

Town of Fairhaven Public Meeting Protocols

In response to Governor Baker's recent declaration of a public health emergency, and to reduce the possibility of exposure and proliferation of COVID-19, Town offices are closed to the public. With regard to public meetings and public hearings, the following procedures will be in place until further notice:

Public meetings and hearings shall be limited to those that are considered necessary for purposes of maintaining essential governmental functions and/or are mandated under federal, state, or local law or regulation.

Pursuant to an Order issued by Governor Baker on March 12, 2020, **Attachment A**, the requirement that public bodies meet in a public place that is open and physically accessible to the public has been temporarily suspended, provided that public access to the body's deliberations is made available through adequate alternative means. In the case of legally required public hearings, public access must include the opportunity for active, real-time public participation through remote participation. The requirement that a quorum of the body be physically present for purposes of remote participation has also been suspended. Consequently, effective Monday, March 23, all public meetings and hearings will be conducted through web/video conference, to the best of the ability of all members of those boards and committees. Instructions for using or accessing this technology is included on **Attachment B**.

The Chair or their designee (such as a dedicated staff member) should be the meeting host. All other requirements of Open Meeting Law shall remain in place, including those pertaining to meeting notices, agendas, and the creation and maintenance of minutes. Except in the case of emergency Executive Sessions should not be held without prior review by Town Counsel. For purposes of meeting notices, the location of the meeting is the link and telephone number and associated meeting ID number providing access to the videoconferencing site (Zoom).

It is recommended that meeting hosts conduct a rehearsal meeting.

A member of a Board or Committee can either attend a meeting virtually or be physically present at the meeting. In order to attend a meeting virtually, you must let your Chair or their designee (such as a dedicated staff member) know at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting. In order to attend a meeting in person, you must be feeling healthy and well and not exhibiting any active symptoms of illness and you must practice appropriate sanitary precautions and social distancing. This includes washing hands or using hand sanitizer before entering the room and upon leaving, avoiding hugs or handshakes, sitting or standing at least 6 feet from other people, and covering coughs and sneezes with your elbow, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (**Attachment C**).

Members of the public are not permitted to attend public meetings and public hearings in person. For public meetings that do not include public hearings, to the extent possible, they will be provided the opportunity to watch the meeting over local cable T.V. For public meetings where there will be a legally required public hearing, there will be a public comment period recognized by the Chair or their designee for each public hearing, at which point you may submit your comments and questions via phone or the online videoconferencing site. You must identify yourself by name and address before speaking or commenting to allow the recording secretary to take accurate minutes. Anonymous comments should not be acknowledged by the Chair or the elected/appointed body. The Chair of the board/committee has the discretion to dismiss a comment if they do not feel the commenter is forthcoming with their identity.

The link and phone number as well as the meeting ID number to access the meeting remotely will be posted on each agenda as well as on the Town's website under the calendar event for that meeting (see example below). The link to access and meeting ID are unique to each meeting.

Example Text for Agenda and Posting

To Access Meeting Remotely: <https://zoom.us/s/177039004>
or CALL 1-929-205-6099
Meeting ID: 177 039 004 #

If you are an applicant or a representative of an applicant for a public hearing, you are permitted to attend the meeting in person if you are unable to participate remotely, provided you are feeling healthy and well and not exhibiting any active symptoms of illness and you must practice appropriate sanitary precautions and social distancing. This includes washing hands or using hand sanitizer before entering the room and upon leaving, avoiding hugs or handshakes, sitting or standing at least 6 feet from other people, and covering coughs and sneezes with your elbow, as recommended by the CDC (**Attachment C**).

In the event that multiple meetings are scheduled at the same time, every effort should be made to stagger start times or reschedule to another day that is free of Board/Committee meetings. In the event that is not possible and multiple meetings must occur at the same time, the meeting that includes public hearings has priority over public meetings that do not have public hearings on their agenda. Other meetings will be recorded and televised at a later date.

After the meeting has finished, the room will need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Please understand that this is a dynamic situation that may be subject to change in the near future.

If you have any questions regarding these protocols please contact Mark Rees.

If you have any questions regarding the technical aspects on conducting a remote meeting please contact Derek Frates.