



*Helping Communities face the challenges and impacts of growth while maintaining their character and sense of place.*

## How to Run a Planning Board Meeting & Hearing: Suggested Rules of Procedure & Etiquette

iTRaC is the Nashua Regional Planning Commission's new approach to community planning that focuses on integrating transportation, land use and environmental planning. The program was developed to assist communities in dealing with the challenges of growth in a coordinated way that sustains community character and a sense of place.

### Planning Board Meetings:

A typical meeting agenda will include general Board business, public hearings to review cases, work sessions to develop land use regulations and update master plans. Any formal decisions by the Board are made through a motion, that is seconded, and carried by an affirmative vote of a majority of the members present. Any roll call votes and voting results must be recorded in the minutes.

### Order of Business:

1. 1st call to order by Chair
2. Roll call by the Secretary
3. Review and act on minutes of the previous meeting
4. Reading of communications directed to the Board
5. Report of officers and committees
6. Unfinished business
7. Hearings on subdivision/site plans
8. Other business - public comment

Having established procedures helps enforce proper etiquette and ensures productive and efficient meetings.



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Lee Bennett  
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RSA 673:10 requires Planning Boards to meet at least once a month. A regular day, time, and location should be established.

### Considerations, Disqualifications, and Alternatives

If a regular board member is absent from a meeting or hearing or disqualifies themselves from sitting on a particular application, the chairman should appoint one of the alternates to sit in place of that regular board member. In this case, the alternate will have all powers and duties of a regular member. The alternate should continue in place of the absent board member until the matter is completed. If the regular board member has not been present for the majority of the discussion it is recommended they do not vote on that matter.

The Chair must be notified as soon as possible if a member finds it necessary to disqualify themselves from sitting on a particular matter so an alternate can be requested to fill that member's place. The disqualification must be announced by the chair or the member disqualifying themselves before the discussion or the public hearing on the matter. But only the member can make the final decision whether to recuse themselves.

If a board member is uncertain whether they should disqualify themselves, they may request the general opinion of a vote of the board prior to or at the commencement of the meeting or public hearing. Such a vote is advisory and non-binding.

## Officer Roles at Meetings

There are typically three officers: Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary (or clerk).

The Chair: Oversees all meetings and hearings.

The Vice Chair: Presides in the absence of the Chair and has full the powers of the Chair during his/her absence.

The Secretary: Duties are as follows:

- Keeps a full record of each meeting.
- Issues notices of all meetings.
- Records names of members present.
- Notifies applicants and abutters of hearings.
- Fulfills duties assigned by Chair.

In absence of the secretary, the Chair appoints a temporary secretary to keep records of the meeting.



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## Joint Meetings

The Planning Board can hold joint meetings and hearings with other land use boards including the Zoning Board of Adjustment, Historic District Commission, and the Building Inspector. The Planning Board Chair must chair all joint meetings and public hearings when the subject matter involves the Planning Board. Joint business meetings with another local land use board may be held at any time when called jointly by the Chairs of the two boards.



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The rules of procedure for joint hearings, the subject matter of which involves the Planning Board, shall be the same as these rules of procedure except that the order of business shall be as follows:

1. Call to order by the Planning Board Chair.
2. Introduction of members of both Boards by the Planning Board Chair.
3. Explanation of reason for joint meeting/hearing by Chair.
4. In the case of a public hearing relative to a requested permit or an application for a plat approval, or both, the applicant shall be called to present his/her proposal.
5. Adjournment.

## Meeting Etiquette

There are simple etiquette guidelines that help to ensure a productive, efficient, and professional environment during meetings and hearings. The Board, guests, and members and members of the public should:

- Respect the individuality and views of others.
- Participate and encourage participation.
- Ensure that only one person talks at a time. Raise a hand to participate.
- Do not interrupt others, or start talking before someone finishes.
- When one person speaks, others should listen. Do not engage in cross talk and avoid individual discussions in small groups during the meeting.
- Ensure a distraction free environment. No flash photography. Participants should remain seated and avoid milling around or creating distractions.
- Individuals should be brief, precise, and avoid duplicating others.

## What is a Public Hearing?

A public hearing is a formal meeting that is held for the purpose of receiving input from the public on a certain issue or action.

## Non-application Public Hearing Procedures:

This includes proposing new or amending zoning ordinances, amendments to site plan and subdivision regulations, annual impact fee review, and any other business item that is not an application under the Board's regulations that may require a hearing.

### Procedure

1. CHAIR: Convene the hearing and read legal notice.
2. CHAIR: State the manner of hearing conduct and the meeting steps.
3. SELECTED MEMBER OF THE BOARD: Present the matter for consideration.
4. Board questions (if any).
5. CHAIR: Open up for public testimony—members of the public seeking to testify must state their name and address for the record.
6. CHAIR: Close hearing after all public comments have been received.
7. CHAIR: Ask if there are any further questions of the Board, if none or once all have been resolved, take a motion and second.
8. BOARD deliberation and discussion.
9. CHAIR: Call for a vote.

## Application Public Hearing Procedures:

This includes site plan review applications, subdivision applications, sign permits, home occupations, and conditional use permit applications.

### Procedure:

1. CHAIR: Convene the hearing and read the legal notice.
2. CHAIR: State the manner of hearing conduct and meeting steps.
3. BOARD: Identify applicant and determine completeness.
4. BOARD: Vote to accept application as complete or reject as incomplete.



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If rejected—STOP HERE.

If accepted—CONTINUE (at that time or a date and time certain—65 day clock starts).

If the application HAS REGIONAL IMPACT, set a future date and time for considerations sufficient to provide notice to the regional "abutters".

If there is NO REGIONAL IMPACT – Continue – Inform the public that this portion of the process will now consider the application for approval, receive applicant and staff comments, as well as public input.

5. BOARD: Determine whether the application is a development of regional impact per RSA 36:54-58.
6. Applicant presents proposal.
7. Board may ask questions during presentation.
8. Town staff or other boards/commissions' comments.
9. CHAIR: Read written testimony received.
10. CHAIR: Open the hearing and receive public testimony.
11. CHAIR: Close hearing once all public comments have been received.
12. BOARD: Act on application (motion and seconds to approve, approve with conditions, or deny).
13. BOARD: Deliberation and discussion.
14. BOARD: Vote.



This guide was published by the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. With over 50 years of planning experience in the Nashua Region, the NRPC is a leader in innovative planning strategies that preserve and improve the quality of life in Southern New Hampshire. The commission provides its 13 member municipalities with comprehensive solutions to local land use, transportation, environmental and regional planning issues as well as cutting-edge mapping and data services. NRPC is staffed by a team of professional planners with extensive experience in land use, transportation and environmental planning. The Geographic Information System (GIS) Department is staffed by experienced GIS planners and contains a wide variety of specialized data sets. NRPC's ability to collaborate with multiple parties results in planning that is innovative, inclusive, technically sound and driven by public participation.

*If your community requires assistance with Planning Board meetings or hearings, the Nashua Regional Planning Commission is ready to help. Visit our website for a more comprehensive list of services that NRPC can provide your community at [www.nashuarpc.org](http://www.nashuarpc.org) or call (603) 424-2240 to speak with one of our planning professionals.*



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