# Barnstable County Committee Handbook

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Welcome!

The Barnstable County Commissioners would like to take this opportunity to thank you for volunteering your time to serve the citizens of Barnstable County.

Whether a long-time public servant or first time volunteer the contents in this handbook will guide you throughout your service.

Public service is in some cases like private involvement in a charity, association or private club. However, public service comes with many other requirements and responsibilities that will affect your participation.

Barnstable County adheres to its policies and procedures and follows state laws which govern participation on county committees. These are all addressed in the committee handbook.

Please take the time to review the contents of the Barnstable County Committee Handbook and familiarize yourself with Massachusetts General Laws that govern Open Meeting Laws, the Code of Conduct and what is expected of you, and the charge and responsibilities of the specific committee you have appointed to. In addition, please review Mason’s Manual of Legislature Procedure and Roberts Rules of Order for the procedural aspects of conducting a public meeting.

The Committee you have been appointed to has been established to fulfill a specific purpose and need of Barnstable County. You now represent all the citizens of Barnstable County and your service is essential to its mission.

You should understand that the service you are about to embark on is greatly appreciated by the public you serve, county staff, and county officials.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of staff or your County Commissioners. Enjoy your time with the county and thank you for volunteering your service.

Thank you,

Board of Regional Commissioners

October 2018
A. BECOMING A COMMITTEE MEMBER

All new and reappointed committee members and alternates must swear or affirm an oath of office administered by the County Clerk before they take a seat or vote in a public meeting of the committee to which they have been appointed.

Committee members should become familiar with the following list of documents. A link to each is provided for your convenience:

- State Ethics Conflict of Interest Law Training and Summary [https://www.mass.gov/online-conflict-of-interest-law-training](https://www.mass.gov/online-conflict-of-interest-law-training)

Each appointee is

- **within 30 days of swearing-in**, all committee members and alternates are required by state law to complete a State Ethics Conflict of Interest Online Training Course (and repeat the training every two years thereafter) and return a Certification of Completion to the Clerk of Barnstable County to the committee liaison on which you are appointed.
- **every year** all committee members and alternates are required to review and sign an Acknowledgement of Receipt of the Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law provided by the state and maintained in their data base
- **within two weeks after review and receipt of materials** described in the Open Meeting Law Section 29.04 Certification (1) (a) and (b), all committee members and alternates will be required to sign a Certificate of Receipt of Open Meeting Law Materials and submitted to the Clerk of Barnstable County to the committee liaison on which you are appointed.
- **Forward a copy of signed receipts and acknowledgements** to the Barnstable County Clerk as follows: joconnell@barnstablecounty.org—committee liaison on which you are appointed.
**B. COMMITTEE PROCEDURES**

**Structure and Management**
Meetings of committees are subject to Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, which influences many of the following guidelines:

- The Open Meeting Law applies to every meeting or deliberation between a quorum of a government body if any public business over which the government body has jurisdiction is discussed or considered.
- A meeting must be held in public even if there will be no vote or decision made.
- A meeting occurs any time a quorum of the members convenes and discusses any public business or policy over which they have some jurisdiction or advisory power.
- Depending on the committee’s workload, meetings may be held weekly, bimonthly, monthly, or less frequently. A routine regular meeting day, hour, and location should be established whenever possible.
- Except in cases of emergency, committees shall not meet on weekends, major religious or official government holidays.

**Executive Session**
Executive Sessions are closed sessions that are permitted only for a very limited number of specified purposes. Unless they are involved in personnel matters or litigation, most appointed committees rarely, if ever, convene in Executive Session. [refer to Massachusetts General Law 30A Section 18-21]

**Election of Officers**
Committees elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. Committees should elect officers at the first meeting or annually when customary. Newly established committees shall have a Pro-Tempore Chair appointed by the County Commissioners for the purpose of scheduling its first meeting.

**Responsibilities of Officers**

**Chairperson:** The Chairperson schedules the place, date, and time of meeting. The Chairperson draws up the meeting agendas and ensures meeting notices are officially posted. The Chairperson presides at all meetings, decides questions of order, calls special meetings, and signs official documents that require the Chairperson’s signature. The Chairperson shall have the same rights as other committee members unless otherwise specified.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chairperson must request notification from any person who intends to make a video or audio recording or transmission of the meeting.

**Vice-Chairperson:** The Vice-Chairperson assumes all responsibilities of the Chairperson whenever the Chairperson is absent from meetings and performs other duties as necessary.
Agendas
The agenda is a specific list of items to be discussed at a meeting of the committee. Agendas are usually drawn up by the Chairperson and must be posted at least forty-eight hours before the beginning of the scheduled meeting. The Chairperson or the committee liaison should forward approved agendas to the county web page coordinator for posting.

Once the meeting date and agenda have been posted, only those topics specifically listed on the agenda may be discussed when the committee convenes. The Chairperson should ensure that discussions, deliberations or any motions made are within the realm of the posted agenda item.

Motions, Discussion and Voting
Once recognized by the Chairperson, any member of a committee may make a motion for consideration and action. Motions should be made in the affirmative. Motions must be seconded. Discussion does not proceed if there is no second. A motion is passed when a simple majority of members vote in the affirmative. Committee members should familiarize themselves with both Roberts Rules of Order and Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedures related to conduct and meeting procedures where applicable.

Posting of Public Meetings
It is the responsibility of the committee or its liaison to provide timely notice of the committee’s scheduled public meetings. By law, notice of an upcoming public meeting of a committee must be posted by the Chairperson or other designee at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance, not including Saturdays, Sundays or legal holidays.

The official posting location for Barnstable County public meeting notices is the public notice bulletin board located to the right of the entrance door to the Superior Courthouse building. This does not prohibit postings on the county web page.

Posted meeting notices must contain the name of the committee, date, time, meeting location and an agenda which presents the anticipated topics of discussion.

Posted notice of the cancellation of a scheduled public meeting should be made by the Chairperson or designee as soon as it becomes evident a cancellation is appropriate.

Meeting Locations
Other than meetings which may require on-site visits elsewhere, public meetings are held in facilities that meet ADA requirements.

Quorum Requirement
Except as otherwise specified by law, attendance by a majority of the regular members of the committee constitutes a quorum. If a quorum cannot be achieved, the meeting must disband, and no committee business shall be discussed. Members who attend a meeting by Remote Participation may not be counted in the calculation of a quorum. The Chairperson may designate an appointed alternate member to achieve a quorum.
Open Meeting Law, Communications and Technologies
A committee may schedule meetings and receive meeting related materials and agendas by email or telephone. However, discussions or deliberations on public business involving a quorum of members via email, telephone or other technologies shall be deemed a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

Email or text messages written or received in the capacity of a committee member are considered public records which must be made available for public inspection in the same manner as hardcopy documents.


Remote Participation
The Board of County Commissioners approved a Remote Participation Policy which allows committee members to participate in a scheduled public meeting by telephone, internet technology or other acceptable means, when they are unable to attend in person due to personal illness; personal disability; emergency; military service; or geographic distance.

For all the rules and procedures governing remote participation, please consult the full Remote Participation Policy statement provided in the Appendix of this handbook.

Conflict of Interest
All members who participate in a public meeting must be impartial in their judgement and abide by the state’s Conflict of Interest Law.

Training and guidance on complying with the Conflict of Interest Law can be found at: https://www.mass.gov/online-conflict-of-interest-law-training

Conduct
An individual committee member has a right to speak publicly as a private citizen but should not purport to represent the committee unless specifically authorized by that body to do so.

Record Keeping
Each committee shall maintain accurate minutes of its meetings, setting forth at a minimum the date, time, place, members present or absent, a summary of the business taken up at the meeting, a list of documents used at the meeting, and all the votes or actions taken at each meeting.

Each committee shall vote to approve the minutes of their previous meeting at their next scheduled meeting and issue approved minutes within 10 working days of the approval votes. Approved minutes shall be submitted to the Barnstable County Clerk and committee liaison for permanent record keeping management and forwarded by the committee liaison to the county web page coordinator for posting.
**Staff Liaison**
A county staff liaison, often a department head or other designee, may be directed to serve as a staff liaison to a committee. The staff liaison serves as a facilitating resource to the committee, providing institutional knowledge, supporting documents and informed guidance on matters of concern to the committee. In some cases, the staff liaison may record minutes of meetings, prepare and circulate information for meetings and perform other administrative duties. The staff liaison does not direct the deliberations of the committee or an ex-officio member of the assigned committee.

**Staff Support**
Each committee is responsible for its own clerical work. However, at times and with advance notice, county staff can provide assistance in assembly of documents, photocopying, mailings and other services.

**Use of County Equipment and Facilities**
County equipment and facilities may be used for official committee business only. Committees are assigned a mailbox at the County which the Chairperson or staff liaison should check on a regular basis.

**Committee Expenses**
In general, committees do not have an operating budget. If a committee anticipates a need to expend funds, it can make a request. Such a request is subject to a review and evaluation of need, availability of funds, and approval.

**Public Records Law**
Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 66, Section 10 gives a right of public access to “public records” which are defined to include any document, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by a public official or employee to serve a public purpose, unless subject to a statutory exemption.

The county is responsible for the retention and destruction of any records related to county business. The county follows the records retention and destruction schedule specified by Massachusetts General Law.

**Civil Discourse**
The county recognizes the importance of civil discourse at all levels of the government including those who volunteer their time and services on behalf of the county.

Communities should conduct themselves so as to maintain public confidence in their county government and in performance of the public trust. They should strive at every meeting to treat every person fairly and with respect. In turn, it is expected that those members from the community attending public meetings will display respect to the public, committee members and county staff.
Professional respect does not preclude differences of opinion but requires respect for those differences and the people who express them. Everyone should strive for civil discourse on all matters.
C. CONCLUSION

We all possess valuable skills, experiences and insights gained from our education, occupations, or from time devoted as active volunteers for community groups or non-profit organizations. Those assets can be of great benefit to the Barnstable County Cape Cod Regional Government, but government service also requires an understanding of additional responsibilities or limits, often defined by law.

The Barnstable County Cape Cod Regional Government Committee Handbook provides only a summary description of the distinct responsibilities, code of conduct and unique obligations for citizens who volunteer and accept an appointment on a committee serving county government.

Committee members are advised to read and understand all statutes governing their county service, including the Open Meeting Law, Conflict of Interest Law, the Barnstable County Home Rule Charter and the appendices contained in this handbook.
D. COMMITTEE HANDBOOK APPENDICES

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