

**BOARD, COMMISSION &
COMMITTEE HANDBOOK
FOR VOLUNTEERS**



Adopted: January 6, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Without the dedication of the many volunteers who serve and contribute countless hours as board, commission, and committee (collectively “Boards” or “Board”) members, the City would be unable to function. These volunteers help make the City of Portsmouth a great place to live, work, and play.

Citizen knowledge, interest and action are important ingredients to the delivery of top-quality public services. More than ever, citizen participation is playing an important role in local government. The richness that comes from citizens serving on City Boards is one of the things that makes Portsmouth exceptional.

The City has established Boards to advise and assist the City Council in dealing with specific projects, policies, and issues of concern. Boards play an integral and important role in the City's decision-making process. The City benefits from the expertise of the dedicated individuals that make up these Boards.

Being a member of a City Board requires work and commitment, and it is hopefully a very rewarding experience. It offers a means to participate in community affairs, to work with interesting people, and an opportunity to help shape City policy.

This handbook has been prepared to:

1. Outline the role and function of City Boards;
2. Review important guidelines for all Boards;
3. Provide information about the history and composition of the City’s organizational structure; and
4. Provide members with the information necessary to understand areas of responsibility for their respective Board and their role in serving their Board and the City.

CITY ADMINISTRATION

Board members need to be familiar with the City’s organization and develop an understanding of City departments and their operations. The easiest way to do this is to review the organizational chart attached.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship with the City Council

A good relationship with the City Council is essential. The primary responsibility of City Boards is to advise and make recommendations to the City Council. Boards are responsible for providing additional avenues of communication for the general public. As they provide their recommendations to the City Council, Board members should keep in mind that no Board has the final authority to establish City policy or administrative direction. It is the City Council's role to receive the recommendations made by the Boards and to consider them as part of its decision making. Regardless of one’s individual position, it is helpful for a Board member to understand that the policy decisions of the City Council are final once they are made.

Official communications with the City Council should be in written form, or by public report, from the entire Board. Communications will then be forwarded through the Staff Liaison to the City Council and the City Manager. The role of Staff is typically to *communicate* the position of the Board rather than to *advocate* for it. Whenever a Board has an item before the City Council, the Chair or a representative of the Board is not usually required to attend the Council meeting, but is encouraged to be present to speak about the issue or answer questions, especially when Staff recommendations differ from those of the Board. Staff will indicate in the agenda report if Staff recommendation differ from the recommendations of the Board.

When a Board member addresses the City Council at a public meeting, it should be made clear whether or not he/she is speaking on behalf of the Board or as an individual. If the member is speaking on behalf of the Board (normally this would be the Chair or Vice Chair), only the majority position of the Board should be advocated. If

the member is expressing his/her own personal viewpoint on a particular subject, it should be stated as such.

Board members assist the City Council and Staff by:

1. Focusing attention on specific issues of community concern;
2. Encouraging citizen participation and involvement in the ongoing management of their community;
3. Providing a grass roots perspective on issues of importance; and
4. Making recommendations considering citizens' input and perspective.

Citizens seeking to provide comment at Board meetings on non-agenda items should be directed to do so during public comment at those meetings, or at City Council meetings so that the City Council is aware of citizens' concerns. The Council may refer items back to the Board for greater policy development.

Generally, Roberts Rules of Order are followed for Board meetings and the Chair has some discretion in running meetings. Fairness is very important. (If a Board allows public comments on agenda items, then it should be very judicious in doing so, similar to the City Council rule of three minutes.) A few sample motions are provided below:

<u>You Want to</u>	<u>You say</u>	<u>Interrupt</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Debate</u>	<u>Amend</u>	<u>Vote</u>
Enforce Rules	Point of Order	Yes	No	No	No	None
Suspend Rules	Move to suspend Rules	No	Yes	No	No	2/3 vote
Make a Motion	I move	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a Motion	I move to amend	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Postpone	I postpone to time certain	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Close debate	Move the Question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3 vote
Take a break	Move to recess	No	Yes	No	Yes	Majority
Close meeting	Move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority

Relationship with City Staff

Staff Liaisons to Boards are valuable resources. They do research and provide relevant information that enhances the Board's ability to get things done. Staff are available to answer questions and follow-up on items brought before the Board. Members should be aware of the time involved on the part of Staff in preparing studies and reports and should make sure that all requests to Staff are consistent with the Board's approved role.

Board members may not direct Staff to initiate major projects without approval from the City Council or City Manager, and individual members may not direct Staff to initiate any program or study. In addition, members should not become involved in the operational matters of City departments unless part of Board's advisory responsibility (e.g. the Library Board of Trustees). For more information about the powers and duties of the Portsmouth Library Board of Trustees, please see the Trustee section of the Library website at: <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/library/library-trustees-board>.

Relationship with Fellow Board Members

Cooperation among fellow Board members plays an important role in the successful efforts of City Boards. In order to build consensus around common goals and objectives, members should first show a willingness to define the issues at hand and then work to reconcile opposing viewpoints. When members interact positively, the group as a whole will be more effective. Important points to keep in mind in working with other members are:

1. Respect an individual's viewpoint, even though it may be different from your own;
2. Allow other members adequate time to present their views before making comments;
3. Be open and honest;
4. Welcome new members and help them become acquainted with the Board; and
5. Accept responsibility, voice opinions, be fair and factual.

Relationships with the Public

Good relations with the public are vital for all City Boards. In many cases each Board serves as a link between the City Council and the public, helping to inform the public, to reconcile opposing viewpoints, and to explain City programs and policies. Members should welcome citizen input at meetings and be considerate of all interests, attitudes, and differences of opinion. Each Board provides a channel for citizen expression by listening to comments, opinions, and concerns from the public. Therefore, it is important to be responsive and in tune with the community.

Relationship with Other Boards

From time to time, an issue will come before the City that involves two or more Boards. When this occurs, each Board should focus on their own advisory responsibilities, not on areas that are under the jurisdiction of the other Board. The responsibilities of Boards are, at times, very close to one another, and care should be taken to avoid overlapping to the greatest degree possible. For example, the Conservation Commission, Trees and Greenery Committee and Recreation Board can all easily become involved in the consideration of a single project around parks. This can get confusing, and it is often difficult to resist getting involved in decisions that are the responsibility of another Board. On a particularly complex project, or when members' objectives contradict one another, it may be appropriate to have joint meetings to improve communication to facilitate a mutual understanding of the issues.

Business Relationships

Members of Boards may not participate in a discussion or vote if they have a direct financial interest in the vote to be taken (such as a contract). For more information, See Volunteer Training and Standards of Conduct and Ethics Policy.

APPOINTMENT PROCESS & EXPECTATIONS

Board Member Requirements and Appointment Process

Members of almost all City Boards must be residents of the City of Portsmouth. Interested applicants apply for an appointment to a specific Board. Appointments are made by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

Oath of Office

Every officer of the City, including members of City Boards, may be required to take an oath of office administered by the City Clerk.

Training for Board Members

Continuing education to further one's knowledge of the various issues that face New Hampshire municipalities is essential to serving the public interest. Board members are encouraged to attend conferences and workshops, read relevant publications, and utilize other opportunities for personal and professional training that will bring new ideas into the community. New Board members will be required to participate in member orientation and training. Failure to complete this orientation and training will result in the member's inability to begin his/her term and participate in meetings. Land use board members may be required to attend specialized training during their term.

General Guidelines for Board Members

The Council encourages active citizen participation in the business of City government. Boards provide an opportunity for interested residents to participate in the governing of their community under guidelines and procedures established by the Council. Boards can improve the quality of City government by providing the Council with resources to make better-informed decisions. Other benefits of these Boards include improved lines of communication between the public and Council, greater opportunities for discussion of public issues and more citizen involvement in City government.

Appointment to a City Board is an honor. It provides an opportunity for genuine public service. Each Board member should be aware of the responsibilities that go along with officially serving the City. The specific duties of each Board vary with the purpose for which it was formed.

There are, however, many responsibilities common to all Board members:

1. Understand the role and responsibility of the Board. Be informed of its functions, scope and authority and relationship to other Boards;
2. Represent the overall public good, not the exclusive point of view of a sole group or interest;
3. Keep all lines of communication open. Each member serves as a communication link between the community, the City Council, and Staff;
4. Do your homework and be prepared. Members should become familiar with items under consideration prior to meetings in order to be fully prepared to discuss, evaluate, and act on matters scheduled for consideration. Reviewing the materials in your agenda package in advance of each meeting is crucial. It will give you a sense of the potential impacts that recommended actions may have on the community, and any potential issues surrounding those actions. Not being prepared hinders a Board member's ability to represent your community, make informed decisions, and explain your position with confidence. Feel free to seek Staff's advice and assistance in advance of a meeting;
5. Ask questions in advance. If you have a question about a matter that is not on the agenda (or perhaps it's regarding an agenda item but it relates to technical details), contact the Board Chair or Staff Liaison before the meeting. If you ask your questions during the meeting without prior notice, Staff may not have the resources on hand to provide a clear and concise answer. Asking questions in advance of the meeting will provide Staff with the necessary time to do their homework and better prepare for the conversation;
6. Be a participant, an active representative, and be enthusiastic. If you are not able to attend the meeting, or must attend via Zoom or Teams, please let your Staff Liaison or the Board Chair know in advance. Board members are reminded that physical attendance is vital to ensure a quorum during meetings. Without a quorum, the Board is unable to have an official meeting and cannot pass recommendations to Council or Staff. Specific attendance requirements, along with provisions regarding the appointment, tenure and removal of Board members are set forth in Chapter 1, Administrative Code, Article III, Boards, Section 1.302, Appointments, Tenure and Removal. For City Ordinance: <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/cityclerk/city-ordinances;>
7. Establish a good working relationship with fellow Board members, the City Council, and your Staff Liaison; and
8. Understand the scope and authority of your Board's responsibility and strive to work within that scope.

Being appointed as a Board member by the City Council carries with it a significant responsibility. As an "ambassador" of the City, the City Council expects that you will conduct yourself with politeness and courtesy with the public and Staff and whenever in the public eye. Yours is a position of service that is charged with maintaining the public trust. It is important that you do not abuse that trust.

MEETINGS

Attendance

Regular attendance at meetings is critical to the effective operation of City Boards. Therefore, all members are expected to attend all of their Board meetings, including work sessions. If you are unable to attend a meeting, call your Chair or Staff Liaison prior to the meeting.

Quorum

A quorum is a simple majority of the voting members of a Board physically present at the meeting and is necessary to pass any motions. In the event of a lack of quorum, or if quorum is lost during a Board meeting, the Board's official business will cease.

Role of the Chair

The principal role of the Chair is to manage the Board meeting. This includes helping to set meeting agendas, maintaining the order of business during the meeting, focusing discussion on the issues at hand, and ensuring that the public appearing before the Board are treated courteously. The Chair must make certain that discussions do not get sidetracked. Duties of the Chair also include review of the agenda with the Staff Liaison before the meeting, representing the body at City Council and community group meetings.

Role of the Staff Liaison

Boards are often assigned a Staff Liaison to provide information, professional or technical advice and support as required. A Staff Liaison will support the Chair in their facilitation of Board meetings, including the wording of motions and determining next steps on various agenda items.

Role of the Staff Liaison or Secretary

Boards often assign a Secretary or Staff Liaison to help with administrative tasks. These tasks typically include:

- Attending meetings and recording minutes;
- Operating Zoom or Teams during a meeting;
- Preparing and distributing minutes to Board members;
- Posting agendas and minutes to the City's website (through the Staff Liaison);
- Maintaining the Board member contact list; and
- Coordinating various meeting logistics including room bookings and public notices of Board meetings (through the Staff Liaison).

Role of the City Council Liaison

A City Council Liaison may be appointed to your Board as a voting or non-voting member. A voting City Council Liaison serves as a full member of the Board.

The City Council Liaisons serve as a communication channel between the City Council and the Board to deliver information, both to and from the City Council, and to provide clarification as required. A Council Liaison's role is not to assess or align with the decisions of the Board, but to act as a conduit of information.

Open Meetings

Effective citizen oversight of the workings of government is essential to our democracy and promotes confidence

in it. Public access to meetings of governmental bodies is a vital aspect of this principle. Please consider reading New Hampshire's Access to Governmental Records and Meeting Laws (<https://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/indexes/default.aspx>). It offers explanations of some of the fundamental principles in New Hampshire Open Meetings Law, and answers questions that arise on a regular basis.

City Boards are public bodies under the Right-to-Know law and are therefore held to the same standard of transparency as City Council meetings. As such, Board meetings are open to the public, unless the meeting has been closed as part of consultation with the Legal Department on matters that are allowed under state law.

Notification of Board meetings is posted in two locations at public notice posting places as defined through state law, which are often the bulletin board in the City Hall foyer and the City's website.

COMPLIANCE WITH CITY POLICIES

Board members interact with members of the public, other members and City Staff. The City has established several policies, more fully described and incorporated by reference below, that you are required to abide by during your term. Prior to your term beginning, you will be required to review this Volunteer Handbook and acknowledge that you have reviewed and will abide by these policies as a condition of being a member of a City Boards. Failure to sign off on these policies will result in your inability to begin your term and participate in meetings.

Volunteer Training and Standards of Conduct and Ethics Policy

All Board members are required to be familiar with and comply with the City's Volunteer Training and Standards of Conduct and Ethics Policy which provides standards for performance of your duties and standards of conduct that require respectful interactions with each other, the public and Staff. The City's Volunteer Training and Standards of Conduct and Ethics Policy is incorporated herein and requires your review and signature through the City's PowerDMS system, which will be your acknowledgment that you have reviewed and will abide by this policy as a condition of being a member of a City Board.

In addition to the Volunteer Training and Standards of Conduct and Ethics Policy, all Board members are subject to the City's Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest ordinance set forth in Chapter 1, Administrative Code, Articles VIII, Code of Ethics, and some members are subject to Article IX, Conflicts of Interest/Mandatory Financial Disclosure <https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/cityclerk/city-ordinances>.

Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy

All Board members are required to be familiar with, and comply with, the policy of the City of Portsmouth prohibiting sexual (or other forms of unlawful) harassment in the workplace. The City's Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy prohibits harassment of any kind and requires reporting incidents of harassment and discrimination. The City's Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy is incorporated herein and requires your review and signature through the City's PowerDMS system, which will be your acknowledgement that you have reviewed and will abide by the policy as a condition of being a member of a City Board. The references to "employees" shall include Board members and the reference to "supervisors" shall include the Chair of the Board. However, all questions and reports relative to violations of the City's Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy (Reporting Procedures and Investigations) should be made to the Director of Human Resources or the Legal Department, not the City Manager's office.

Acceptable Use Policy for Electronic Media

The City encourages the use of technological resources and computing systems "electronic media" and associated services because they can make communication more efficient and effective and because they are valuable sources of information. However, all employees and everyone connected with the City, including Board members, should

remember that electronic media and services provided by the City are City property and their purpose is to facilitate and support City business. The City's Acceptable Use Policy is incorporated herein and requires your review and signature through the City's PowerDMS system, which will be your acknowledgment that you have reviewed and will abide by the policy as a condition of being a member of a City Board.

Social Media Policy

Social media consists of networks and online publications that enable individuals and groups to communicate between and among one another for different purposes (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs, etc.). The City of Portsmouth uses various social media in order to reach out to the public and educate individuals on certain events, activities, awards, and other news releases.

The City does not provide social media platforms for Board members to communicate amongst one another, to Staff or to members of the public. When using social media posts, and other online interactions ("electronic communication") regarding matters before their Board, members are reminded that although they are not acting on behalf of their Board, they should maintain a standard of professional and respectful communications in all their public electronic communications. When posting to public pages, members should be mindful of their responsibilities under the Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment, Volunteer Training and Standard of Conduct and Ethics Policies described above.

Expressing opinions on social media or engaging in contentious public online discussions can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest for some Boards with quasi-judicial roles. Posts on various social media sites have been the focus of court cases here in New Hampshire where conflicts arose, and decisions were overturned because someone posted something on a social media platform. If you choose to use social media, please do so with caution.

Adherence to City Council Policy

Board members should not approve projects that violate adopted City policies. Members can make recommendations to the City Council about exceptions to a City policy and can also recommend policy changes when appropriate.

Open Records

Meaningful access to public records plays a vital role in facilitating government oversight. All communications to City Staff and to elected officials are subject to Right-to Know requests. Please review New Hampshire's Access to Governmental Records and Meetings Law, link to NH RSA (<https://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/indexes/default.aspx>) for more information.

VIOLATIONS OF CITY POLICIES AND BOARD RULES AND PROCEDURES

A member's failure to adhere to City policies and Board rules and procedures can create a lack of trust in City government and hinder the effectiveness of the Board's work. It may also subject the decisions of the Board to legal challenges. A Board member's failure to adhere to these policies, rules and procedures could negatively influence a member's reappointment or change in role from alternate to permanent member and may be grounds for removal.

City of Portsmouth, New Hampshire Citywide Organizational Chart

