



AGENDA

City of Traverse City
City Commission Study Session
Monday, February 23, 2026
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Traverse City/Grand Traverse County Senior Center
801 E. Front St., Traverse City, Michigan

- I. Welcome and Connection Exercise
- II. Why Shared Agreements Matter
Creating Draft III Shared Agreements
- III. Presentation/Discussion/Finalize
Accountability in Real-Time
- IV. Learning Priorities Moving Forward
- V. Closing

Phase II: Strengthening How We Govern Together

Each topic below reflects areas where governing bodies commonly benefit from building skill, clarity, and shared understanding.

After reviewing the options below, please select two topics:

- *Which topic would most strengthen how we work together right now?*

- *Which topic would most strengthen public trust?*

Your selections will guide the focus of our next two sessions.

1. Communication and Listening in Meetings

The quality of your decisions depends on how well you hear one another, especially when you disagree.

Possible Focus Areas

- Listening to understand before responding
- Demonstrating you heard the message
- Asking clarifying questions instead of cross-examining
- Managing different pacing styles
- Intent versus impact in tone and questioning
- Repairing tone when conversations tighten

Practical Skills

- Paraphrasing before challenging
- Clarifying versus advocacy questions
- Naming impact without accusation
- Slowing down reactive exchanges

DiSC Connection

- Different processing speeds
- Direct versus measured communication styles
- Different questioning instincts
- How tone and pace land differently

Process Handouts

- Listening framework
- Meeting reset language guide
- Question types reference sheet

2. Deliberation and Decision-Making

Public trust increases when meetings stay focused, decisions are clearly framed, and once a vote is taken, the Commission moves forward together.

Possible Focus Areas

- Distinguishing exploration from preparing to vote
- Clarifying what action is actually being made
- Recognizing when perspectives have been heard and it is time to decide
- Keeping the discussion connected to the agreed priorities
- Supporting decisions after close or split votes

Practical Skills

- Framing the decision clearly
- Identifying essential information versus excessive data
- Using language that supports the body after a vote
- Transitioning from debate to action
- Recognizing repetition versus progress in discussions

DiSC Connection

- Identify styles that want more clarity/certainty before deciding
- Analytical versus intuitive approaches
- Speed versus thoroughness preferences

Process Handouts

- After the decision framing checklist
- After-the-vote protocol/guide
- Debate-to-decision flow guide

3. Handling Tension Points and Differences

Disagreement is part of governance. How it is handled determines whether trust strengthens or erodes.

Possible Focus Areas

- Giving and receiving feedback constructively and directly
- Calling in rather than calling out
- Receiving feedback constructively
- Addressing differences
- Responding to heated public comments
- Separating policy disagreement from personal attack

Practical Skills

- Feedback framework
- Naming intent from impact
- De-escalation responses in public meetings
- Referring back to Shared Agreements in real time
- Repair conversations after tense exchanges

DiSC Connection

- Stress behaviors by style
- Direct versus indirect feedback preferences
- Conflict instincts and triggers

Process Handouts

- Feedback conversation guide
- Public comment response model
- Shared Agreement accountability phrases

4. Role Clarity and Working with Staff

Clear boundaries between governance and management reduce tension, protect staff credibility, and strengthen public trust.

Possible Focus Areas

- Asking oversight questions without slipping into the management of staff
- Working effectively through the City Manager
- Clarifying requests while respecting staff workload
- Protecting staff credibility during disagreement
- Clarifying your role when engaging with the public

Practical Skills

- Boundary-setting language
- Redirecting operational drift respectfully
- Clarifying intent when asking staff questions
- Post-vote communication discipline
- Speaking as a body after decisions

DiSC Connection

- Risk tolerance differences
- Detail versus big-picture tension
- Urgency versus deliberation styles

Process Handouts

- Governance versus management quick reference
- Communication pathways guide
- Staff engagement guardrails

5. Creating a Culture of Learning and Responsible Experimentation

If you want thoughtful innovation without overwhelming staff, the Commission must define how learning happens.

Possible Focus Areas

- What is Sustainovation and why it is important in a complex world
- Calling people in rather than calling out
- Defining enough data for pilot efforts
- Distinguishing oversight from suspicion
- Encouraging experimentation with guardrails
- Responding to imperfect outcomes constructively
- Celebrating the wins

Practical Skills

- Learning-oriented questioning
- Setting two to three agreed evaluation criteria for pilots
- Risk-level conversations
- Framing pilot efforts as tests, not verdicts
- Supporting staff when outcomes differ from expectations

DiSC Connection

- Comfort with uncertainty
- Data-driven versus intuitive styles
- Cautious versus progressive instincts

Process Handouts

- Pilot guardrail model with two to three data points
- Learning-focused question list
- Sustainovation principles summary

Proposed Shared Agreements: Drafts I and II

Group 1: Communication and Meeting Conduct

Lauren, Mitch, Ken

Draft I:

1. *We will communicate clear expectations or desired results. (9 green)*
2. *We will invite input and expertise. (5 green, 3 yellow)*
3. *We will be open to differences of opinion. (6 green)*
4. *We will speak to issues, not to people. (9 green)*
5. *We will come prepared. (6 green)*

Draft II:

1. We will clearly communicate the purpose and desired outcomes of agenda items so expectations are measurable and understood.
 2. We will invite relevant expertise early in discussions so expectations are realistic and informed by subject matter professionals.
 3. We will listen to understand, assume good intent, and remain open to different viewpoints.
 4. We will focus our comments on issues and ideas, not individuals, recognizing that personal attacks undermine trust.
 5. We will come prepared by reviewing materials in advance, and when possible, provide staff with advance notice of questions.
-

Group 2: Handling Disagreement and Decision Making

Benjamin, Heather, Amy

Draft I:

1. *We will speak as a body once majority decisions have been voted on and passed. (7 green)*
2. *We will summarize decisions, whether or not they move forward. (5 green, 1 yellow)*
3. *We will explore issues in public meetings through the process of questions, motions, and deliberations. (2 green, 4 yellow)*
4. *We will make space for everyone to share their perspectives and thoughts before making a decision. (8 green)*
5. *We will explain, as much as possible, the reasoning behind our decisions. (7 green)*

Draft II:

1. We will make space for all perspectives to be expressed before moving to a decision.
2. We will disagree respectfully, focusing our comments on issues and the merits of positions rather than on individuals.
3. We will respect majority decisions once adopted and support the implementation of those decisions, even when we voted in the minority.
4. We will clearly explain, as appropriate, the reasoning behind our decisions so the public understands how conclusions were reached.
5. We will maintain trust and stability after decisions are made by reinforcing that the Commission has deliberated and acted as a governing body.

Group 3: Engaging with Staff, Staying in Role, Public Communication

Jackie, Lance, Laura, Deb

Draft I:

1. *We will respect staff by articulating our intent. (7 green, 1 yellow)*

2. *We will acknowledge staff workload limitations by directing questions and concerns to the City Manager. (7 green)*
3. *We will remain committed to effective governance by refraining from interference in management and operations. (3 green, 2 yellow)*

Draft II:

1. We will clearly articulate our intent when engaging with staff, identifying whether we are seeking information, offering perspective, or signaling potential policy direction.
2. We will respect the governance framework established in the City Charter by focusing on policy and outcomes while refraining from interference in management and operations.
3. We will engage staff through coordinated channels that respect organizational structure, staff capacity, and aligned priorities.
4. We will treat staff as trusted professionals and separate policy disagreements from judgments about staff competence.
5. We will recognize that individual commissioners do not direct staff; authority rests with the Commission as a body.
6. We will support and publicly uphold the adopted Commission decisions, including those in which we voted in the minority.

TC Commission Shared Agreements
Group 1: Communication & Meeting Conduct

Participants: Lauren, Mitch, Ken

Draft I: January 10, 2026

- 1. We will communicate clear expectations or desired results. (9 green)*
- 2. We will invite input and expertise. (5 green, 3 yellow)*
- 3. We will be open to differences of opinion. (6 green)*
- 4. We will speak to issues, not to people. (9 green)*
- 5. We will come prepared. (6 green)*

Draft II: Consolidated Shared Agreements

1. We will clearly communicate the purpose and desired outcomes of agenda items so expectations are measurable and understood.
2. We will invite relevant expertise early in discussions so expectations are realistic and informed by subject matter professionals.
3. We will listen to understand, assume good intent, and remain open to different viewpoints.
4. We will focus our comments on issues and ideas, not individuals, recognizing that personal attacks undermine trust.
5. We will come prepared by reviewing materials in advance, and when possible, provide staff with advance notice of questions.

Discussion Questions for Draft III

1. Does this language describe observable behaviors we can recognize in meetings?

2. Is anything redundant, overlapping, or unclear?
3. Is anything essential missing within this topic area?
4. Is anything procedural that belongs under governance guidelines rather than Shared Agreements?
5. Does this reflect what is most important for how we want to govern together?
6. Can we live with this language publicly and hold one another accountable to it?

*** Aim for 3 - 5 statements that carry the most weight for Draft III of Shared Agreements**

TC Commission Shared Agreements

Group 2: Handling Disagreement and Decision-Making

Participants: Benjamin, Heather, Amy

Original Draft I (January 10)

- 1. We will speak as a body once majority decisions have been voted on and passed.*
- 2. We will summarize decisions, whether or not they move forward.*
- 3. We will explore issues in public meetings through the process of questions, motions, and deliberations.*
- 4. We will make space for everyone to share their perspectives and thoughts before making a decision.*
- 5. We will explain, as much as possible, the reasoning behind our decisions.*

Draft II Consolidation

1. We will make space for all perspectives to be expressed before moving to a decision.
2. We will disagree respectfully, focusing our comments on issues and the merits of positions rather than on individuals.
3. We will respect majority decisions once adopted and support the implementation of those decisions, even when we voted in the minority.
4. We will clearly explain, as appropriate, the reasoning behind our decisions so the public understands how conclusions were reached.
5. We will maintain trust and stability after decisions are made by reinforcing that the Commission has deliberated and acted as a governing body.

6. We will conduct deliberations in a manner that protects the legitimacy of the Commission, including fair facilitation and structured discussion.

Discussion Questions for Draft III

1. Does this language describe observable behaviors we can recognize in meetings?
2. Is anything redundant, overlapping, or unclear?
3. Is anything essential missing within this topic area?
4. Is anything procedural that belongs under governance guidelines rather than Shared Agreements?
5. Does this reflect what is most important for how we want to govern together under this topic area?
6. Can we live with this language publicly and hold one another accountable to it?

*** Aim for 3 - 5 statements that carry the most weight for Draft III of Shared Agreements**

TC Commission Shared Agreements

Group 3: Engaging with Staff, Staying in Role, and Public Communication

Participants: Jackie, Lance, Laura, Deb

Original Draft I (January 10)

- 1. We will respect staff by articulating our intent.*
- 2. We will acknowledge staff workload limitations by directing questions and concerns to the City Manager.*
- 3. We will remain committed to effective governance by refraining from interference in management and operations.*

Draft II Consolidation

1. We will clearly articulate our intent when engaging with staff, identifying whether we are seeking information, offering perspective, or signaling potential policy direction.
2. We will respect the governance framework established in the City Charter by focusing on policy and outcomes while refraining from interference in management and operations.
3. We will engage staff through coordinated channels that respect organizational structure, staff capacity, and aligned priorities.
4. We will treat staff as trusted professionals and separate policy disagreements from judgments about staff competence.
5. We will recognize that individual commissioners do not direct staff; authority rests with the Commission as a body.
6. We will support and publicly uphold the adopted Commission decisions, including those in which we voted in the minority.

7. We will raise concerns about staff performance or conduct through appropriate governance channels rather than in public forums.

Discussion Questions for Draft III

1. Does this language describe observable behaviors we can recognize in meetings?
2. Is anything redundant, overlapping, or unclear?
3. Is anything essential missing within this topic area?
4. Is anything procedural that belongs under governance guidelines rather than Shared Agreements?
5. Does this reflect what is most important for how we want to govern together?
6. Can we live with this language publicly and hold one another accountable to it?

*** Aim for 3 - 5 statements that carry the most weight for Draft III of Shared Agreements**

Items Raised That May Belong in Governance Protocol or Operating Guidance

- Formal definition of Commission roles (policy, fiduciary responsibility, oversight)
- Communication through defined reporting relationships
- Response time expectations
- Clarifying purpose of communication as policy, fiduciary, or oversight
- Chair responsibility for summarizing discussion and consensus
- Media single point of contact
- Clear articulation of next steps following discussion



CITY OF
TRAVERSE CITY

Commission & Executive Team Special Session

2/23/2026





Welcome and Opening Remarks





AGENDA

Welcome & Connection Exercise

Why Shared Agreements Matter
Creating Draft III Shared Agreements

Presentation/Discussion/Finalize
Accountability in Real-Time

Learning Priorities Moving Forward
Closing

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Purpose of today:

To operationalize trust in how you govern together



Outcomes for today:

1. Finalize a clear set of Shared Agreements
2. Clarify how agreements will be upheld
3. Identify the next skill areas to strengthen
4. Align on how you want to work together going forward



Norms

- Listen to understand
- Speak from your own perspective
- Name differences respectfully
- Make space for other voices
- Assume positive intent and attend to impact
- Stay present and engaged





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Journaling & Pair Reflection

1. *Since the retreat, what have you become more aware of about how you show up in meetings as a Commissioner?*
2. *What is one behavior you want to strengthen moving forward?*



Effective Listening

The Master Key to Success



*In public service, listening is not courtesy -
it is responsibility. The strength of your governance is
revealed in how well you understand
before you decide.*

*Listening is an act of respect that
builds trust
long before a vote is taken.*

*Votes may settle decisions,
but listening builds legitimacy.*

What Most People Call Listening

- Waiting your turn to speak
- Mentally preparing a response
- Interrupting to correct
- Reframing the point into your perspective
- Saying “I hear you, but...”
- Cross-examining instead of clarifying

*If you are drafting your counterpoint
while someone else is speaking,
you are not listening*



Listening Formula

Listen → **Reflect** → **Confirm** → **Clarify** → **Your Perspective**

Demonstrating understanding comes before your response

“I heard you say...”

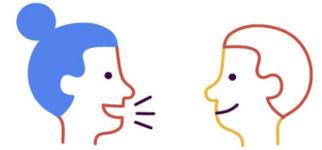
“It sounds like...is that right?”

“What feels most important to you is...”

*Listening is an active behavior,
not a passive one.*

*Understanding is not assumed -
it is demonstrated.*

Breakout in Pairs (4 min each)



Speaker:

Share what you reflected on in your journaling and why it's important to you. Share only what you are comfortable sharing.

Listener:

1. "I heard you say..." (Reflect)
2. "Did I get that right?" (Confirm)
3. "I'm curious, could you tell me more about..." (Clarify)

Listen → **Reflect** → **Confirm** →
Clarify



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Input/Recommendations

Closing & Next Steps

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Shared Agreements

How We Govern & Work Together



Shared agreements are used as:

- a behavioral compass
- a reset tool if something goes sideways
- a boundary protector between governance & management
- a decision guide after the vote
- a modeling tool of what civic leadership look likes



Why Shared Agreements Matter

- Protect the line between governance and management
- Support respectful disagreement
- Keep meetings focused and productive
- Operate effectively under public scrutiny
- Build trust and credibility with each other, staff and the public



Without shared agreements:

- Assumptions fill the gap
- Intent and impact get confused
- Questions feel like challenges
- Staff may feel undermined
- Decisions get reopened
- Trust slowly erodes with each other & public





AGENDA

Welcome & Connection Exercise

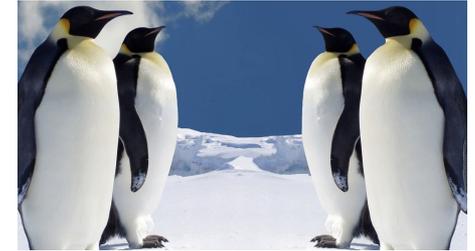
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Breakout into Assigned Topic Area:



*Group 1: Communication & Meeting Conduct
(Lauren, Mitch, Ken)*

*Group 2: Handling Disagreement & Decision-Making
(Benjamin, Amy, Heather)*

*Group 3: Engaging with Staff, Staying in Role & Public
Communication
(Jackie, Deb, Lance, Laura)*



Reviewing Draft II Shared Agreements

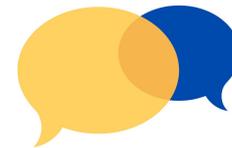
1. Review your strengthened Draft II language
2. Decide:
 - *Does this reflect what we are truly committing to?*
 - *Is the language behavioral and clear?*
 - *Is anything redundant?*
 - *Is anything missing?*
3. Select one spokesperson
4. Be ready to present your final 3 - 5 recommended statements

Practice listening and reflecting



Guardrails

- Stay within your assigned topic area
- Strengthen and clarify existing language not expand it
- Focus on observable behaviors, not procedural steps
- Avoid rewriting from scratch
- Don't go for perfection



Instructions for Group Discussion

1. Review your strengthened Draft II language
2. Decide:
 - *Does this reflect what we are truly committing to?*
 - *Is the language behavioral and clear?*
 - *Is anything redundant?*
 - *Is anything missing?*
3. Select one spokesperson
4. Be ready to present your final 3 - 5 recommended statements

Practice listening and reflecting





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Reflections on Presentations

1. What do you want clarity on?
2. Is this language clear enough to use in real time?
3. Does anything here conflict with or duplicate with another group?
4. Can you live with this as written?





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Closing Reflection

What is one takeaway from today's session?

- or -

What is one thing you appreciate
about our time together?

