



Town of Bridgewater

Rules and Procedure Committee

May 3, 2023

7:00 PM

The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom.

To attend via video, click on the link below:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88980591706>

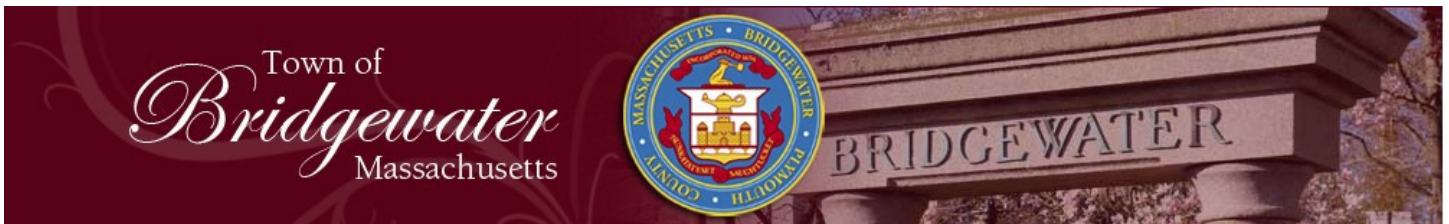
To attend via phone, dial: 1(646) 876-9923

Meeting ID: 889 8059 1706

MEETING AGENDA

Disclosure: Pursuant to Section 20 of Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, An Act Relative to Extending Certain Covid-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, this meeting for the Town of Bridgewater will be fully remote and accessible to the public through remote participation to the greatest extent possible. There will be no in person attendance permitted. Citizens who wish to tune in to the meeting may do so via Zoom.

- A. Call to Order**
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes**
 - a) March 16, 2023 Meeting Minutes
- C. Public Comment**
- D. Legislation Referred**
 - a) Order O-FY23-049: Adoption of Town Council Social Media Policy
- E. Adjournment of Meeting**



Town of Bridgewater **Rules and Procedure Committee**

March 16, 2023

7:00 PM

MEETING MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Councilor Chase, Chair of the Rules & Procedures Committee, called the meeting to order at 7:05pm. The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

Council Members Present:

Councilor Chase

Councilor Linde

Councilor Robinson

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

WELCOME TO NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councilor Chase welcomed new committee members Councilor Linde and Councilor Robinson.

SCOPE OF RULES & PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

Councilor Chase explained what is expected of the Rules & Procedures committee.

Councilor Linde noted that it was explained well. Asked if Councilors interacted with the Town Attorney. Councilor Chase noted that yes, you can speak with the Town Attorney to make sure items do not conflict with laws.

LEGISLATION REFERRED

- a) Order O-FY23-049: Release of Trustee and Acceptance of Funds, Release of All Restrictions and Covenants, and Declaration of Restrictions for 1185 Pleasant Street

Councilor Chase noted that this pertains to the new fire headquarters and passive recreation area and feels it should not have been referred to Rules.

Councilor Chase made a motion to return Order O-FY23-049 to Town Council without a recommendation. This motion was seconded by Councilor Linde for discussion.

Councilor Linde asked if there was any harm to recommend and Councilor Chase noted that he is in favor of the order but does not understand the reasoning as to why it was referred to Rules.

A roll-call vote was taken and the results were recorded as follows Chase – Yes; Linde – Yes; Robinson – Yea. Motion passed 3-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

Councilor Chase Linde made a motion to adjourn This motion was seconded by Councilor Robinson.

A roll-call vote was taken and the results were recorded as follows Chase – Yes; Linde – Yes; Robinson – Yea. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Meeting minutes being submitted in draft form by Debbie Ward.



Bridgewater Town Council

Introduced By: Shawn George, Councilor
Date Introduced: 2/21/2023
First Reading: 2/21/2023
Second Reading:
Amendments Adopted:
Third Reading:
Date Adopted:
Date Effective:

Order O-FY23-049: Adoption of Town Council Social Media Policy

WHEREAS, the Bridgewater Town Charter, Section 2-6, grants the Council the ability to promulgate policy relative to its procedures, and;

WHEREAS, The Town Council finds it is important to define the role of Town Councilors relative to social media interactions;

ORDERED that the Town Council of Bridgewater, Massachusetts in Town Council assembled vote to adopt the attached social media policy.

Explanation:

Social media is a relatively new forum for wide-spread communication which can cause unintended violations of open meeting and conflict of interest laws. This policy begins to address best practices for Councilors to follow to avoid potential conflicts or violations.

Committee Referrals and Dispositions:

Referral(s)	Disposition(s)
•	•

Attachments: 1. 2023-2-15 Town Council Proposed Social Media Policy

TOWN of BRIDGEWATER
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR BRIDGEWATER TOWN COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION:

The term “social media” refers to forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. Some examples include, but are not limited to, Internet-based platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Many local governments use social media as a tool to communicate with citizens. Rather than waiting until a regularly scheduled council meeting to receive citizen input, council members can instantly interact with them via social media. Although this technology greatly increases communication outreach and efficiency, some restrictions are required in order to comport with federal and state law.

POLICY:

Town Councilors may choose to, but are not obligated to, use media to send and receive messages about town information, services and related programs with community stakeholders, including vendors, citizens, media and other members of the public.

If Town Councilors use social media, the following shall apply:

1. Councilors should understand the current guidelines for public participation, which are subject to change as new technology and tools emerge.
2. Public comments may be removed from a Town Councilor’s social media accounts if they contain any one or more of the following:
 - a. Vulgar, physically threatening or harassing language.
 - b. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, marital status, familial status, national origin, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, source of income or other protected status under applicable law.
 - c. Inappropriate sexual content or similar links.
 - d. Private or otherwise confidential information.
 - e. Content that promotes illegal activity or encouragement of actions that may compromise public safety.
 - f. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.
 - g. Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public officials or individuals. If this situation does occur the Town Councilor is expected to report this to the proper local, state and/or federal agencies.
3. Use of Personal Accounts
 - a. As an elected official, Town Councilors should be aware of additional risks related to general participation on social media.

4. Open Meetings Law Violations: Communications between a quorum of Town Council members about public business, no matter the forum or time, can constitute a “meeting” to which the Massachusetts Open Meetings Law (OML) applies. If the OML applies to a discussion, an agenda must be posted 48 hours in advance, and the public must be allowed to attend.
 - a. Therefore, Councilors should consider the following when using *personal* social media accounts:
 - i. Remove elected titles from profiles used to identify a personal social media account, and clearly state how constituents should communicate regarding public matters.
 - ii. Include an introductory statement in the profile or about section of the account that defines the purpose and topical scope of your page: For example, “This account is intended for personal use only. The views, postings, positions or opinions expressed on this site are my own and do not represent those of the Town of Bridgewater. If you are a resident of Bridgewater and would like to discuss town business, please go to [official page] or contact me at [official email].”
 - iii. Redirect information to official government sources and avoid making posts related to Councilors’ official duties or governmental bodies.
 - iv. Redirect political dialogue requests to an alternative means of communication (i.e. email, phone or other preferred social media account).
 - v. Avoid commenting on local issues where other Town Council members are also participating in discussion.
 - vi. Avoid making posts and/or comments on behalf of the Town of Bridgewater and/or the Town Council.
 - vii. Avoid making posts and/or comments in an official capacity as an elected official.
5. Public Information Request: State law clarifies the definition of “public information” as information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained in connection with the transaction of official business, which includes email, Internet posting, text message, instant message, and other electronic communication.
 - a. Therefore, Councilors should consider the following:
 - i. Hide, rather than delete, clearly inappropriate public comments on personal or official social media account, if possible. In some cases, these comments may still be subject to verification or public disclosure in the future. When in doubt, do not delete it.
 - ii. Avoid responding to inappropriate comments or personal attacks on social media. If the commenter persists, redirect them to an alternate method of communication (i.e. email).
 - iii. Be aware that a personal social media account, depending on its content, may still be subject to the Public Information Request.
6. First Amendment: More constituents are posting comments on elected officials’ personal pages to voice concerns on public issues. Once an elected official’s social media page is opened for political discussion, it is transformed into a public forum for speech and debate, instantly granting every user a First Amendment right to comment.
 - a. Therefore, Councilors should consider the following:
 - i. Limit open-ended political and Town of Bridgewater business discussions from personal social media accounts and redirect dialogue requests to an alternate channel.

- ii. When in doubt, don't block users. Especially those with whom a Councilor has previously engaged. If necessary, consult with legal counsel first, and then document the actions and reasons for blocking.
- 7. Use of Official Accounts: If a Councilor choose to create a social media account to engage with constituents, a best practice is to keep this account distinct and separate from other personal accounts.
- 8. Election Accounts: Elected officials increasingly use social media for reelection purposes as well. However, mixing campaign and constituent communications from the same account could put Councilors at risk for violating laws that prohibit using government resources for political purposes.