

Town of Columbia, NH
Town of Columbia Planning Board
Rules of Procedure

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I. PURPOSE AND INTENT

These Rules of Procedure shall govern the operation of meetings and business before the Columbia Planning Board in carrying out its duties and responsibilities as assigned to it by the ordinances and regulations of the Town of Columbia and the Laws of the State of New Hampshire. Where there appears any conflict between these Rules and the Laws of the State of New Hampshire, the Laws of the State of New Hampshire shall govern.

II. AUTHORITY

These rules of procedure are adopted under the authority of New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) Chapter 676:1.

III. MEMBERS AND ALTERNATES

- A. The Planning Board shall consist of five members all of whom shall be residents of the Town. The Selectmen shall designate one selectman as an ex-officio member with power to vote, and the other members shall be elected by the voters of the Town at the annual Town meeting.
- B. Selection, qualification, term, removal of members, and filling of vacancies shall conform to RSA 673.
- C. Up to two alternate members may serve on the Planning Board as authorized by RSA 673:6, and as selected by the regular members of the Planning Board.
- D. Each newly elected (including re-elected) member and alternate member shall be sworn in and take an oath of office as required by RSA 42:1.
- E. The Board of Selectmen shall forward to the Town Clerk for recording the appointment and expiration dates of the terms of each regular member of the Board. The Planning Board shall forward to the Town Clerk for recording the appointment and expiration dates of the terms of each alternate member of the Board.
- F. All members, including alternates, are required to attend all meetings of the Board. More than three (3) unexcused absences in a twelve-month period may be cause for review of that individual's ability to perform the duties assigned. (re: RSA 673:13)

IV. OFFICERS

A. The following officers shall be elected annually in the month of April by majority vote of the Board members present. Alternates and ex-officio members shall not be elected as officers.

1. Chairman: The Chairman shall preside over all Planning Board meetings and hearings; shall prepare, with the assistance of the Land Use Secretary, an annual report, budget and agenda; shall appoint such committees as directed by the Board; and shall perform other duties customary to the office; the Chair or designated representative shall be the sole spokesperson for the Board when dealing with outside entities such as other boards, the press, legal counsel, and a planning consultant outside of Board meetings; when appropriate shall seek the counsel of the Board; the Chair or designated representative shall execute all formal documents on behalf of the Board. A recap of the dealings outside the meetings shall be provided by the Chairman to the Board at the next regular meeting.

2. Vice-Chairman: The Vice-Chairman shall preside in the absence of the Chairman and shall have the full powers of the Chairman on matters that come before the Board in the absence of the Chairman.

3. Chairman in Abstention: In the absence or unavailability of the Chairman and Vice Chairman, the members present shall select a Full Member to exercise the duties of the Chair.

B. All officers shall serve for one year and shall be eligible for re-election.

V. STAFF

A Land Use Secretary shall be hired by the Town to serve the needs of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment.

VI. COMMITTEES

A. The first regular meeting held in April, or as soon as deemed appropriate by the Board, will be the organizational meeting during which standing committees, if any, may be appointed, representatives to particular organizations elected and the Planning Board goals and objectives are established for the coming year.

B. The Chairman of any committee is responsible for delegating minutes to be recorded and forwarded to the Land Use Secretary of the Planning Board. They are responsible for the public notice being given at least 3 days (excluding Sunday and legal holiday) but may include day of posting and day of meeting in advance of such

meeting. All members of the committee shall be allowed to fully participate and vote at committee meetings. Members of a committee (other than Planning Board members) and their charge shall be recommended by the full board. Committees may consist of members, alternates and the general public.

VII. MEETINGS

- A. Regular meetings shall be held at the Columbia Town Office Building at 4:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month unless otherwise posted. Other meetings may be held on call of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman (in the Chairman's absence), provided public notice is given at least five (5) days [excluding Sundays and legal holidays] in advance of such meetings. See VIII. D for Site Visit schedule.
- B. Planning Board meetings will end no later than 6:30 p.m. Any items remaining on the agenda will be heard first at the next scheduled meeting.
- C. Nonpublic sessions shall be held only in accordance with RSA 91-A:3.
- D. Quorum: A majority of the membership of the Board shall constitute a quorum necessary to transact business, including alternates sitting in place of regular members.
- E. All votes on any matters to come before the Board shall be taken after the matter has been duly moved, seconded and discussed. Unless otherwise stated, all matters shall be decided by the majority vote of all of those members (both regular and designated alternates) present and voting. In the case of a tie vote the Motion fails.
- F. Continuance: A public hearing on a noticed matter may be continued pending the submission of additional material or information or the correction of noted deficiencies. A motion to continue an application hearing or meeting shall require a date, time, and location for the continued meeting prior to adjournment of the matter.
- G. If any regular Board member is absent from a meeting or hearing, or disqualifies himself or herself from sitting on a particular application, the Chairman shall designate one of the alternate members to sit in place of the absent or disqualified member. If the ex-officio member is absent, only another member of the Board of Selectmen may be designated as an alternate to sit in the place of the absent ex-officio member. Such alternate shall have all the powers and duties of a regular member in regards to any matter under consideration on which the regular member is unable to act.
- H. At Planning Board meetings, alternates who are not activated to fill the seat of an absent or recused member or who have not been appointed by the chair to temporarily fill the unexpired term of a vacancy may participate with the board in limited

capacity. During a public hearing, alternates may sit at the table with the regular members and may view documents, listen to testimony, and actively participate and interact with other board members, the applicant, abutters and the public. However, they shall not be allowed to make or second motions and shall not participate in any way during the deliberations (at the close of the Public Hearing) by the board. During work sessions or portions of meetings that do not

include a public hearing, alternates may fully participate, exclusive of any motions or votes that may be made.

I. The Chairman shall be allowed to vote on all matters before the Planning Board after the other members have voted first.

VIII SITE VISITS

A. Site Visit. A “site visit” is defined as a visit by the Board or Subcommittee of the Board to a location which is the subject of an application before the Board, and involves going onto the property or visiting areas which are not customarily available for public inspection.

B. Request. When the Board deems it necessary for the adequate consideration of an application, the Chairman shall request the applicant to allow a site visit by the Board or Board members. At the same time, the Chairman may ask if unaccompanied visits will be permitted.

C. Scheduling. The Chairman shall schedule a site visit for Board membership, and it shall be noticed as a meeting of the Board in accordance with RSA 91-A. If unaccompanied visits are permitted, members may visit individually.

D. Minutes. Minutes of site visits shall be kept whenever there is a quorum of the Board or Subcommittee of the Board conducting the site visit.

IX. JOINT MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

A. RSA 676:2 provides that the Board may hold joint hearings with other town boards and commissions. Each board shall have discretion as to whether or not to hold a joint meeting with any other board.

B. Joint business meetings with any other land use board may be held at any time when called jointly by the Chairmen of the two boards.

- C. The provisions covering the conduct of public hearings, set forth in these rules, together with such additional provisions as may be required by the other board, shall be followed; and the other board shall concur in these conditions.
- D. Special Exception or Variance requests shall be presented first.
- E. Any board member of either board may ask questions at any time.
- F. No decision shall be made by either board until the Joint Hearing is over.
- G. Each board will discuss and vote on its own decisions after the hearing is closed, or on a date specified before the meeting is adjourned.

X. DISQUALIFICATION

Any member who finds it necessary to disqualify him or herself from sitting on a particular application shall notify the Chairman as soon as possible so that an alternate may be requested to sit in that person's place. The disqualification shall be announced by either the Chairman or the disqualified member before the beginning of the public hearing on the application. The disqualified member shall step away from the board table during the public hearing and during all deliberations on the application. Any Board member who is an abutter to a property under review by the Board shall not sit for any hearing, review or vote on the application. (re: RSA 673:14)

XI. BUSINESS BEFORE THE BOARD

Business before the Board, as set forth in a published agenda, shall generally consist of the following:

- A. Roll Call
- B. Minutes of previous meeting
- C. For each application submitted
 - 1) Review of application
 - 2) Acceptance, rejection or continuance of application submitted
 - 3) Close meeting and open Public Hearing
 - 4) Hold Public Hearing
 - 5) Close Public Hearing and reopen meeting
 - 6) Approve, deny, or continue the application.

- D. Unfinished business
- E. New business
- F. Communications and Miscellaneous
- G. Such other business as the Board may deem appropriate
- H. Public comments
- I. Adjournment

The Chairman has the right to vary the order of business to accommodate the needs of the Board members, the applicants, and the public.

XII. APPLICATION/DECISION

- A. Each application shall be made on forms provided by the Board and shall be presented to the Land Use Secretary who shall record the date of receipt over his or her signature.
- B. Before each meeting, the Land Use Secretary shall present to the Board all applications received during regular office hours at least 15 days prior to the meeting at which the application is to be considered for acceptance. Any plans (including modifications) or additional materials must be submitted at least 15 days before the meeting at which the Board may consider them.
- C. Completed applications shall be accepted by majority vote of the Board and shall be scheduled for consideration within 30 days of acceptance.
- D. The Board shall render a written decision within 65 days of the date of acceptance of a completed application, subject to extension or waiver as provided in RSA 676:4. E. The Board shall act to approve, conditionally approve, or disapprove.
- F. Notice of decision will be made available for public inspection at the Board's office in the Columbia Town Office building within 5 business days after the decision is made, as required in RSA 676:3. If the application is disapproved, the Board shall provide the applicant with written reason for this disapproval.
- G. Decisions on applications shall conform to the applicable provisions of the RSA's and Town Ordinances and Regulations.

XIII. PUBLIC NOTICE

A. Public notice of applications to be placed on the agenda (or for which public hearings are to be held) and shall be posted in the local newspapers and also posted at atleast one other establishment open for public business in town. The notice shall be posted not less than 10 days before the date fixed for the hearing, not including the day of notice or the day of the hearing. Notice shall include the name of the applicant, description of the property or project, action desired by the applicant, location of the property or project, zone designation, the date, time and place of the hearing.

B. Personal notice shall be made by certified mail, return receipt requested to applicants and all abutters not less than 10 days (not including the date of notice or the date of the hearing) before the date fixed for the hearing. Notice shall also be given to other parties deemed by the Board to have special interest. Said notice shall contain the same information as the public notice and shall be made on forms provided for this purpose. C. All fees shall be paid by the applicant before the start of the hearing.

XIV. PUBLIC HEARING

The conduct of public hearings shall be governed by the following rules:

A. The Chairman shall call the hearing in session and ask for the Land Use Secretary to confirm that all proper notice has been given, and that all fees have been paid.

B. The applicant or designated representative shall describe the purpose of the application and review the information provided on plats provided as part of the application.

C. Members of the Board may ask questions at any point during testimony.

D. Abutters will be called upon to ask questions or make comments on the application.

E. Other members of the public will be called upon to ask questions or make comments on the application.

F. Each person who appears shall be required to state his or her name and address and indicate whether that person is a party to the applicant or an agent or counsel of a party to the applicant.

G. The Chairman shall have discretion to limit the amount of time taken by each speaker and whether a single person shall be permitted to address the Board more than once.

H. Any member of the public who wants to ask a question of a party to the application must do so through the Chairman.

- I. The Board will hear with interest any evidence which pertains to the facts of the application or how the facts relate to the provisions of the town Ordinances, Regulations, Master Plan, or state zoning and planning statutes or affect abutting land owners.
- J. The hearing on the application, unless continued, shall be declared closed, and the meeting may then be reopened for other business coming before the Board.
- K. In the case of a continuance, additional notice is not required if the date, time and place of the continuation is made known at the Public Hearing.

XV. ADDITIONAL RULES OF ORDER

- A. The Board will follow the rules of order within these Rules of Procedures or in the absence a specific rule, a ruling as decided by the Chairman. In any event, failure to strictly follow standard parliamentary rules of procedure shall not invalidate any action taken by the Board.
- B. The Chairman shall call the meeting to order at the time and location noticed.
- C. Motions: A member shall not interrupt another who is speaking to make a motion. If there is no second to a motion, the motion fails. There shall only be one motion on the floor at a time, except a motion may be made for an amendment to the initial motion. Only one amendment to a motion may be considered at a time. Friendly suggestions by other members may be made to fine-tune a motion prior to debate. Prior to debate and voting the Chairman shall restate the motion. At the request of any member, the motion shall be put into writing.
- D. Debate: Members shall be recognized by the Chairman to speak. All voting members shall have equal consideration for speaking. At the discretion of the Chairman, debate may be in the form of a general conversation. Members shall be allowed to speak at least twice for up to 5 minutes on a matter. After a reasonable discussion time the Chairman or members may request a vote on the question. Two thirds of the voting members may override a request to continue a discussion and require voting on the question.
- E. Amendments: an amendment to a motion may strike out words, add words, or strike-out and add words.
- F. Debate shall be allowed on all motions unless forbidden. Debate is not allowed on motions for adjournment or recess.
- G. A majority of the voting members present decides a question, unless a greater percent is required. Two thirds of the voting members present is required to override a request to continue discussions or to override a decision of the Chairman.

H. Recess: The Chairman may call for a short recess providing a time is stated to reconvene the proceedings. Said recess should normally not exceed 10 minutes. A motion to recess is not debatable.

J. Voting: All voting shall be taken by roll-call except on routine administrative matters which may be by voice vote. At the request of any member, the Chairman shall direct that the vote be taken by roll-call and entered on the record on any question before the Board. The sequence for taking roll-call shall be determined by the Chairman. A tie vote or an approval or denial by less than a majority of the voting members constitutes no action.

K. Abstaining: Members shall be allowed to abstain from voting. Members abstaining from voting shall indicate the reason. Such vote shall not be counted as a Yes or No, but shall be considered one of the total voting to determine a total of members voting.

L. Vote of Absent Members: Unless a Member has attended the meetings on a matter or has examined the record and become familiar with the evidence presented in the proceedings, he or she shall not cast a vote essential to the decision.

M. Reconsideration: A member voting on the winning side of a question may make a motion to reconsider.

N. Extension of Time: Any three Board Members may request an extension of time before voting on any proposal before the Board. If such an extension is requested, the Board shall schedule a special meeting not more than two weeks from the date of the request to take action on the proposal. There shall be no new business placed on the agenda of any special meeting.

O. Special meetings may be called by the Chairman or in her/his absence, by the Vice-Chairman, or at the request of three regular members of the Board provided public notice and notice to each member is given at least 48 hours in advance of the time of such meeting. The notice shall specify the purpose of the meeting. There shall be no new business placed on the agenda of any special meeting.

P. Point of Order: A question to a point of order may be made at any time. The Chairman shall immediately rule on the point of order.

Q. Subcommittee members as selected by the Chairman shall be confirmed by a majority vote of the Board.

R. Adjournment. The Board by a majority vote may declare the meeting adjourned if the agenda is completed and there is no further business. A motion to adjourn is not debatable.

XVI. RECORDS

- A. The records of the Board shall be kept by the Land Use Secretary and made available for public inspection in the Board's office in the Columbia town office building during normal business hours of the town clerk, in accordance with RSA 676:3, II.
- B. Minutes of all meetings, including names of Board members, persons appearing before the Board, a brief description of the subject matter discussed, and all votes taken shall be open to public inspection in accordance with RSA 91-A:2, II.
- C. Audio recordings of meetings shall be deleted upon approval of minutes. The Board by a majority vote may request the audio recordings be saved for a maximum of one year from the approval date.

XVII. FORMS

All forms not part of a regulation and revisions prescribed shall be adopted by resolution of the Board and shall become part of these rules and procedures. All forms not part of a regulation may be amended by a majority vote of the members of the Board having been discussed and read in one meeting and voted on at the next scheduled Planning Board meeting.

XVIII. AMENDMENTS

These rules of procedure may be amended by a majority vote of the members of the Board, provided that such amendment is read at two meetings immediately preceding the meeting at which the vote is to be taken.