

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
Rules Committee
March 10, 2022 5:30 PM
Council Chambers

Present: Pascale Burga, Chair
Michael Molisse, Vice Chair
Ken DiFazio, Councilor
Arthur Mathews, Councilor

Absent: Christopher Heffernan, Councilor

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

22 002- Town Council Rules and Regulations, 2022-2024

Chair Burga called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM. She explained that the purpose of the Weymouth Town Council Rules is to establish and maintain reasonable rules of procedure for the Weymouth Town Council and to promote fair and orderly conduct for council proceedings. The Rules committee is appointed by the Town Council President as defined in section 7 of the Rules and in Rule 57, the rules will be reviewed and adopted within 120 days of the first council meeting of the year, in every even year. This year the first council meeting was January 3, 2022. The measure was referred on January 18, 2022. Council Assistant Diane Hachey asked councilors to submit any suggested changes to the office for the committee's consideration. She received two suggestions.

Councilor MacDougall proposed combining the Long Range and Economic Development Committees, that are aligned to a single agenda to reduce the number of meetings and thereby provide for better outcomes. Councilor DiFazio asked if there would be any adverse outcome to combining them? Councilor Mathews responded that there are two different chairs and one would lose a chairmanship. Councilor Shanahan chairs Economic Development and Councilor MacDougall chairs Long Range Planning. He could be eliminating his own chairmanship. Councilor Mathews added that the Long-Range Planning committee was created under the direction of the then-president, Patrick O'Connor. Two committees were added then- Long-Range Planning and Mental Health & Substance Abuse Committees. He wants to go back and read the minutes from the meetings to see what prompted it. It was a response to development to Union Point and at a time when there was a lot of things going on with base redevelopment. At one time, Councilor Harrington was chair of Economic Development and it was the last of the two to hold meetings. Councilor Mathews suggested he was indifferent to the change, but not amenable to eliminating a chairmanship. He would like to hear why Councilor MacDougall made the suggestion, and review minutes during the time the committee was established. He noted the Long-Range committee will be needed once the new master developer is ready to begin work at Union Point. Chair Burga asked if they should take this under advisement? Councilor Mathews responded that it isn't necessary; they can adopt the rules, and take this up again at any time. No action was taken on Councilor MacDougall's recommendation.

The next suggestions were from Council Assistant Diane Hachey. She recommended housekeeping changes to Rule 18- Change the title from “Motions, and Procedures during Debate” to “Motions, Reconsiderations and Procedures during Debate”--as the rule includes explanation of action required for items under reconsideration.

Councilor Mathews motioned to forward the change to Rule 18 to the full town council with a recommendation for favorable action and was seconded by Councilor Molisse. Unanimously voted, 4-0.

Rule 26- change title from “Hearings,” to “Public Hearings” to maintain consistency to this reference throughout the rules.

Councilor Mathews motioned to forward the change to Rule 26 to the full town council with a recommendation for favorable action and was seconded by Councilor Molisse. Unanimously voted, 4-0.

Add section G to Rule 26 to read, “Once a public hearing is held and closed, no additional testimony will be accepted. This applies to any venue- phone calls, emails, etc., and further communication received by the Town Council office will not be submitted to all town councilors.” Councilor Mathews noted this is the practice of Planning Board and the BZA. Ms. Hachey provided the policy from their procedures. Councilor Mathews responded that the Ordinance Committee will likely have additional communications with the staff, or recommendations as a result of a public hearing. An example that was cited as the hearing on the Elks- the public hearing was closed and the proponent then came in to the Planning Department and wanted to add to it. Councilor DiFazio noted in other hearings, when suggestions were made they resulted in changes to proposals. Councilor Mathews noted there is a distinct difference between discussion between staff and with the public, but not taking additional testimony after the hearing is closed. He is not sure he agrees with the wording and would accept changing it to “no further public testimony.”

Councilor Molisse motioned to forward the change to the full town council with a recommendation for favorable action, as amended. Councilor DiFazio seconded the motion. Councilor Mathews noted that any communications received following the close of a public hearing should be distributed to the council, and in the current rules, the chair has the discretion to allow public comment; but they should proceed cautiously. Unanimously voted, 4-0.

The final discussion revolved around paper vs. electronic packets. In past practice, the councilor’s packets were printed and delivered by Weymouth Police. When COVID hit, the practice was ended, and Chief of Staff Langill issued a directive that electronic communication be used to minimize personal contacts. Packets were sent out electronically. They were printed out for those who asked, but not delivered. The discussion was to determine if the practice of electronic delivery should continue or

revert to paper packets. Would WPD be available or willing to deliver? Would councilors want them? If police can't come and pick up, would councilors come in to pick them up? Councilor Mathews noted that while he administers the Zoom platform with simulcast during the council meeting, he needs to have a paper packet to follow the meeting. He reviews the electronic version prior to the meeting. Council Assistant Diane Hachey sent out a memo to the councilors to gauge preference for packets-whether to have paper packets or electronic packets. Language exists in the ordinances and rules. Chair Burga suggested that going electronic puts the council at a disadvantage since they have limited access to the town's network, or may have network outages. At one time, a councilor worked to obtain electronic devices, but the administration was not in favor of it. Councilor Mathews suggested they see the response; gauge the interest, see who wants it, and have a conversation with WPD. It's not a reason to hold up the rules adoption within the timeframe. He proposed taking no action at this time.

Councilor Mathews motioned to forward measure 22 002 to the full town council with a recommendation for favorable action and was seconded by Councilor Molisse. Unanimously voted 4-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:10 PM, there being no further business, Councilor Mathews motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Councilor Molisse.

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary

Approved by Pascale Burga as Chair of the Rules Committee
Voted unanimously on 21 March 2022