

The Open Government Open Meeting Law Committee
Meeting Minutes
9/22/2010

The Open Government Open Meeting Law Policy Establishment Committee met at the Easton Town Offices, 136 Elm St. with Co-Chairs Robert Alford and Stephanie Danielson presiding.

Members present: Robert Alford, Stephanie Danielson, Mary Southworth, Kit Minsky, Mark Taylor, Bradford Washburn, Ellen Weene, and Kristin Kennedy.

Colleen Corona, Chair, Board of Selectmen was present.

Corona said she had asked to attend the first meeting of committee as she felt she had some information that would be useful. Corona described in brief the manner in which the Board of Selectmen's Office prepares information for the members of the Board, noting that information is distributed electronically prior to the meeting. Corona said that it is a strict policy that the Selectmen never have an email exchange that constitutes an electronic discussion. Email is only properly used as an "FYI." She said that she feels email discussions or email chains are the most serious violation of the Open Meeting Law. Corona gave an example of one committee that had received a public request for information related to an exchange of emails.

Corona said that she often receives questions from board and committee members regarding the Open Meeting Law. A common concern is related to members sitting together at a social event or at an informational meeting and her understanding is that with the new Open Meeting Law, a committee is not required to post agendas in these situations, providing there are no votes or deliberations. Corona said she feels it important that each board or committee has a representative at Town Hall that they can ask regarding the Open Meeting Law. Corona stressed the importance of chairs sitting down with new members and explaining the issues regarding 1) confidentiality; 2) the Open Meeting Law; 3) conflict of interest; and 4) scope of responsibility relating to that board or committee.

Danielson commented that from her past experience on various boards and committees, it is important that the individuals receive training and understand how to conduct a meeting.

Southworth commented on the fact that meeting space has to be open to the public and handicap accessible. A discussion followed as to the need of having a meeting space large enough to accommodate all attendees of a meeting and how this is often a problem as the meeting rooms at Town Hall are small.

Danielson and Corona noted that committee members should be provided with any regulations or publications they might need for their committee work in addition to information on the Open Meeting Law. Danielson mentioned that an on-site inspection does not constitute a meeting unless there is a deliberation following that inspection.

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A discussion followed regarding the current policy regarding posting minutes to the web and providing draft copies when required. A discussion occurred as to possibly instituting a time period regarding the approval of minutes and if members who are absent from a meeting should approve minutes from that particular meeting.

A discussion occurred between Corona and Alford regarding the need to go into Executive Session and if a set of minutes is needed for General and Executive Session minute. Weene commented that she produces two sets of minutes for a meeting when an Executive Session occurs, "General" and "Executive."

Corona suggested the committee should select one individual to confer with Town Counsel when the committee has questions.

A discussion followed regarding agenda posting and the use of the "Emergency Item" when an important item was presented after the agenda was posted. Kennedy commented that the Board of Health has on every agenda "any other business that for the health and well-being of the community should be acted upon without delay."

A discussion occurred regarding instituting a time limit as to putting a set of minutes online. Corona reiterated the Board's policy of putting minutes online so they can be available to the public and noted that if minutes aren't up until many months after a meeting, she sees this as a problem.

Southworth noted that the Board of Selectmen would be approving the policy created. Danielson said that the goal was to have a policy drafted by November 12th.

Future meeting dates were discussed and the following dates were chosen: October 7, October 20th, and November 3rd. It was noted that Town Clerk Gillis was to attend at least one of the meetings.

Voted: (Minsky/Taylor) voted unanimously to adjourn (11:00am)

Respectfully submitted,

Kit Minsky