

## *Operating Procedures for Boards, Committees, Commissions, and Task Forces Town of Reading, Massachusetts*

The following are operating procedures for all Boards, Committees, Commissions and Task Forces ("bodies") of the Town of Reading. These guidelines are meant to assist you in your work, and to ensure that the operation of the "body" meets the requirements of State and Town law and practice.

- The "body" on which you serve is a legally constituted body of the Town of Reading. All Open Public Meeting Law, Conflict of Interest Law, and other regulations apply to all members of the body. Training on Ethics and Conflict of Interest law is available each fall, and all members of every "body" are required to take the training in order to be covered by the Town's indemnification.
- All Town "bodies" fit into an operating Department for organizational and support purposes. All Departments have a Department Head who will usually be your main contact.
- Staff assistance will be provided to each "body" to the extent that is possible. Recording Secretaries are not available except in very unusual situations. Unless staff assistance is permanently assigned to a "body", requests for staff assistance must go through the Town Manager. Generally, staff members are not assigned to be members of Town "bodies", in order to keep the appropriate separation between policy roles and administrative roles.
- As an organization it is the Town's belief that volunteers deserve the maximum support that the Town can give them, including having the information they need to conduct their business in a timely manner. The Town will assist with photocopying and mailing.
- Assistance from specialists outside of your Department, such as legal counsel and financial advisors, are available upon request through the Town Manager. The RMLD provides legal counsel and financial advisors for the Reading Municipal Light Board and the CAB.
- Before participating as a member of the "body", you must be appointed in the manner determined by the document that establishes the "body", (usually by the Board of Selectmen) **and** you must be sworn in by the Town Clerk.
- All meetings must be open to the public, and are required to be posted publicly through the Town Clerk's office at least 48 hours before the meeting, not including Sundays and legal holidays. Your Staff liaison (if any) will assist you in doing this posting, or the Office Manager in the Town Manager's office will take care of this task (942-9043). If the meeting has not been posted, you may not meet, even "informally" or in a "work session".
- In posting a meeting on standard forms, the meeting place will be determined by staff, based on availability of space. All meetings must take place in a public place - usually Town Hall. You may not change the meeting place unless the meeting has been re-posted to a new location at least 48 hours before the meeting, not including Sundays and legal holidays.
- Discussion of business being considered by a "body" must be in public session of the "body". Telephone meetings or email meetings or discussion of the business of the "body" by a majority of its members is not permitted. Dissemination of information to members of a body via mail, email or otherwise is permitted, as long as a copy of that information is made available to the public at the next meeting of the body. Often including a list of such materials on the agenda of the meeting is helpful in letting the public know that such a document exists.
- Meetings are not permitted on election days (where there is an election in this Town), during Town Meeting (you must adjourn no later than 7:25 PM), on legal holidays, and during certain religious holidays as determined by the Town Manager.
- You must provide minutes. Minutes must, at a minimum, state the date, time, and place of the meeting; who was present and spoke, and must record the actions taken including the vote. Draft minutes are a public record, and generally minutes from one meeting should be available for approval by the body at their next meeting. The original and 1 copy of all minutes is to be sent to the Town Clerk's office once

approved. They will keep the official and permanent file of the minutes, and send the copy to the Reading Public Library as required by Charter.

- A quorum of the meeting is a majority of the members of the "body" (i.e. the full authorized membership). If there is not a quorum present, the meeting cannot take place. The only action that can be taken, is adjournment.
- Actions of the "body" will be effective only if a majority of the full authorized membership votes in the affirmative. For example, if a 9 member "body" has 6 members present, 5 affirmative votes are required to pass any action. (by State statute the Zoning Board of Appeals requires a unanimous affirmative vote on most issues)
- Voting must be done by roll call or by a show of hands – just voice votes are not permitted.
- In general there will not be a need for an executive session. If the "body" anticipates discussing something that it feels will need to be discussed in Executive Session, please contact the Town Manager in advance to review the need and procedures. (For the RMLB and CAB, contact the General Manager).
- Each "body" must select a chairman who will be responsible for running the meetings and developing an agenda.. Additionally a vice-chairman may be selected, and someone will need to be designated to take minutes.
- No "body" has authority to expend funds unless it has been specifically authorized to do so. If you're not sure, you probably are not authorized to expend money. To the extent that there is a need for funding, you should discuss this need with the Department Head, and then the Town Manager. (For the RMLB and the CAB, see the General Manager.)
- Pursuant to Selectmen's policy, no "body" is authorized to solicit or accept gifts unless specifically cleared through the Town Manager.
- Various "bodies" may have their own operating guidelines or "bylaws", and this is permissible so long as the operating guidelines or "bylaws" do not conflict with these procedures or any provision of State Law, Town Bylaws, or the Charter.
- Each "body" is accountable to its appointing authority, and reports should be made on either a specific or a periodic basis to the appointing authority. If the appointing authority is the Board of Selectmen, the report may be scheduled through the Town Manager. Additionally, annual reports of all bodies are required.
- The press may cover meetings of Town "bodies". All information available at the meeting is available to the press. Press releases on other than routine matters should be cleared with the Town Manager in advance. (RMLD press releases are cleared through the General Manager).

Note – the Reading Municipal Light Department has somewhat separate governance from parts of Town government, although most of these guidelines still apply. The RMLD provides its own staff support to Boards, Committees and Commissions; provides legal assistance as required through the General Manager; and clears press releases through the General Manager.

I hope these procedures help you in your work as a Town of Reading volunteer. If there's anything that hasn't been covered, or if there's any assistance you need, please don't hesitate to ask.

***THANKS FOR VOLUNTEERING!***

Peter I. Hechenbleikner  
Town Manager

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