



# SELECT BOARD POLICY

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**POLICY NAME: TOWN OFFICIALS, PUBLIC MEETINGS AND VISITORS CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY**

## I. PURPOSE

The Town of Groton strives to provide public buildings/spaces that are conducive to personal safety and security and free from intimidation, threats or violent acts. These guidelines serve as the standard for achieving and maintaining a high level of public confidence, trust, and professional respect with regard to how the Town of Groton and its officials conduct business. These guidelines are intended to define and create a centralized understanding with regard to standards of conduct. The Select Board recognizes the importance of maintaining professional standards at all levels of government, including for those who volunteer their time and services on behalf of the Town. The Town maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward violence, including the threat of violence by the general public, employees, town officials and/or anyone who conducts business within the Town.

The Select Board encourages other boards and committees of the Town who are not appointed by the Select Board and/or Town Manager to adopt and follow these guidelines.

## II. APPLICABILITY

These guidelines apply to all Town boards, committees and commissions whether elected or appointed by the Select Board and/or the Town Manager; and to all presiding officers, board members, committee members, commission members, public officials, and other representatives of the Town appointed by the Select Board and/or Town Manager while acting in their official capacity or while acting on behalf of the Town.

## III. CODE OF CONDUCT

All Town boards, committees and commissions whether elected or appointed by the Select Board and/or the Town Manager, public officials, representatives of the Town, employees and visitors assume the following obligations and commitments:



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## **A. Conduct Generally and In Relation to the Community**

- Remember that you represent the Town at all times.
- Demonstrate respect for the public you serve at all times.
- Conduct yourself so as to maintain public confidence in our local government.
- Recognize that the chief function of local government is to serve the best interests of all of the people. Accept your position as a means of unselfish public service and do not attempt to benefit personally, professionally, or financially from your position.
- Seek no favors and understand that personal aggrandizement or profit secured by holding these positions is often dishonest and may be unlawful.
- Conduct official business in such a manner as to give the clear impression that you cannot be improperly influenced in the performance of your official duties.
- Unless specifically exempted (e.g., executive session), conduct the business of the public in a manner that promotes open and transparent government and for members of boards/committees/commissions, maintain full compliance with the Open Meeting Law.
- Safeguard all confidential information, including, without limitation, privileged attorney-client communications.
- Comply as fully as possible with all town policies, all applicable laws, statutes and regulations, including, without limitation, the following:
  - Town of Groton Charter, Bylaws and Local Regulations
  - Massachusetts General Laws (M. G. L.) and the Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR)
  - The Open Meeting Law (G. L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25)
  - Procurement Laws (G. L. c. 30B)
  - The Ethics/Conflict of Interest Statute (G. L. c. 268A)
  - The Public Records Law (G. L. c. 66, § 10)

## **B. Conduct on Social Media**

- Board and Committee members using social media platforms (including, but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) are reminded that their online persona reflects their character. Social media is not exempt from Open Meeting Law or Records Retention Law. For the purposes of individual board/committee members using social media, please note:
  - All board/committee members ("Officials") are expected and required to conduct themselves online in a manner consistent with the Town's policies and standards of conduct.



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- Officials must not reveal any confidential or privileged information about the Town, its constituents, or its contractors.
- Officials must not harass others in contravention of the Town's Social Media Policy, Electronic Communications and Computer Usage Policy, Standards of Conduct Policy, regardless of the time, place, form, or manner in which the information is posted or transmitted. Comments may be deemed to violate this policy even if the Town's name or name(s) of any individual is not specifically referenced.
- Officials shall be as honest and accurate as possible when posting information or news. Officials should not use social media to post rumors or conjecture about the Town, its employees, constituents, officials, suppliers, vendors, or contractors.
- Officials may only express their personal opinions and should never represent themselves on social media as a spokesperson for the Town, unless specifically designated to do so.
- It is recommended that officials refrain from providing public opinions on a matter before their committee, as it could be a violation of Open Meeting Law.
- Comments include "liking" a post or other similar responses on a social media site.

### **C. Conduct in Relation to Town Staff**

- Treat all staff as professionals and respect the abilities, experience, and dignity of each. Direct questions about Town staff or requests for additional background information to the Town Manager.
- Avoid publicly criticizing an individual employee or a department; only raise concerns about staff performance to the Town Manager through private communication.
- Ensure that all requests for staff support go through the Town Manager's office.
- Recognize and support the administrative chain of command and refuse to act on complaints as an individual outside the administration.

### **D. Conduct in Relation to Fellow Board/Committee/Commission Members**

- Treat all fellow members of a board/committee/commission with respect, despite differences of opinion. Professional respect does not preclude honest differences of opinion but requires deference within those differences.
- Recognize your responsibility to attend all meetings to assure a quorum and promptly notify the chair should you for any reason be absent from a given meeting or be unable or unwilling to continue to serve, in accordance with the Town's



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Attendance at Committee Meetings Policy. Formal notice to resign from a board/commission/committee requires written notification to the Town Clerk.

- Recognize that action at official lawful meetings is binding and that you alone cannot bind the board/committee/commission outside of such meetings.
- Refrain from making statements or promises as to how you will vote on quasi-judicial matters that will come before the board until you have had an opportunity to hear the pros and cons of the issue during a public meeting.
- Make decisions only after the presentation and discussion of all facts applicable to a question.
- Uphold the intent of executive session and respect the privileged communication that exists in executive session.

## **E. Conduct of Visitors in Public Building/Space**

- Use common courtesy when interacting with others. Avoid causing disturbances or disruptions.
- Do not attempt to intimidate, harass, bully or threaten employees, town officials and/or visitors in a public building/space. Any form of violence, including threats of violence, is strictly prohibited.
- Do not engage in any lewd or offensive behavior.
- Show respect to others, building facilities and personal property of others.
- Smoking, vaping, drinking alcohol or appearing to be under the influence of any substance is strictly prohibited.
- Visitors must adhere to the "Employees Only" signs posted in public building/space unless permission is granted by an employee to enter an office space.

## **IV. GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS SPEAKING AT PUBLIC MEETINGS**

- The Chair of the public body is responsible for conducting all public meetings in an orderly and peaceable manner.
- The public body may allow a public comment session during the open session of a public meeting. If public comment is posted on the meeting agenda, the session will last for no more than fifteen minutes. Each speaker during the public comment session shall be limited to a maximum of three minutes.
- Members of the public may speak only with the permission of the Chair. To maintain an orderly and peaceable meeting, all speakers must identify themselves by name



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- and address prior to speaking.
- All remarks shall be addressed to or through the Chair or to the public body as a whole. Matters presented by speakers during a public comment session will not be debated or acted upon by the public body at the time they are presented.
  - All persons addressing the public body must conduct themselves in a peaceable and orderly manner. Such persons may not make true threats of violence or incite imminent lawless conduct by others. Additionally, speakers are encouraged to refrain from making any personal, impertinent, unduly repetitive, slanderous, or profane remarks. Speakers are further encouraged to respect the views and opinions of others (including members of the public body and the general public) and to treat others as the speaker wishes to be treated. Individuals in attendance at a public meeting may not interrupt recognized speakers or members of the public body. Further, such individuals are encouraged to refrain from engaging in disorderly or boisterous conduct, including the utterance of loud, threatening, or abusive language, whistling, stamping of feet, or other acts which disrupt or otherwise impede the orderly conduct of any meeting.
  - If any person disrupts the proceedings of a meeting, the Chair shall give the person a clear warning to cease such disruption. If, after a clear warning, the person continues to be disruptive, the Chair may order the person to withdraw. If the person so ordered fails to withdraw, the Chair may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person from the meeting.
  - Whenever the public is allowed to participate in remote public meetings, the same rules and guidelines that apply to in-person meetings apply to their remote counterparts.
  - Comments made during public comment sessions do not reflect the views or the positions of the public body before which the member of the public is speaking. Because of constitutional free speech principles, public bodies do not have the authority to prevent or limit all speech that may be upsetting or offensive during such sessions.

### V. CONCLUSION

The Town will not tolerate harassing conduct that affects business being conducted in public buildings/spaces, that interferes unreasonably with an individual's performance (whether it be an employee, board member or member of the public) or that creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Respect must be shown for others, building facilities and personal



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property of others at all times. Adherence to this Code of Conduct is required by all people doing business with the Town of Groton. Violators who do not comply with this policy may be asked to leave the premises. Repeated violations may result in permanent suspension of facility privileges.