

## **The FAQs of ABCs**

Recently, the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County (CBICC) kicked off a new citizens engagement initiative called ABC Essentials. The goal is to introduce the idea of local authorities, boards and commissions (ABCs) to our businesses members and community members who may wish to serve in a voluntary capacity in the future. This program was launched in partnership with local government entities, which are always in need of residents with an appetite to serve their community and make a difference!

**Question:** Why did the CBICC launch this initiative?

**Answer:** The decisions or recommendations made by ABCs can greatly affect our economy and quality of life at the municipal, county, and regional levels. While the CBICC works tirelessly to represent its member businesses, the Chamber also works closely with its partners in local government through the Centre County Economic Development Partnership (CCEDP). Municipal officials have expressed a great need for residents willing to serve on various ABCs. It's in everyone's best interest to get involved! People who are invested in their community are more likely to remain in the community, will be happier and more productive at work, and the area will be more attractive to people looking to move to Centre County. The ABC Essential program strikes right at the core of CBICC's mission to improve the economic quality of life in Centre County, making it a great place to live, work, play, learn, and do business.

ABCs tackle issues as diverse as planning and transportation to libraries and water. Just as broad as the purposes for ABCs were the questions that arose during the introductory session. In keeping with the mantra that "it is always better to ask than assume," here are a few of the frequently asked questions:

### **What is an ABC?**

ABC stands for authorities, boards, and commissions. Each township, borough and county has several ABCs to help them render services on behalf of residents.

### **What do ABCs do?**

ABCs address a plethora of topics: Planning, Zoning, Code, Sign Ordinances, Parks, Libraries, Open Space, Water, Transportation, and many, many more.

### **How do I get on an ABC?**

First, you do *not* have to run for office – *no* political campaign necessary! People on ABCs typically apply and then are appointed by the powers that be (Borough Council, Board of Supervisors, etc.).

### **When and where should I apply?**

While appointments are typically made at the end of the year, unplanned vacancies may arise at any time – so go ahead and submit an application if you're interested. To find an application or inquire about the application procedure, visit your local borough or township website or give them a call.

**Will I get paid? Are there perks?**

Those appointed to an ABC are unpaid volunteers, but some ABCs may offer an opportunity to attend a conference, site visit, or attend an annual appreciation dinner.

**Is there an orientation?**

Once appointed to an ABC, there is typically an orientation for new members. The chair of the ABC or a staff member of the borough/township can also be a great resource, as can current ABC members!

**What about meetings – how often, how long, how much homework?**

Meeting frequency and length varies, for example it could be once a month for two hours or only once a year for an hour. This is a great question to think about before applying for an ABC – find one that fits your current lifestyle. As for homework, that will depend too, so be sure to ask!

**Do I need to know Robert's Rules of Order?**

While the formal or informal nature of a given ABC's meeting may vary, you should probably acquaint yourself with the basics (Call to Order, Make a Motion, Second, All in Favor/Opposed, Motion Carries, Motion to Adjourn, etc.). These meetings have agendas and minutes that are available online, so you may want to peruse a few to get a feel for how they are conducted. Since meetings are public, you can also attend a meeting to see how it is run.

**What are the legal implications?**

Committees and townships have attorneys (also called solicitors) who sit in on the meetings and are always available for questions about conflicts of interest or other issues that may arise. If you are serving on a Board, then you can ask for a copy of Directors & Officers Insurance policy. A good rule of thumb is to ask first if you have any questions in this area.

**Are there term limits?**

Term limits may vary, so be sure to ask. Term possibilities include two, three, four, or more years. There is also the possibility of serving a second term or a non-consecutive term. Before committing, be sure you know the length of time for your volunteer commitment.

**Will I enjoy it?**

Yes! Find an ABC that speaks to your passion or skill set. If you want to make a difference, take your time in selecting an ABC that lights an inextinguishable fire in you! If there are meetings, jargon, or other potentially mundane hurdles, be sure that the ABC you select will fill your gas tank enough to keep you soaring over any hurdles! Once you find your fit – or fire – you'll be on the right track to making a difference.

**Does my voice on an ABC matter?**

As Uncle Sam says, we need you! When a vacancy arises, who will be the next person to take a seat at that table? With only so many seats, every voice is important. So too is every perspective and experience. Take the opportunity to make your voice heard in the community. Our community will be stronger for it.