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City solicits volunteers

By David Brown
Of the Emerald

You don't have to fight city hall when you know how it works for your benefit.

That's the message of a pamphlet titled "Eugene's Government" and distributed by City Hall.

The message seems to be sinking in, because citizen volunteers play an unusually large role in more than 50 special interest committees advising Eugene's municipal government, according to David Whitlow, assistant city manager.

Unlike other cities Whitlow has worked in, volunteer applications for positions on Eugene advisory committees, boards and commissions frequently outnumber openings, he says.

The committees furnish Eugene's governing council and residents with information on a wide range of issues affecting the area's quality of life. Five human rights commissions, for example, represent the interests of the aging, the handicapped, minorities, women, and youth.

Likewise, 20 chartered neighborhood organizations work with city staff members on neighborhood improvements and projects. The West University Neighbors built a community park and have established a crime prevention program, while the Fairmount Neighbors recently finished work with city planners on proposed guidelines for future business and institutional development within their neighborhood.

Neighborhood organizations and advisory committees also supply a vehicle for individuals interested in becoming involved with local government, Whitlow says.

"A lot of the new most radical ideas filter up through the committee system," says City Councilor Mark Lindberg.

Lindberg, a University Community Service and Public Affairs professor, represents the city's Ward 3, which encompasses the west University neighborhood. The University campus is located in Ward 4, represented by Councilor Gretchen Miller.

The Eugene City Council is the legislative body enacting ordinances — city laws — and policies, as directed by the city charter. The Council consists of one representative from each of eight city wards and is presided over by a mayor, currently Gus Keller.

On the council level, government-resident interaction reaches beyond organizations. An individual may testify on any subject on the agenda during council meetings by filling out a "request to speak" form found in the council chambers.

Written submissions or a requested addition to council agendas can be arranged through the city manager's office.

The mayor, Gus Keller, who also acts as city representative, only casts a vote on the council if it is tied. He can veto council decisions. But a two-thirds council vote can override that veto.

Both mayor and councilors are elected in

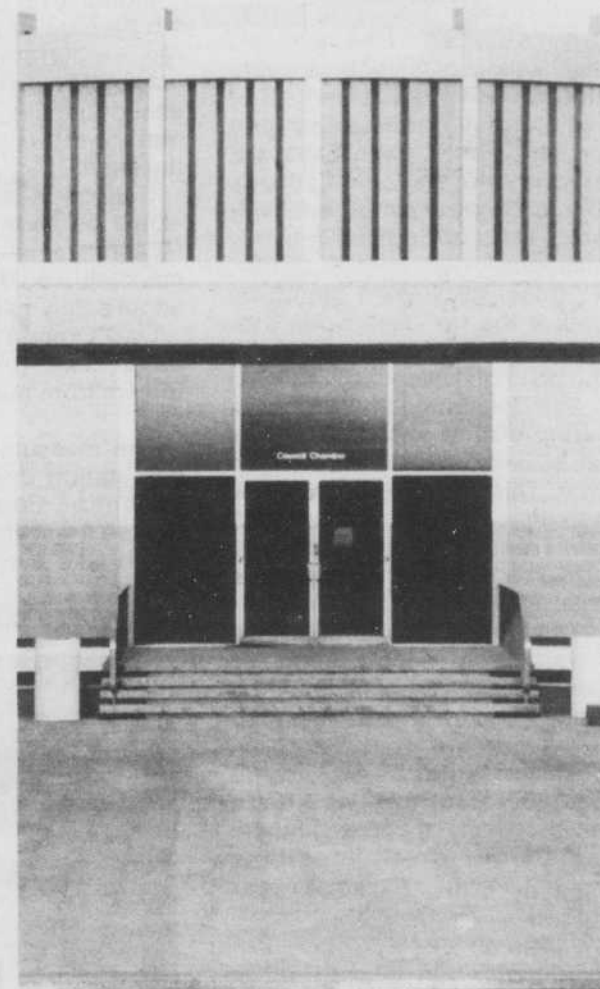


Photo by Hank Trotter

Volunteers play a role in 50 special interest committees advising Eugene's municipal government.

November, during even numbered years, on a non-partisan ballot to serve four-year terms.

The judicial and administrative heads are appointed by the council.

Judge Frank Bocci currently heads Eugene's municipal court. The court tries misdemeanors, violations of traffic or animal regulations and civil cases.

City Manager Mike Gleason currently acts as administrative head, implementing council decrees and conducting council business. The manager's office works with the police chief, fire chief, airport director and other department heads "to give them directions as far as implementing various policies," says Whitlow.

The city manager's office is one source for information on everything from council meetings to the pamphlet on "Eugene's Government." Questions and complaints from the community are handled by the public service officer in the city manager's office.

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