

TOWN OF MERRIMAC



A Guide to Posting Meetings, Agendas & Minutes

This is intended to be a guide for chairs of multiple-member bodies, and their associated members, responsible for posting meetings and filing minutes.

The Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (MGL Ch. 30A, §18-25) should be referred to for further detail concerning the matters outlined in this document.

Appendix includes the following templates that are available for usage if interested:

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

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Town Clerk

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Meeting Agenda Requirements

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
 - Street address & Town for non-Town Buildings

Body of Agenda:

- List of Topics the Chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed – **MUST BE SPECIFIC** itemized list so the public will understand what will be **discussed** **AND** which items a **vote** is anticipated to be taken 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 items 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." Again, this is NOT for items to be voted on or may be controversial.
 - If the chair anticipates an executive session may be needed, that should be included on the agenda

Posting a Meeting & Agendas –

- Meeting Postings & Agendas must be posted with Town Clerk **AT LEAST 48 hours PRIOR** to meeting, **excluding Saturdays, Sundays and Legal Holidays.**
- The Open Meeting law requires 24 hour / 7 day a week access to meeting schedules and agendas. We must process & post each meeting in **BOTH** of the following locations to be in compliance.
 - Town Hall Bulletin Board
 - Town of Hall Foyer Window area

** It is strongly suggested to post all agendas on the Town Website ***
- Although you may use any of the following means to communicate your postings with the Town Clerks Office, email is the preferred method.
 - Fax, 978 346 8013
 - Email, townclerk@townofmerrimac.com
 - In Person, Town Clerks Office -- 1st floor of Town Hall – 2-4 School Street, Merrimac, MA

*Reminders for Emailing Postings & Agendas:

- The ownership of making sure the Town Clerks Office has received a posting falls on the

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.

Deliberations -

- A public body cannot discuss a matter that should have been reasonably anticipated unless the matter appears on the agenda.
- The OML specifically defines the term “deliberation” to include email. Public bodies may only use email to distribute agendas or documents to be discussed as well as scheduling information. No opinion of a member may be expressed and members should avoid a reply to all on emails.
- Whenever members are sharing feelings, ideas, beliefs or concerns relative to their position it is considered deliberation and would need to be in compliance with Open Meeting Law postings.
- Should a public body deliberate inadvertently outside of a public meeting they **MUST** meet in open session to rectify the mistake and they **MUST** make an independent deliberative action and not merely a ceremonial acceptance in open session. They should also share in open session any email communications that could be considered a violation to rectify it.

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 going 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 approved 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.
- Minutes are **public and permanent records.**
- **File an original signed copy** of the approved minutes with the Town Clerk.

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 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.

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 convened in an open posted session, with executive session listed on the agenda when reasonably anticipated by the chair. See Section 104-006 of the Policies & Procedures outlines executive sessions to be held at the beginning or end of a posted open meeting.
- 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*”
- The chair must announce whether the open session meeting will reconvene after the executive session.
- 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 to determine if the reason for going into executive session still exists until such minutes are disclosed.
- Executive session minutes must be available to the public once disclosed.

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 and Agenda Posting Template
- Minute Notes Form
- Minute Template