

# 10 Commandments for Good Meeting Minutes

## 2019 Spring Short Courses

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Trainers:	Lori Stalker, <a href="mailto:lstalker@mntownships.org">lstalker@mntownships.org</a>	218-821-0578
	Lucinda Messman, <a href="mailto:lmessman@mntownships.org">lmessman@mntownships.org</a>	763-360-3962
	Petra Hartness, <a href="mailto:phartness@mntownships.org">phartness@mntownships.org</a>	651-592-2003

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Taking minutes are a statutory duty.

MN Statute 366.11, item 3: “to record minutes of the proceedings of every town meeting in the book of town records and enter in them at length every order or direction and all rules and regulations made by the town meeting”

Good Minutes serve as a reminder for the Town Board and those in attendance of what occurred in a previous meeting. Word and phrase choice are important in transmitting the meaning of what was said.

Remember – if you are massively participating in the meeting – recording effective meeting minutes will be very difficult if not impossible. There is a reason that the clerk records minutes rather than being a voting member – you have to listen to record.

### **Effective meeting minutes start with a good meeting agenda.**

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1. Set up a basic outline
  - a. Are there regular portions to a meeting?
  - b. Are there documents that need to be handed out with the minutes (aka: meeting packet)
  - c. Were there corrections made to last meeting minutes
  - d. Anything tabled?
2. Record time/place/location/attendance at a meeting –

**Town of \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ Township**  
**Regular Board meeting**  
**March 30, 2019, 7:00pm**  
**Held at Somewhere Town Hall**  
**123 Main Street**

Board Members present: Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_, Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_, Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk \_\_\_\_\_, Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_

Absent: Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Others present/in attendance (whatever you want to call this part).....list who else was in attendance. Always helps to make sure the sign in at the door.

3. Any other pre-meeting items.
4. IF YOU MISS SOMETHING IN A VOTE – STOP THE MEETING AND ASK. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH VERIFYING WHAT SHOULD BE IN THE MINUTES – THIS IS YOUR STATUTORY DUTY AS CLERK. REQUIRED!!
5. Review your notes shortly after the meeting – do your best to not wait until weeks after the meeting has passed to type the minutes.

6. Number the pages on your notes – even if they are in a 3-ring binder, sometimes you aren't paying attention to what you are writing or it is a subject you are not familiar with and page numbering helps.

Be objective – unless necessary (motions/actions) use of names for every sentence is not necessary.

**NOT THIS:** Mr. Know-it-All Smith came in because the township grader has been running off the edge of the road and onto what he thinks is his property. Know-it-All called the road grader operator a bunch of names and said he will get him fired if this doesn't stop. Know-it-All doesn't seem to understand right of way at all and the supervisors were yelling back and forth about whose right it is and that the township can grad wherever they want. The supervisors know what they are doing and Mr. Know-it-All should be quiet and happy his road even gets graded. Road contractor stated a new guy is working and learning how to run things. He will talk to the new guy.

**MORE LIKE THIS:** Mr. Smith brought a concern regarding road grader running into his property at 12345 7<sup>th</sup> Street NE and skimming off a large portion of the ditch on 7/5 and 8/12. Chair asked Road Contractor for information/clarification. Road Contractor stated the event did occur and that the new road grader operator was being retrained so this will not happen in the future. Road Contractor did buildup and re-seed the skimmed area on 8/14 to meet township standards.

Should the conversation even be in the minutes? Maybe/probably. Why? Often townships need to be sure appropriate records are kept when road maintenance is involved. If there is a large skimmed area – it could be contributory in an accident. By indicating the resolution of the event – it is in the permanent record. It also lists problems with current road maintenance – if this occurs often, the board will need to handle.

#### **Keep the minutes objective and factual – not inflammatory**

**NOT THIS:** Mrs. Jones submitted a bill and nasty note to the Township for the sprinkler heads that were ripped up by the snowplow over the winter. Township Supervisor Reynolds indicated that Mrs. Jones is not going to get “a single red cent for her stupid sprinkler heads” because they were in the right of way and she should have known better.

**MORE LIKE THIS:** Mrs. Jones submitted a claim to the township for sprinkler heads hit by the snowplow this past winter (copy in April 15 claims folder). The Town Supervisors voted unanimously to deny the claim as the sprinkler heads were in the right of way. Clerk to send letter to Mrs. Jones.

Why is this in the minutes – it was a claim submitted to the Township and the Township needs to record payment of claims or why they are dis-allowed.

If you refer to documents – either attach them to make them part of the minutes or indicate where they may be found. Don't try to summarize original documentation.

Example: Motion by Smith to pass Resolution 2016-14: A resolution appointing election judges for the general election (full text on file). Second by Jones. Motion carried, all voting in favor.

Can you include the full resolution text – of course- that is up to you. However, maintain a resolution book means everyone should know where that book is located and that they can go to the resolution book, look for resolution 2016-14 and read the full text.

Ask someone to review your minutes – always good to have another set of eyes.

Always destroy your notes after you have translated them to minutes.

Be sure you include enough detail in your minutes.

**SOUTH HARBOR TOWNSHIP**  
**Audit Meeting and Monthly Meeting**  
**AGENDA**  
**February 13, 2019 6:45pm**  
**38677 Hyser Ave**  
**Cove MN**

Chairman call the Audit Meeting to order.  
Board review Treasurer and Clerks books.  
Questions??  
Board approve and sign books  
Clerk's proposed levy for Annual Meeting  
Meeting adjourned.

Chairman call the regular monthly meeting to order

Old Business:

Deputy Sheriff Report  
TREASURER'S REPORT  
APPROVE MINUTES FROM JANUARY MEETING  
APPROVE CLAIMS

New Business:

1. Road Report
2. Building Permit = 0 Culvert Permits = 0
3. Board approve Absentee ballot board and election judges for township election on March 12, 2019. Proposed Absentee ballot board is Leanne Holada and Lori Stalker and judges are: Adeline Anderson, Leanne Holada and David Anderson.
4. Clerk Report
- 5.
7. Misc notices and mail
- 8. Public Comment**

**This is a courtesy extended to persons wishing to address the Board, who are not on the agenda. No more than one (1) public comment form per citizen will be accepted per meeting. A completed Public Comment form must be presented to the Clerk prior to the meeting. Your presentation will be limited to two (2) minutes.**

Adjourn regular meeting

# SOUTH HARBOR TOWNSHIP PUBLIC COMMENT PROCEDURE

As a courtesy, the Board will provide a public comment period for persons not directly involved in an agenda item. Persons may address the Board during the public comment period. The public comment period is limited to two (2) minutes, per person, per meeting.

**The following are public comment regulations:**

1. Please fill out the form below, detach, and present to the clerk or chair prior to the meeting.
2. Presentation is limited to two (2) minutes

**The Board will hear the presentation and will:**

1. Direct the matter to staff to handle, or
2. Direct the matter to staff to research and place the matter on a future agenda, or
3. Not comment on certain matters

Thank you.

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**TO ALL PERSONS ADDRESSING THE TOWN BOARD AT PUBLIC COMMENT:**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

In order to accurately record your name and address for the official minutes of this meeting, please complete the following and hand it into the Clerk, before addressing the board.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT TO BE PRESENTED TO THE BOARD:

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**THE ART OF TAKING MINUTES:**

1. Transitional or connecting words:

Transition means to go from one point to another. By using transitional words or phrases, one separate thought can be smoothly connected to a different thought, facilitating the flow of information. Transitional words or phrases show stages of argument, consequence, example, conclusion, degree of certainty, summary, similar points, contrasting points, and relationship of time. Transitional words or phrases produce clearer expression, easier reading and more professional sounding minutes by eliminating the overuse of such words as “and”, “but”, and “so”.

Examples:

- The treasurer said “.....,” and - The treasurer said “.....”. In addition,
- The manager said “.....,” and - The manager said “.....”. Next,
- The president said “.....,” and - The president said “.....”. Once more,
- The chairman said, “.....,” and - The chairman said, “.....”. In conclusion,

2. The importance of synonyms:

Synonyms are simply words with similar meaning. Selecting the appropriate synonym produces precise and effective communication.

Examples:

- The treasurer said “.....,” and - The treasurer announced “.....”. In addition,
- The manager said “.....,” and - The manager commented “.....”. Next,
- The president said “.....,” and - The president advised “.....”. Once more,
- The chairman said, “.....,” and - The chairman reiterated, “.....”. In conclusion,

3. How to say it:

How accurately the meaning of what is said in a meeting is set down on paper and conveyed to readers of the minutes depends on the choice of words and phrases that clearly and effectively express the flow of information. Thus, it is not only the readability of the minutes that is important, but the transmission of meaning of what was said at the meeting.

Examples of phraseology:

Said: “I don’t see why the committee can’t be given the money”.

Minutes: It was suggested that the committee be funded to investigate the project. Or: Councilmember\_\_\_asserted his approval of funding the project.

Or: \_\_\_\_\_(print your own version).

Said: “I don’t like it at all, and the City shouldn’t do it”.

Minutes: A member expressed his concerns and suggested that the project not be endorsed. Or: \_\_\_\_\_was not in favor of endorsing project\_\_\_\_\_.

Or: \_\_\_\_\_(print your own version).

Said: “Before the City spends that kind of money, let’s look into it”.

Minutes: A member suggested that the City consider the necessity and feasibility of the program before approving the recommended expenditure.

Said: “Okay, let’s go with it”.

Minutes: Councilmember\_\_\_was impressed with the concept and goals of the proposal, and urged the Council’s support, endorsement and funding.

Said: “That’s not how it should be done, I think ....”.

Minutes: \_\_\_\_\_disagreed with the recommended course of action and suggested that the most effective way to resolve the problem would be to .....

## ***THE ART OF TAKING MINUTES – transitional words***

### **Stages of argument**

Initially  
At the onset  
To begin with  
Up to the present time  
So far  
Currently  
In sum  
Lastly  
Finally  
After all  
In conclusion  
Opining that  
In the first place  
Secondly  
First

### **Consequence or result**

As a rule  
Therefore  
Accordingly  
Consequently  
Thus  
As a result  
Hence  
In short  
Otherwise  
Then  
Truly  
Actually  
Apparently  
Fortunately  
For this reason

### **Example**

Indeed  
In fact  
In other words  
In particular  
Specifically  
That is  
To illustrate  
For example  
For instance  
Incidentally

### **Defining**

This / These  
Those  
That

### **Degree of certainty**

Certainly  
In fact  
As a matter of fact  
Surely  
Doubtlessly  
Indeed  
Perhaps  
Possibly  
Probably  
Basically  
In all probability  
To a degree  
To a great extent  
In any case  
Of course

### **Concession**

After all  
Although this may be true  
At the same time  
Even though  
I admit  
Naturally  
Granted

### **Summary**

Thus  
To summarize  
In brief  
To conclude  
In conclusion  
In short  
on the whole  
Briefly  
In essence  
Concisely  
In the final analysis

### **Contrasting points**

Anyway  
Nonetheless  
Nevertheless  
Despite this  
On the other hand  
However  
Still  
While  
In spite of this  
Then  
At the same time  
After all  
Although

### **Relationship of time**

Foremost  
Formerly  
Beyond  
Eventually  
At the time  
Before  
As soon as  
At last  
When  
While  
Immediately  
Lately  
Later  
Meanwhile  
Presently  
Currently  
Afterwards  
As long as  
At first  
Until  
In the meantime

### **Similar Point**

Besides  
Equally important  
Furthermore / Further  
Moreover  
Similarly  
In any case  
In like manner  
In addition  
Next  
Again  
Once more  
Also  
Incidentally  
Generally  
Again  
Likewise  
Another reason

***THE ART OF TAKING MINUTES – synonyms***

**Said**

Addressed  
Advised  
Affirmed  
Aired  
Alleged  
Alluded  
Announced  
Answered  
Asserted  
Avowed  
Cited  
Commented  
Communicated  
Declared  
Described  
Detailed  
Disclosed  
Divulged  
Explained  
Expressed  
Informed  
Mentioned  
Named  
Quoted  
Recited  
Recounted  
Referred  
Related  
Remarked  
Replied  
Reported  
Responded  
Revealed  
Set forth  
Spoke  
Specified  
Stated  
Summarized  
Talked  
Thanked  
Told  
Voiced

**Feel**

appreciates  
assumes  
believes  
concludes  
deems  
discerns  
holds  
is aware of  
is impressed with  
judges  
perceives  
surmises  
trusts

**Review**

analyze  
canvas  
check  
consider  
evaluate  
examine  
inspect  
investigate  
scan  
survey  
view

**Give**

accord  
assign  
award  
bestow  
deliver  
dispense  
donate  
endow  
extend  
furnish  
grant  
provide  
supply

**Subject**

affair  
area  
business  
core  
entity  
item  
material  
matter  
object  
point  
problem  
proposal  
proposition  
question  
substance  
text  
theme  
topic

**Indicate**

allude  
argue  
demonstrate  
designate  
disclose  
display  
imply  
manifest  
point out  
reveal  
show  
signify  
specify  
stand for  
suggest  
symbolize  
typifies

**THE ART OF TAKING MINUTES:**

***Important Action Verbs:***

Established	Reopened the question of	Honored
Endorsed	Commented	Chose
Confirmed	Described	Bestowed
Questioned	Mentioned	Congratulated
Presented	Declared	Reluctantly passed
Summarized	Urged	Delayed a decision
Inquired	Explained	Failed to
Requested	Announced	Allocated
Reminded	Furnished	Launched
Briefed the Board	Supplied	Added
Warned	Provided	Proposed
Considered	Approved	Volunteered
Agreed	Was informed	Ratified
Noted	Heard	Enacted
Reiterated	Deliberated	Dictated
Referred	Received	Imposed
Adopted	Gathered	Appointed
Voted	Understood	Cited
Granted	Ascertained	Charged
Commended	Advised	Rejected
Formed	Acknowledged	Restricted
Decided	Acquainted	Created
Expressed	Communicated	Limited
Welcomed	Implied	Authorized
Reported	Instructed	Scrutinized
Stated	Directed	Stipulated
Reviewed	Affirmed	Clarified
Indicated	Accounted	Appropriated
Informed	Discussed	Repealed
Pointed out	Ordered	Extended
Predicted	Denied	Allowed
Suggested	Asked	Expanded
Stressed	Empowered	Revised
Observed	Released	Redefined
Offered	Continued	Mandated
Identified the primary problem	Tabled	Increased
Accepted	Scheduled	
Increased	Determined	
Declined	Prescribed	
Distributed	Amended	
Conducted	Examined	
Disclosed	Criticized	
Nominated	Disagreed	
Emphasized	Supported	
Recommended	Applauded	
	Sought	



## ***THE ART OF TAKING MINUTES***

**Motions:** A motion is a formal proposal and once made and seconded, the Chairman places the proposal before the meeting body by restating the motion. Wording of motions is of utmost importance in the minutes. Motions must be recorded as being adopted, lost for lack of a second, failed, referred to committee, amended, postponed indefinitely postponed to a specific date, or tabled. In a less formal meeting, when a member gets going on an idea, and another member says, “yes, let’s consider that a motion,” you must capture the substance of the discussion, as well as key words in formulating the motion. During the meeting there is always the apprehension that someone will ask to have a motion read back. Typically it is the complicated and controversial motion, not the short and easy one. If a motion was difficult to record, and you feel a little uncertain as to the accuracy of your notes, you should never hesitate to ask that a convoluted motion be restated to assure it is recorded properly and completely to the satisfaction of the maker.

**Taking a meeting cold:** Taking a meeting for the first time or taking a meeting for someone else is considered taking a meeting cold. The best procedure is to study the minutes of the last several meetings, if time permits. Note the tone, style and format of the minutes i.e., formal or informal, and study the agenda.

**The emotional side:** There is an emotional side to both taking and preparing the minutes. You are under pressure, having the responsibility of deciding what to record or what not to record in the final draft. Educated guesses as to what is important, and what parts of discussions are relevant, have to be made. Maintaining alertness for discerning when general discussion suddenly becomes pointed and significant is an important factor in taking good minutes. Each meeting has its own atmosphere depending upon the issues, the mood of the meeting body, and the personalities of the participants. This interaction of the members based on their personalities, experience, and background results in the fact that meetings are never quite predictable.

**Summary:** Minutes are the official record of a meeting. They can be brief or lengthy, depending on the length of the meeting’s agenda subjects and the desire of the meeting body, Chairman, or board. Minutes range from a brief summary for a small and informal meeting to book form for a convention or annual meeting. Large meetings may use action minutes which record the motions only and are a temporary record until the minutes of the full proceedings are distributed in final form. Regardless of length, the minutes record the substance of a meeting in a clear, accurate, concise, informative way. The language of the minutes frequently reflect the type of meeting held. The more formal the meeting, the more formal the wording and tone should be. The language of a formal meeting requires traditional minutes phrases. The tone is impersonal and objective. The style is narrative, using few adjectives and a minimum of pronouns. Flowery descriptions, personal opinions, and long irrelevant paragraphs are not acceptable as professional language for informal or formal minutes. If in doubt about how much to put down when transcribing your notes, it is generally better to be too wordy on the initial draft which can be edited out. Do not err on the side of brevity. Good minutes serve to refresh the recollection of board members on points of fact. In case of future controversies, minutes interpret actions approved by the board members.



REBECCA OTTO  
STATE AUDITOR

## STATE OF MINNESOTA OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

SUITE 500  
525 PARK STREET  
SAINT PAUL, MN 55103-2139

(651) 296-2551 (Voice)  
(651) 296-4755 (Fax)  
[stateauditor@osa.state.mn.us](mailto:stateauditor@osa.state.mn.us) (E-mail)  
1-800-627-3529 (Relay Service)

### Statement of Position Meeting Minutes

Minnesota law requires all public authorities and political entities to “make and preserve all records necessary to a full and accurate knowledge of their official activities.”<sup>1</sup> That is, the law requires that meeting minutes be created and maintained. Auditors review the minutes of a governing body when performing financial and compliance audits. Minutes are reviewed to determine if actions taken at the meeting meet statutory requirements. Consequently, the Office of the State Auditor receives questions concerning what items must or should be included in meeting minutes.

Minutes may be defined as a record of the “proceedings” of a governing body.<sup>2</sup> Minnesota law defines the term “proceedings” (and, therefore, the contents of the record or minutes of the “proceedings”) to include at minimum:

- the subject matter of a motion;
- the persons making and seconding a motion;
- the roll call vote on a motion;
- the character of resolutions or ordinances offered, including a brief description of their subject matter; and
- whether the motion to approve a resolution or ordinance was defeated or adopted.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Minnesota’s “Open Meeting” law requires that minutes include the individual votes of each member of the governing body on any action, including each appropriation of money other than “payments of judgments, claims, and amounts fixed by statute.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Minn. Stat. § 15.17.

<sup>2</sup> Various statutes that refer to taking or publishing minutes use the term “proceedings” or “official proceedings.” *See, e.g.*, Minn. Stat. §§ 384.09 (counties); 412.151, subd. 1 (statutory cities); 367.11(1) (towns); and 123B.09, subd. 10 (school districts).

<sup>3</sup> *See* Minn. Stat. § 331A.01, subd. 6. The League of Minnesota Cities has also compiled a list of items required in meeting minutes in their information memo titled “Meetings of City Councils,” at [http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/meetings\\_of\\_city\\_councils.pdf?inline=true](http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/meetings_of_city_councils.pdf?inline=true).

<sup>4</sup> Minn. Stat. § 13D.01, subd. 4.

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This Statement of Position is not legal advice and is subject to revision.

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Beyond these statutory requirements, the decision regarding how elaborate or extensive the minutes should be is within a governing body's discretion.<sup>5</sup> The amount of detail which is appropriate for inclusion in the minutes is likely to vary, depending on the nature of the proceedings and the subject matter involved. The minutes need not record the discussions of the members and others, or information relating to the process by which a decision is made. Moreover, the minutes should not be cluttered with unnecessary detail that could hamper efforts to review or otherwise use the minutes at a later date. In addition, the minutes should never reflect the clerk's or secretary's opinion on anything said or done.

Nevertheless, there will be instances where it would be wise for the governing body to include in the minutes information in addition to what is required to satisfy the minimum statutory requirements. For example, a governing body's reasons for reaching a particular decision may be important for defending a challenge to the action taken. In that circumstance, the minutes should include all findings of fact, conclusions, and reasons for conclusions so that an entity may defend its actions. Including this additional detail should protect the board against claims that it acted arbitrarily or capriciously in making its decision.

The Office of the State Auditor often reviews meeting minutes and recommends that meeting minutes include the following information in addition to the statutory requirements:

- type of meeting (regular, special, adjourned regular, adjourned special, recessed, or emergency);
- type of group that is meeting (*i.e.*, the governing body or a committee);
- date and place the meeting was held;
- the time the meeting was called to order;
- approval of minutes of the previous meeting, with any corrections noted;
- identity of parties to whom contracts were awarded;
- abstentions from voting due to a conflict and the member's name and reason for abstention;
- reasons the governing body awarded a particular contract to a bidder other than the lowest bidder;
- granting of variances and special use permits;
- approval of hourly rates paid for services provided, mileage rates, meal reimbursement amounts, and per diem amounts;
- a listing of all bills (including per diems) allowed or approved for payment, noting the recipient, purpose and amount;
- a list of all transfers of funds;
- appointments of representatives to committees or outside organizations;
- reports of the officers;

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<sup>5</sup> Charter cities may have adopted additional meeting minute requirements in their charters.

- authorizations and directions to invest excess funds, and information on investment redemptions and maturities; and
- the time the meeting concluded.

The Office of the State Auditor recommends that the minutes be signed by the clerk or secretary.

Meeting minutes also should be approved by the governing body, usually at the next meeting. The minutes should be signed and dated by a designated member of the governing body to indicate that they are the official meeting minutes.<sup>6</sup> The approved minutes are the official record of the proceeding.

Audio or video recordings of meetings are not meeting minutes and are not a substitute for meeting minutes.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For some entities, Minnesota law specifies who must sign meeting minutes. *See, e.g.*, Minn. Stat. § 365.55 (requiring the minutes of town meetings to be signed by “the clerk of the meeting and the moderator”).

<sup>7</sup> With certain exceptions, however, a governing body must electronically record all closed meetings at its own expense. *See* Minn. Stat. § 13D.05, subd. 1(d).