

TOWN OF NORTON



A Guide to Posting Meetings, Agendas & Minutes

This is intended to be a guide for chairs of multiple-member bodies, and their associated staff, responsible for posting meetings and filing minutes. The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (MGL Ch 30A, §18-25) and Charter for the Town of Norton should be referred to for further detail concerning the matters outlined in this document.

Appendix includes the following templates that are available for usage:

- Meeting Posting Template
- Meeting and Agenda Posting Template
- Agenda Template
- Minute Notes Form
- Minute Template

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Town Clerk

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Posting a Meeting & Agendas – Required Items**

Meeting Notices must contain the following information:

- Name of the Committee
- Date, Day of Week and Starting Time of Meeting
- Location of Meeting
 - Name of Town Building & Room
 - Street address & Town for non-Town of Norton Buildings

**Meeting notices are required when you are sending notice of upcoming meetings PRIOR to sending an Agenda. Sending your agenda is sufficient (without a meeting notice) if you are not asking to post meetings in advance of posting agendas.

Meeting Agendas must contain the following information:

- Name of the Committee
- Date, Day of Week and Starting Time of Meeting
- Location of Meeting
 - Name of Town Building & Room
 - Street address & Town for non-Town of Norton Buildings

Body of Agenda:

- List of Topics the Chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed – these must be specific so the public will understand what will be discussed AND voted on at the meeting.
 - Old Business and New Business may be listed on the agenda. This is NOT for items to be voted on or may be controversial. It simply allows for conversation on old or new items not specifically listed on the agenda.
 - Agendas may include an item to inform the public that certain matters may be discussed that arise after the meeting notice was posted. Such an item may be listed as: “Other – Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting.”

Please provide the Town Clerks Office with 2 copies of any Agenda Postings when hand delivering them to the Town Clerks Office. 1 for the file and 1 for public posting areas. An electronic copy of the document is also required for posting to the town website.

Receiving and Filing Postings & Agendas (Electronic Versions REQUIRED)**

Although you may use any of the following means to communicate your postings with the Town Clerks Office, email is the preferred method.

- Fax, 508-285-0297
- Email, townclerksoffice@nortonmaus.com *
- In Person, Town Clerks Office -- 1st floor of Town Hall
70 East Main Street

- * The ownership of making sure the Town Clerks Office has received a posting falls on the person posting the meeting, not the Town Clerks Office. The Town Clerks Office will check the email mailbox one half hour prior to the office closing each day (M,T,W @ 4pm; Thurs @ 7pm; Fri 12pm).
- * DO NOT send postings to an email of a specific staff person in the Town Clerks office....instead please use the dedicated email account townclerksoffice@nortonmaus.com . Everyone in the office has access to this email account and your posting can be processed despite individual work schedules, illness or vacations.
- * **If you are down to the wire to comply with the 48 hour notice, please call the Town Clerks Office at 508-285-0230 to inform us that you have emailed the posting so we can help assist you with compliance.**
- * When processing in person, please provide the Town Clerks office with 2 copies of any Agenda Postings when hand delivering them to the Town Clerks Office. One is for our files, one is for the public posting on bulletin board. An electronic copy of the document is also required for posting to the town website.

Want to verify that your meeting and/or agenda has been posted?

Please check the online meeting calendar from the town's website at www.nortonma.org (home page, left column, calendars) to see if the meeting has been posted.

24 hour / 7 day a week Access

The Open Meeting law requires 24 hour / 7 day a week access to meeting schedules and agendas. The Town of Norton will utilize the Town Website to comply. Each meeting will be posted on the calendar (found on the home page at www.nortonma.org). Agendas will be available in the form of a pdf attachment to the corresponding meeting. The Town Clerks office will make your word document into a pdf and post accordingly.

****How do you provide us with your Electronic Version?**

- Email the agenda as an attachment to townclerksoffice@nortonmaus.com email address.
- You may also scan the document from a networked printer on the towns exchange server. Both copiers in Town Hall are networked. Simply select scan on copier, select pdf file and then select the Town Clerks Office from the address list. This will send the file via email to the Town Clerks Office email for processing. Do NOT combine multiple meetings in the same scan.

Meeting Cancellations

- Cancelling a meeting before the meeting is scheduled to start:

Should it be necessary to cancel a meeting due to inclement weather or any other reason, the Chair of the public body or assigned staff person should notify the Town Clerks Office as soon as possible so the postings (bulletin board & website) can be updated. We need to have a written notification of cancellation. You can cancel a meeting by simply sending an email to us stating what meeting you are cancelling.

- Cancelling a meeting after the meeting when a quorum is not present:

It is necessary to inform the Town Clerk's Office when a posted meeting was not held, either due to lack of a quorum or any other unforeseen reason. The Clerk's Office will be expecting Minutes for any posted meeting that is not cancelled with proper notification to the Clerk's Office.

It is strongly recommended that a minority of members of a public body not "meet" in the absence of a quorum, and further, that such a group avoid discussion about any business within the jurisdiction of the public body, or any other matter.

Meeting Minutes – per MGL Ch 66 §6

State law requires all public bodies (committees, commissions, boards, sub-committees and ad-hoc committees) to keep accurate written records of its public meetings.

***Importance of the Record** - Many matters before boards and committees are reviewable by a court on an appeal. In many of these matters, the appeal is based on the record developed before the board or committee. Thus it is important to adequately develop a record that will accurately reflect what went on during the meeting and, most importantly, support the decisions and actions of the board or committee.*

Meeting Minutes as set forth by law must include the following information:

- Date, time and place of the meeting
- List of Members present and absent
- Any actions taken at the meeting (including to go into executive session w/roll call vote)
- A summary of the discussions on each subject
- Exact wording of all motions, including who made and seconded the motion
- The decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes
- A list of documents and other exhibits used by the body at the meeting

Once minutes are accepted by vote of the public body:

- The person who recorded the minutes and the committee chairman should **sign the minutes** and indicate the date of the meeting at which the minutes were accepted.
- **File an original signed copy** of the approved minutes with the Town Clerk.
- Send an electronic version of the minutes (without the signatures) to townclerksoffice@nortonmaus.com. Minutes will be posted as a pdf attachment to the corresponding meeting on the calendar of the Towns website.
- Norton's Town Charter states "for the convenience of the public, **copies** of these records shall also be kept at the main branch of the **Norton Public Library**, provided, however, such copies are not to be construed in any way as being the official records." It is the responsibility of the committee, NOT the Clerk's Office to comply with this regulation.

Public Record

The records of all public body non-executive session meetings minutes are public and permanent records and must be available for public inspection. Minutes of open meetings are public records, subject to mandatory disclosure upon request within 10 days.

Records of any executive session may be withheld from disclosure only as long as publication may defeat the purposes of the executive session.

Meeting Notes and Draft minutes are considered public record from the moment of their creation, and are considered the public record of the meeting until official Minutes are approved by the public body. The notes and draft minutes must be retained only until the minutes are approved, and may thereafter can be destroyed without permission from the Supervisor of Public Records. Any secretarial notes, if not destroyed once the official minutes are accepted, are considered a public document under the public records law.

Timely Fashion

Chapter 30A, §22C of the Open Meeting Law requires minutes to be produced in a timely fashion but does not provide a definition for “timely fashion.” The Attorney General does however recommend that minutes be approved at a public body’s next meeting whenever possible. The law does, however, state that in the event someone requests minutes from a meeting, such minutes must be provided to them within 10 days.

A good rule of thumb is that committee minutes should be reviewed and approved within eight weeks of the original meeting date. For Committees which meet monthly or more frequently, the minutes should be reviewed and approved at the next regular meeting following the one being reported. Committees, which meet less frequently, should adopt a procedure, which will assure approval within two months of the original meeting date.

Executive Session Reminders

- All meetings must be opened in open session. Votes to go into executive session must be recorded in the open session minutes by a roll call.
- Before going into executive session, the chair must state the purpose for the session, *“stating all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called”*
- All votes in executive session must be recorded in the minutes by a roll call.
- Executive Session Minutes must be disclosed when purpose of exemption has been met, unless otherwise protected.
- Executive Session Minutes must be reviewed periodically by chair or public body.
- Executive Session Minutes must be provided within 10 days in response to request, unless review not yet undertaken (then by board’s next meeting or 30 days, whichever occurs first)
- Executive session minutes must be filed with the Town Clerk once made public.

Appendixes

Includes the following templates that are available for your usage if you so desire.

These are not required, but each template includes all the items required as outlined in this document.

- Meeting Posting Template
- Meeting and Agenda Posting Template
- Agenda Template
- Minute Notes Form
- Minute Template