



Town of Carlisle

MASSACHUSETTS 01741

Office of
TOWN CLERK
66 Westford Street
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Agenda and Minutes Style Guide

Updated August 2, 2024

To improve the efficiency and efficacy of the business of the Office of the Town Clerk, we request all Boards and Committees standardize their submissions for posting as described here.

Agendas:

- File naming the document:

- Use only alphanumeric characters, underscores, and dashes.
- Your group's name/abbreviation, followed by the date, and the word "agenda."
 - Example: The Carlisle School Committee Meeting agenda for 1/1/2020 would be saved as "CSC_01-01-2020_Agenda"
 - Include the "0" before single-digit portions of the date.
 - Date can be formatted by year first if easier for your records.
- Save as a PDF document and send as an attachment to townclerk@carlislema.gov
- If the agenda is more than one page, please include page numbers, in the form of "Page x of y" where "x" is the current page and "y" is the total pages.
- If you need to send a **revised agenda**:
 - Name the document as above, adding "Rev" and number revisions.
 - Ex: "CSC_01-01-2020_Agenda_Rev1"; if there is a revision after that: "CSC_01-01-2020_Agenda_Rev2"
 - The Office may ask a public body to begin to number all versions of submitted Agendas

- Submission deadlines:

- Must be posted **48 hours** before the scheduled meeting time to comply with Open Meeting Law (only business days are counted).
- Submit to townclerk@carlislema.gov **with appropriate time for the office to post**.
- For a morning meeting, agendas need to be submitted before close of business (3:00pm) **three days** before the meeting. As the office doesn't open until 9:00am, we can't guarantee getting to your email and posting the meeting before the 48 hour deadline if the meeting is scheduled before 12:00pm.

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- Ex: Municipal Facilities Committee is meeting at 8am on Thursday. We need the agenda before 3pm on Monday, as we won't be in the office until after the 48 hour deadline.
 - Ex: School Committee is meeting 9:45am on Monday. We need the agenda before 3pm on Wednesday because we need enough time to get to the email submission and post it.
 - For an evening meeting, agendas need to be submitted before close of business (3:00pm) two days before the scheduled meeting.
 - Ex: Finance Committee is meeting at 7pm on Tuesday. We need the agenda before 3pm on Friday.
 - Please keep to the 48 hour rule when possible. There is allowance in OML for emergency meeting agendas and revisions that do not meet the 48 hour deadline. If challenged, your public body would need to explain that reasoning to the Attorney General's Office and any other resulting legal action.
- **Required content of an agenda:**
- Full name of the Board or Committee (no abbreviated names)
 - Date, time, and location of the meeting
 - Note for Virtual locations: you may include the meeting information OR the email address of someone to contact for the public to gain access to the meeting. If including the meeting information, both the web link and the dial-in information must be present. If by email, someone must be monitoring that email account throughout the meeting to allow in any latecomers
 - For Hybrid (virtual and in-person): both locations must be listed
 - Topics anticipated at the time of calling the meeting

Minutes:

- **File naming the document:**
- Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters, including spaces and periods. Use underscores and dashes instead.
 - Your group's name/abbreviation, followed by the date, and the word "minutes."
 - Example: The Carlisle School Committee Meeting Minutes for 1/1/2020 would be saved as "CSC_01-01-2020_Minutes"
 - Save as a PDF document and send as an attachment to **townclerk@carlislema.gov**
- **Required content of the minutes**
- Date and time of the meeting on the first page.

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- Location of the meeting on the first page.
 - The full group name (no abbreviated names) and the meeting date on each page.
 - Page numbers in the form of “Page x of y”
 - Time the meeting adjourned
 - First and last names of the members present, and names of the members absent.
 - Date Minutes were approved
 - Name of individual submitting Minutes
 - Description (summary) of any discussion that takes place during the meeting that reflects the nature of deliberations (transcript is not required)
 - Description of any public participation during the meeting, including the name and address of the individual participating
 - Subjects acted upon, votes taken (including individual votes of members) and any other actions taken
 - Supplemental information and supporting documents, including reports to the Public Body or prepared by the Public Body, do not legally need to be submitted with the Minutes. However, they do legally need to be accessible to the public within 10 days of request and retained in accordance with state schedules. Please reach out to this office if you require assistance.
 - **If your public body would like to include them, all supporting documents need to be saved with the Minutes in one PDF document for posting.** Please do not send supporting documents to be posted separately from the minutes. The web system does not allow for more than one Minutes file to be posted.
- **Submission deadlines:** The Open Meeting Law requires public bodies to create and approve minutes in a timely manner. A “timely manner” is within the next three public body meetings or 30 days from the date of the meeting, whichever is later, unless the public body can show good cause for further delay. **The Attorney General encourages minutes to be approved at a public body’s next meeting whenever possible.** The law requires that existing minutes be made available to the public within ten days of a request, whether they have been approved or remain in draft form. Materials or other exhibits used by the public body in an open meeting must also be made available to the public within ten days of a request.
- In the recent experience of this Office, delaying approving and submitting Minutes to this Office opens the Public Body to scrutiny from the public, including public records requests, local news, and OML complaints.

Public Hearing Notices:

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- **File naming the document:**

- o Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters, including spaces and periods. Use underscores and dashes instead.
- o Your group's name/abbreviation, followed by the date, the abbreviation "PHN", and any other identifying information. Whatever identifying information is in the file name is the information that will be posted.
 - Example: The Planning Board legal notice for 123 Main St on 1/1/2020 would be saved as "CSC_01-01-2020_PHN_123_Main" (or similar). It would be posted with the title "Planning Board Public Hearing Notice 123 Main".
- o Save as a PDF document and send as an attachment to **townclerk@carlislema.gov**

Executive Session:

Open Meeting Law states ten specific purposes for which an executive session may be held. They are the only reasons. You may find a list of the reasons and their explanations beginning on page 11 of the "Guide to Open Meeting Law" (on our website: [Open-Meeting-Law-Guide-and-Education-Materials \(carlislema.gov\)](https://www.carlislema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12345)).

An agenda for an Executive Session must state:

- The reason for the executive session (must match an item from the above referenced list), stating all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called
- Whether the public body will reconvene in open session at the end of the executive session
- A roll call vote of the body to enter executive session

Where a public body member is participating in an executive session remotely, the member must state at the start of the executive session that no other person is present or able to hear the discussion at the remote location. The public body may authorize, by a simple majority vote, the presence and participation of other individuals at the remote participant's location.

While in executive session, the public body must keep accurate records, all votes taken must be recorded by roll call, and the public body may only discuss matters for which the executive session was called.

Minutes:

"Public bodies are not required to disclose the minutes, notes, or other materials used in an executive session if the disclosure of these records may defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session. Once disclosure would no longer defeat the purposes of the executive session, however, minutes and other records from that executive session must be disclosed unless they fall within an exemption to the Public

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Records Law, G.L. c. 4, § 7, cl. 26, or the attorney-client privilege applies. Public bodies are also required to periodically review their executive session minutes to determine whether continued non-disclosure is warranted. These determinations must be included in the minutes of the body's next meeting.

A public body must respond to a request to inspect or copy executive session minutes within ten days of the request. If the public body has determined, prior to the request, that the requested executive session minutes may be released, it must make those minutes available to the requestor at that time. If the body previously determined that executive session minutes should remain confidential because publication would defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session, it should respond by stating the reason the minutes continue to be withheld. And if, at the time of a request, the public body has not conducted a review of the minutes to determine whether continued nondisclosure is warranted, the body must perform such a review and release the minutes, if appropriate, no later than its next meeting or within 30 days, whichever occurs first. In such circumstances, the body should still respond to the request within ten days, notifying the requestor that it is conducting this review.” (2017 Guide to Open Meeting Law pg. 19)

Why are you being asked to do this?

- The law still requires we keep physical records of minutes in addition to our electronic files. This is unlikely to change soon.
- The File Naming method described is the “best practice” for electronic records directly from the Massachusetts State Archives Records Management Unit to mitigate risk of tech obsolescence, unintended corruption, or loss of data for these permanent records.
- There are consistently over 50 Public Bodies that meet in Carlisle, all of which must submit the required agendas and minutes. Conforming to this Style Guide will save the office time; we will not need to rename every agenda and minutes document that comes in and will streamline digital and hard copy organization.
- Including the group name, meeting date, and page numbers makes it possible for multi-page minutes to be identified, filed correctly, and to ensure pages are not missing or removed when the public or another Public Body reviews the files. The public has access to all agendas and minutes that are on file in the Parlin room.

Please reach out with any questions. The Office is available to share examples of, assist with, or review documents before posting.

While not necessary for efficiency or efficacy, pleasantries in communication are always appreciated.