



Town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island

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Town of North Kingstown
BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES
HANDBOOK

January 2008

PURPOSE

This handbook has been prepared to assist members of all North Kingstown Boards, Committees and Commissions in understanding their role in town government.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Town of North Kingstown is organized and operated in accordance with the Rhode Island General Laws.

An elected Town Council governs the Town, by charter. The charter also provides for a Town Manager who is responsible for managing the administrative functions of the government and is responsible for effective and economical municipal operations and ensures that Town Council policies are implemented.

The Town Council is responsible for establishing policies and providing overall direction for the Town's operation. As elected representatives, Council members are directly accountable to the citizens of North Kingstown. It is this accountability that requires the Council to be responsible for all municipal activities. To assist the Council in gaining a greater awareness of the sentiments of the residents, committees and commissions composed of local residents familiar with a specialized aspect of North Kingstown and its needs have been formed. Boards, Committees and Commissions expand the opportunity for citizen input, participation in policy development and to provide needed assistance to Town staff.

APPOINTMENT OF BOARD, COMMITTEE AND COMMISSION MEMBERS

The Town Council appoints Boards, Committees and Commissions. The Town Clerk will supply ordinances or adopted policies associated with a given entity and a copy of the Rhode Island Public Meetings Law, Town Charter and Comprehensive Community Plan to all Board, Commission and Committee members.

To assist the Board, Committee or Commission a Town staff member may be assigned to provide technical information, research capability and professional support. Town staff members are employees of the Town and are accountable to the Town Manager who, in turn, is accountable to the Town Council.

Although many Boards, Committees and Commissions have a staff person assigned, it is not mandatory for the staff person to attend every meeting. Attendance at meetings should be decided by the staff person in consultation with the respective chair.

AUTHORITY OF COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

Unless provided by Town Ordinance, Town Charter, State Law, Committees and Commissions are strictly advisory to the Town Manager and Town Council. Committees and Commissions recommend to the Town Council or Town Manager the action they think should be taken on specific issues. Except for the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Review and Historic District Commission, Boards, Committees and Commissions have no authority to act on their own without Town Council or Town Manager concurrence. They can neither commit resources, direct staff nor establish policy of the Town without Council authorization.

Unless otherwise granted by the Town Council, Boards, Committees and Commissions have no authority to commit Town resources, the Town values their recommendations for effective allocation of resources and development of Town policy. Committees and Commissions provide the following important services:

1. Identify and develop alternative recommendations regarding policy issues within a Board's, Committee's or Commission's area of specialization.
2. Ensure consideration of community values and goals.
3. Provide a "sounding board" when solutions are proposed to problems addressing community needs.
4. Provide citizen input into local government.

As identified in their charge, Board's, Committee's and Commission's responsibilities may include:

1. Advising the Town Council and Town Manager on budget priorities.
2. Advising the Town Council and Town Manager on long-range plans capital and program needs.
3. Advising the Town Council and Town Manager on staffing needs.
4. Advising the Town Council and Town Manager as to audit, purchasing and whistle blower issues.

SELECTION OF OFFICERS

Section 415 of the Town Charter states:

- (1) Within one (1) month following the appointment or reappointment of a committee, commission or board, its members shall elect a member as Chair and a member or nonmember as secretary. The results of such election shall be reported to the town clerk within one (1) week of its taking place and the officers so elected shall serve until their successors are elected and qualified.

The Town Charter does not have a provision for selecting a Co-Chair, so in the event of the absence of the Chair, the board, commission or committee shall elect a Chair Pro-Tem for that meeting. The Chair's function is to conduct meetings and to serve as a liaison between the staff and Board, Committee or Commission. The Chair runs meetings in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Law and Robert's Rules of Order.

In addition, the Board, Committee or Commission shall select a member or non-member (Section 415 of Town Charter) to serve as secretary, who will be responsible to record minutes of every meeting to serve as the official record of a Board's, Committee's or Commission's activities and will be responsible to transmit minutes to the Town Clerk's office as a permanent record in accordance with the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island.

STAFF RELATIONS

The Town Manager coordinates the activities and programs of all departments, agencies and all Boards, Committees or Commissions whose members are chosen by the Town Council. In order for information and requests to flow smoothly, all requests for funding or for requests with a budgetary impact shall go to the Town Manager. Town staff members assigned to assist the Board, Committee or Commission will provide administrative assistance as required. These duties include preparing staff reports, providing analysis and technical data needed to develop recommendations for the Town Council or Town Manager.

The staff role is limited to support and advisory functions. Town staff members are non-voting members and, consequently, do not participate in a Board's, Committee's or Commission's decision-making process. Because of their purely supporting roles, staff members will not respond to questions from the public unless requested to do so by the Chair.

Formal staff contacts should be with the primary staff member assigned to the Board, Committee or Commission. Contacts by members with staff should clearly be in the framework of the Board, Committee or Commission assignment. Board, Committee or Commission members should not ask for the individual reports, favors or special consideration from Town staff members.

The staff serves the Board, Commission or Committee in an advisory capacity, much the same as the Board, Committee or Commission serves the Town Council and/or Town Manager in an advisory capacity. Staff members are selected by the Town Manager on the basis of their professional and technical abilities and are expected to guide the Board, Committee or Commission with recommendations based upon analysis of the situation, regardless of personal opinion.

The Board, Commission or Committee should be aware of staff member's responsibilities to provide advice to the Board, Committee or Commission, Town Council and Town Manager. In instances where the primary staff person disagrees with a Board, Committee or Commission recommendation, staff is obligated to advise the Town Council, through the Town Manager, of the staff recommendation. The Town Council or Town Manager will consider the advice of the Board, Committee or Commission and the staff, as well as other interested parties, when making a final decision.

Town Council members assigned as liaisons to certain Boards, Committees or Commissions shall serve in the capacity of ex-officio, non-voting members of the Board, Committee or Commission. Town Council liaisons will report to the full Council on a periodic basis regarding activities of the Board, Committee or Commission.

TOWN SOLICITOR

The Town Solicitor is responsible for advising the Town Council and staff on legal matters. It is appropriate for staff to gain any required advice from the Town Solicitor prior to any meeting on matters requiring legal review.

ATTENDANCE

Members are expected to attend all meetings on a regular basis. If a member has unexcused absences for three (3) consecutive meetings or has four (4) unexcused absences from regular meetings in a calendar year, he/she may be considered to have lost interest in the Board, Committee or Commission. The Town Council President and Committee Chair will discuss any problems with the respective member and recommend that the Town Council replace the member if necessary.

When less than a quorum of the Board, Committee or Commission members is present at a scheduled meeting, the only action that may be taken is to adjourn the meeting for lack of a quorum. Without a quorum, the meeting is automatically adjourned until the next regularly scheduled meeting, unless a special meeting is called at that time.

MEETINGS

All meetings are open to the public and must be conducted in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Law.

When a regular meeting is called, notice of said meeting shall be provided in compliance with the requirements of Rhode Island General Law. Notice must include date, time and place of the meeting and topics to be discussed. Additionally, a notice announcing the meeting must be posted in Town Hall at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting. Staff will work with the Board/Commission/Committee to ensure that proper notice and posting requirements are accomplished.

Board, Commission or Committee discussions must be limited to those items contained in the posted agenda.

Special meetings are those called by the Chair or a majority of the members. When a special meeting is called, a notice of the meeting must be given to all members forty-eight (48) hours prior to the meeting and must include the date, time and place of the meeting as well as the topic(s) to be discussed. Additionally, a notice announcing the meeting must be posted in Town Hall at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting. Staff will work with the Board/Commission/Committee to ensure that proper notice and posting requirements are accomplished.

Board, Commission or Committee discussions must be limited to those items contained in the posted agenda.

CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

Public Meetings

All regular and special meetings shall be open to the public.

Agenda Preparation

To facilitate the orderly conduct of meetings and to provide advance notice of the business scheduled for discussion, an agenda shall be prepared for each meeting. The meeting agenda shall include staff reports, if available, and materials necessary for the decision-making process. The agenda and back-up materials are available for review by members of the public.

The Chair of the Board/Committee/Commission shall direct staff to prepare the agenda. Agendas may include such items as request of concerned citizens for consideration of a particular issue; for issues of interest based on items contained in the agenda; Town Council or Town Manager referral of items for review, comment and recommendation; and Board/Committee/Commission direction and requests. Members wishing to have an item included on the agenda should contact the appropriate staff or chair and submit their request in writing for inclusion as back-up material for the agenda.

Order of Business

Call Meeting to Order

Roll Call

Confirm Agenda was posted with the Secretary of State's Office as required by RIGL.

Approval of Minutes

Committee/Commission Business (Old Business; New Business)

Posted Agenda Items

Adjournment

Meeting Minutes

The Board/Committee/Commission secretary is responsible for preparing minutes of all meetings. The secretary will be provided with a recording device to record the audio portion of the meeting. (In some cases, the Town provides video streaming of these meetings, which provides audio and video recording of the meeting.) Meeting minutes provide an official record of the actions taken and a summary of the important topics raised in the discussion. They are not intended as verbatim transcript of the meeting.

Prior to voting to approve minutes, members will be given the opportunity to review minutes of previous meetings. Minutes may be ordered corrected by a vote of the members to ensure that they accurately reflect the proceedings of the meeting in question. Minutes become the official record of a meeting only after the Board, Committee or Commission has approved them.

Presiding Officer

The Chair, selected annually by Board/Committee/Commission members, serves as the presiding officer at all meetings. In the Chair's absence this role is assumed by the Vice-Chair, who is also elected annually by members. If both the Chair and Vice-Chair are absent, staff liaison will call the meeting to order and members will elect a temporary Chair to serve until adjournment or arrival of the Chair or Vice-Chair.

The presiding officer retains the right to make seconds and motions, participate in debate and vote on all matters.

Right to Address the Board/Committee/Commission

Every resident or property owner of the Town has the right to be present at a Board/Committee/Commission meeting and there may, at the Board's/Committee's/Commission's discretion, be a portion of the meeting allocated for public comment. In addition, any interested person may request permission from the presiding officer to address the Board/Committee/Commission regarding an agenda item.

Voting

After a motion has been made and seconded, all members of the body have the opportunity to vote. Any member of the body voting in the negative on a motion shall provide a reason for their negative vote. All votes are to be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Tie votes are failed motions that may be reconsidered.

If a member must recuse him or herself from voting on a particular issue, the member must state the reason for the recusal and, in an abundance of caution, separate themselves from the body considering the issue at hand. Once the issue has been considered and a vote recorded, the individual would then rejoin the body.

Reports to the Town Council

The Chair of the Board/Commission/Committee shall, as necessary, submit a report on recommendations and action to the Town Council. Based upon the report and the results of the Council's deliberations and/or hearing(s), a decision is made or the item is returned to the Board/Committee/Commission for additional study.

Conflict of Interest

Due to the Town Council's desire to appoint Board/Committee/Commission members who represent a cross-section of the Community, it is inevitable that matters will be considered on which one or more members have a direct or indirect interest. In these situations, a member must decide if this interest will cause them to be biased in their consideration of the matter at hand. If the member feels a conflict or appearance of conflict exists, they must disqualify themselves from participating in the deliberations, recuse themselves and vacate the dais for that particular agenda item.

Adopted by the Town Council on January 14, 2008.