements should be concise and focus on the most important values of the represented community. They are most effective when integrated into the advisory council's meetings and operations, and indicated on meeting agendas.

MEMBERSHIP



The advisory council membership should include a majority of elected positions chosen by members of the public. Elections should be held in an open and transparent manner.

Elections should be held at a minimum of every four years, and may be staggered to allow for only half of the seats to be elected at any one time. If there are any membership changes, the advisory council should notify their District Supervisor and the Planning Liaison.

MEETINGS



The advisory council should meet according to an approved and publicized annual schedule and at such other times as the Chairperson or the advisory council may determine necessary. All interested members are allowed to attend all meetings of the advisory council. There should be no Closed Session meetings.

The advisory council should follow a Code of Civility (see Appendix F).

The meetings should follow Rosenberg's Rules of Order (see Appendix A).

VOTING & DECISION-MAKING



Advisory council members or their designated alternates should be present to cast a vote. A quorum shall consist of the majority of those members entitled to vote. Any business transacted by the advisory council should be approved by not less than a majority of votes cast. Business should be transacted only at regular or special meetings and should be duly recorded in the minutes thereof. The minutes of advisory council proceedings and official actions shall be public record.

Voting shall be by voice or roll call to be included in the minutes. There should be no secret ballots. All questions or procedures should be governed by the most current edition of Rosenberg's Rules of Order (see Appendix A), unless superseded by law.

Rules of Procedure

Best practice and Board expectations are that the advisory councils embrace the tenants of the California Open Meeting laws. These laws are a set of statutes that guarantee the public's right to access and participate in the meetings of state and local government bodies.

They require that

- Meetings are publicly noticed with prepared and adopted agendas;
- Meetings are conducted in public; and
- The public is provided an opportunity to provide public comment at the meeting.

These laws are intended to promote transparency, accountability, and public participation in government decision-making.

For more information please see:

https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/effective_meetings_5.13.pdf?1431538506

Below are the suggested parliamentary actions normally used for organized meetings.

1. When motions are made by advisory council members, the motion shall be stated to Chair.
2. No question on a motion shall be debated or put unless the motion has been seconded. When a motion is seconded, it shall be stated by the Chair before debate.
3. A motion that has been seconded shall be deemed to be in possession by the advisory council, but it may be withdrawn at any time before decision or amendment with the assent of the second.
4. When a question is under debate, no motion shall be received except as stated in this order:
 - a. To adjourn. A motion to adjourn or a motion to fix time of adjournment shall be decided with debate.
 - b. To lay on the table. A motion to refer or lay on the table until it is decided shall include all amendments to the main question. The motion to lay on the table is not debatable.
 - c. To consider the previous question. A motion to consider the previous question shall preclude all amendment from debate. The motion to consider the previous question is not debatable.
 - d. To postpone to a certain date. The motion to postpone is debatable.
 - e. To amend. The motion to amend is debatable only on the amendment and not whether the main motion has merit.
 - f. To postpone indefinitely. The motion to postpone indefinitely is debatable.
5. Upon demand of any advisory council member, or at the discretion of the Chair, the vote shall be by roll call. No secret ballots.

On any question or point of order not contained in these suggested Rules of Procedure, the advisory council should be guided in its parliamentary actions by the latest edition of Rosenberg's Rules of Order* when such actions would not result in conflict with state law or local ordinance.

*Rosenberg's Rules of Order downloadable PDF: https://www.calcities.org/docs/default-source/get-involved/rosenberg's-rules-of-order-simple-parliamentary-procedures-for-the-21st-century.pdf?sfvrsn=d3f73e91_3

Appendix A

Rules of Procedure

Below are the suggested meeting procedures used for advisory councils.

Agenda

Meeting agendas should include two public comment periods, one at the beginning of the meeting for action items and again at the end of the meeting for general comments. A well-structured agenda should be easy to follow, have a consistent format, and include at least the following essential details:

1. The date of the meeting
2. Time and location of the meeting
3. The council's mailing address, contact number, or email address
4. The names of the current officers and/or members of the council
5. The council's mission statement
6. The order of business
7. A specified open public comment period
8. The minutes of the previous meeting

Public Notice of Meetings

To ensure that each Community Advisory Council represents the community fairly, it is vital that they conduct their meetings openly and publicly. This means the public should be informed of all advisory council and sub-committee meetings by publishing the meeting agenda beforehand, typically 72 hours in advance.

Meeting agendas should be easily accessible and visible to the community. This information may be shared on the advisory council's website, in the local newspaper, on community bulletin boards, in community meeting rooms, or in other similar manners.

If a particular project is scheduled for discussion, the advisory council shall notify the applicant and provide them with a copy of the agenda. This gives the applicant an opportunity to discuss their project with council members and interested community participants. Additionally, a copy of the agenda should be sent to the Planning Liaison, with anticipated questions, if applicable to ensure the Planning Liaison has adequate time to prepare answers.

It should be noted that County staff does not notify applicants of when the advisory council will include a project for review on their agenda. Coordination with project applicants prior to advisory council review is the responsibility of the advisory council.

Rules of Procedure

Below are the suggested meeting procedures used for advisory councils.

Meeting Space

The advisory council has a responsibility to ensure that meetings held in person are held in an accessible venue that can accommodate all members of the community and other interested parties who wish to attend. The meeting space should have sufficient seating and room for everyone. It is important that advisory council members and the Chair are easily identifiable, and that all speakers and advisory council members can be heard.

If meetings are held virtually, the advisory council should make every effort to assure that public participation is available and easily accessible in an online format.

Keeping Minutes

It is recommended that the advisory council appoint a designated person along with a backup person to take minutes at each meeting. This task is crucial but can be challenging at times. Some advisory councils choose to record their meetings in addition to or instead of written minutes.

To ensure transparency, the minutes of previous meetings should be readily available to anyone interested. For example, this can be achieved by keeping copies of the minutes in the community library or posting them on the advisory council's website.

Moreover, it is important to assign someone the responsibility of conveying the advisory council's recommendations to the Department of Planning and Building. These recommendations should include the advisory council's comments on the project, including but not limited to concerns, positive comments, suggestions, and the vote. These recommendations will be included in the staff report prepared for the project (see Appendix C).

Quorum

To make motions and vote on them, a quorum must be present. This means that over one-half of the duly elected or appointed advisory council members are present at the meeting.

Avoiding a Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest arises when an advisory council member's financial interests or personal gains could improperly influence their decision-making.

To prevent such conflicts, advisory council members should:

- Refrain from voting on projects in which they have direct involvement.
- Avoid private discussions on matters concerning the advisory council and the community.
- Decline gifts from individuals whose projects are under review and subject to advisory council votes.
- Clearly state at public meetings whether they represent the advisory council's decision or their own personal gain.

Appendix A

Best Practices and Chair Practical Tips

The advisory council's leader is the Chair, and their duties are outlined in the advisory council's by-laws. The Chair's role is to ensure that meetings are conducted with fairness and open discussion while promoting rational and civil decision-making. The Chair must have a good understanding of the advisory council's procedures and the topics to be discussed at each meeting. They are responsible for guiding the meeting, maintaining a fair approach, moderating and contributing to discussions, and directing public comments on relevant issues. While some councils elect their Chair for two years to maintain continuity, new Chairs and council members provide diverse perspectives.

As the Chair, the main objective should be facilitating productive and inclusive council meetings. Here are some helpful guidelines to achieve this:

- Follow established meeting procedures.
- Advise the public to direct questions through the Chair.
- Set standards and expectations for the public attending (e.g., no clapping, cheering, interrupting, etc.).
- Public comment is offered a standard of three minutes.
- Use appropriate procedures and clarify those procedures before discussion and input on an agenda item.
- County/First responder reports of staff should be placed at the top of the agenda and proceed before any other matter is taken up.
- Focus on the topic at hand, rather than individuals involved.
- Encourage the free flow of ideas and keep council members on track.
- Stay informed by reading reports, reviewing plans, ordinances, and standards.
- Make decisions that are consistent with established practice, principles, and precedence.
- Communicate questions to the Planning Liaison before the meeting to ensure they are prepared.

Standard Comment Form

As part of your response to the referral, please consider the following questions:

- Does the proposed project or policy generate any significant concerns, problems, or impacts?
 - If so, please describe the impacts along with any recommendations to address the impacts in your response.
- If your community has an established “vision” in the Community Area Plan, is the proposed project consistent with that vision?
 - If not, please describe:
- What strengths or weaknesses were identified by community members about the project or policy?
- Is the project compatible with surrounding neighborhoods or land uses?
 - If not, are there changes in the project that would make it fit in better?
- Are there any access, traffic, or circulation impacts or issues that should be addressed?
 - If so, please describe the impacts or issues along with any recommendations.
- If the proposal is a General Plan Amendment, does the community feel the proposed change would encourage other surrounding properties to intensify or establish intense uses that would not otherwise occur?

Please feel free to include information or questions other than those listed above. You may also choose to respond that you have no comments regarding the proposal.

***Online form available at:** <https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Planning-Building/Grid-Items/Community-Engagement/Community-Advisory-Councils.aspx>

Appendix C

San Luis Obispo County Departments

Administrative Office

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/administrative-office](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/administrative-office)
Phone: 805.781.5011
Email:
<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Administrative-Office/Contact.aspx>

Agriculture/Weights & Measures

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/agriculture-weights-and-measures](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/agriculture-weights-and-measures)
Phone: 805.781.5910
Email: agcommslo@co.slo.ca.us

Assessor's Office

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/assessor](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/assessor)
Phone: 805.781.5643
Email:
<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Assessor/Contact-Us.aspx>

Clerk Recorder

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/clerk-recorder](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/clerk-recorder)
Phone: 805.781.5080
Email:
<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Clerk-Recorder/Contact-us.aspx>

Parks & Recreation

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/parks-recreation](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/parks-recreation)
Phone: 805.781.5930
Email:
<https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Parks-Recreation/Contact-Us.aspx>

Planning & Buidling

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/planning-building](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/planning-building)
Phone: 805.781.5600
Email: planning@co.slo.ca.us

Public Works

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/public-works](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/public-works)
Phone: 805.781.5252
Email: publicworks@co.slo.ca.us

Sheriff-Coroner

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/sheriff-coroner](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/sheriff-coroner)
Phone: 805.781.4540
Non-Emergency Crime:
805.781.4550 ext.3

Tax Collector

Website:
[slocounty.ca.gov/departments/auditor-controller-treasurer-tax-collector-public/tax-collector](https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/departments/auditor-controller-treasurer-tax-collector-public/tax-collector)
Phone: 805.781.5831
Email: ttc@co.slo.ca.us

Community Advisory Councils

Avila Valley Advisory Council (AVAC)

Website: avac-avila.org

Elections: Second Monday in January.

Cayucos Citizens Advisory Council (CCAC)

Website: cayucos-ccac.com

Elections: Second Tuesday of March.

Creston Advisory Body (CAB)

Website: crestonadvisorybody.com

Elections: Third Tuesday of April.

Los Osos Community Advisory Council (LOCAC)

Website: locac.info

Elections: May of even numbered years.

North Coast Advisory Council (NCAC)

Website: ncacslo.org

Elections: First Tuesday of April.

San Miguel Advisory Council (SMAC)

Website: sanmigueladvisorycouncil.com

Elections: Annually in June.

Santa Margarita Area Advisory Council (SMACC)

Website: smaaconline.org

Elections: One week and a day before the April meeting, on Tuesday in March.

Shandon Advisory Council (SAC)

Website: shandonca.org

Elections: Annually in October.

South County Advisory Council (SCAC)

Website: scac.ca.gov

Elections: Annually in March.

Templeton Area Advisory Group (TAAG)

Website: taaginfo.org

Elections: Annually in March.

Vitality Advisory Council of Oceano (VACO)

Website: vaco805.org

Elections: Members may be added at any public meeting.

Appendix E

Code of Civility Form

A healthy democracy respects the people's right to debate issues with passion. A healthy democracy not only tolerates disagreement but welcomes it in order to refine ideas and create policies that benefit the greater good.

The deterioration of civility across the country and within our community poses a threat to our democracy and our civic well-being. This deterioration:

- Compromises the integrity of a healthy, representative democracy.
- Closes the door on depth of thought, reducing complex problems to harmful oversimplification.
- Deters potential leaders from running for office or serving in government.
- Poisons the civic well and discourages citizens from engaging on pressing community issues.
- Casts the spotlight on poor behavior rather than shining a light on possible solutions.
- Sets a poor example for our children.

We have crafted this Code of Civility as a promise to each other, and to the people and institutions we serve, that we will always strive to conduct our debates - whether in person, online, or in written communication - in ways that allow for the widest range of opinions on ideas and policies, yet also respect the dignity, integrity and rights of those with whom we might disagree. With our individual and collective commitment to this code, we welcome our elected colleagues, the press and the public to hold us accountable.

In our deliberations we pledge to:

Listen First

We will make an honest effort to understand views and reasoning of others by listening to understand, not listening to find fault, allowing thoughtful discussion to lead to the best possible outcomes.

Respect Different Opinions

We will invite and consider different perspectives, allowing space for ideas to be expressed, opposed and clarified in a constructive manner.

Be Courteous

We will treat all colleagues, staff and members of the public in a professional and courteous manner whether in person, online, or in written communication, especially when we disagree.

Disagree Constructively

We strive to advance solutions to community issues; when faced with disagreement, we do more than simply share our concerns with differing positions, we work to propose a course of action of mutual benefit.

Debate the Policy Not the Person

We will focus on the issues, and not personalize debate or use other tactics that divert attention from the issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT

I, _____, with the signature below hereby acknowledge receipt of the Code of Civility.
(printed name)

Signature

Date

Appendix F

Orientation and Handbook Acknowledgement Form

This is to acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Community Advisory Council Handbook, revised version 2023.

I understand that this handbook is a guideline and an aid to being a Community Advisory Council member.

I also understand that it is my responsibility to read and become familiar with the contents of this handbook.

I attended the Member Orientation on the date stated below.

Date _____

Signature _____

Printed Name _____

Name of Community Advisory Council:
