

## City Council

2024-2025

City of Newton



To: City Council  
From: President Marc C. Laredo and Vice President David Kalis  
Cc: City Clerk Carol Moore  
Re: Administrative Matters  
Date: January 10, 2024

We intend to provide you with information about administrative matters on a regular basis. Here is our current update:

1. Please join us for the annual Martin Luther King Day celebration on January 15, 2024 at Newton North High School from 9:30-11:30 am. If you have not yet signed up, you can register here: <https://www.newtonma.gov/government/mayor-fuller/special-projects-and-initiatives/newton-mlk-day>.
2. On January 16, 2024, we will have a chairs meeting at 6:30 pm in Room 204 prior to our full Council meeting. *All Councilors are encouraged to attend this and all other chairs meetings!* The Law Department will be giving a presentation and answering questions on the Open Meeting Law, Conflicts of Interest, and Public Records.
3. Enclosed are drafts of two revised “Best Practices” memos, one for all Councilors and the other for leading committee meetings. Please review them carefully and provide us with your feedback by January 17. We intend to issue them shortly thereafter and hope that they will help all of us in our work.
4. We have set up a joint School Committee/City Council meeting on Wednesday, January 24 from 7-9 pm in the City Council Chamber. Superintendent Nolin and the School Committee leadership will present information regarding their new education initiatives and financial needs. This will be an important opportunity for us to learn more about the schools well in advance of our budget deliberations in April and May.
5. We want to consider having an earlier start time for our full City Council meetings. City Clerk Moore will be conducting a poll of all Councilors on this question and the related question of how to handle chairs meetings if we make this change.
6. We will be having regular meetings with City Clerk Moore about the administrative work of the City Council. Please let us know if you have any comments or suggestions as to changes or improvements that you would like to see.

## **Best Practices for Councilors at City Council Meetings (2024)**

The following are some guiding principles for all City Councilors at City Council meetings (including full Council meetings, Committees of the Whole, and Committee meetings):

### *Before the meeting*

- Read materials in advance of each meeting.
- When making requests for additional materials or information from staff, copy the President and Vice President or Committee Chair and Vice Chair on all requests.
- Become familiar with and follow the Rules & Orders of the City Council 2024-2025, Robert's Rules of Order, and, for Land Use matters, the Statement of Good Practices for Communications with Councilors Regarding Land Use Petitions.

### *At the meeting*

- Arrive on time.
- Notify the President and Vice President (for the full City Council) or the Committee Chair and Vice Chair (for committee meetings) and the appropriate clerk if you are going to be absent, late, or leaving early.
- Dress appropriately (business attire for full City Council and Committee of the Whole meetings and Committee meetings where a public hearing will be held or a significant public turnout is expected; business attire or business casual for all other meetings).
- If appearing virtually, please keep your video turned on, unless there are technical difficulties.
- Address fellow Councilors by title (Councilor) followed by the last name; staff members by title (Director or Commissioner) or Mr. or Ms. followed by the last name; and members of the public by \_\_\_\_\_ (unless you know their name, in which case use Mr. Jones or Ms. Jones).
- Raise your hand (electronically, if you are participating virtually) if you wish to speak and wait to be recognized by the President or Committee Chair.
- Stay on point when speaking - remain on topic and be concise. Try not to repeat what has already been said.
- Listen attentively to all speakers – fellow Councilors, staff members, and members of the public.
- Feel comfortable engaging in robust debate on issues but do so in a respectful manner.
- Always remember that we are in public setting acting as representatives of the city and that our words (and sometimes actions) are being recorded.

- Avoid the use of cell phones, computers, tablets, and other electronic devices during meetings for anything other than reviewing meeting materials electronically, calendaring items or similar tasks directly related to the meeting.

*After the meeting*

- Meet individually on a periodic basis with the President and Vice President and Committee Chair and Vice Chair to provide and receive feedback on meetings.
- If there is an issue or concern about how a meeting has been run or something that has happened at a meeting, first address it directly with the President (if a full City Council meeting) or the Committee Chair (if a Committee meeting), preferably in person. If dissatisfied with the outcome, then contact the Vice President or the President Emeritus (in the case of the full City Council) or the President (in the case of a Committee).

## **Best Practices for Leading City Council Committees (2024)**

The following are some guiding principles for leading City Council Committees:

### *Leadership*

- Maintain an open dialogue with the President and Vice President. Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs should alert the President and Vice President when there are controversial and/or time sensitive issues, items that will be on second call at full City Council meetings and matters in need of procedural clarification.
- Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs should work closely together on all aspects of planning, running, and reviewing meetings. The Chair and Vice Chair should provide one another with honest feedback, constructive criticism, and suggestions for improvement.
- Communicate frequently with Committee members about the Committee's work.
- If the Chair happens to be involved in a heated dialogue at a meeting, the Vice Chair should help defuse the issue.
- If the Chair and Vice Chair are unable to be at a meeting, the Committee member with the most seniority on the Council should serve as the chair of the meeting.
- Become familiar with the Rules & Orders of the City Council 2024-2025, Robert's Rules of Order, and, for Land Use matters, the Statement of Good Practices for Communications with Councilors Regarding Land Use Petitions
- Make sure that all items are discussed within a year of their docketing as required by the Council Rules.
- Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs should be knowledgeable about important deadlines associated with their individual committees. For example, Land Use and Zoning and Planning have legal requirements about when public hearings need to be held and what happens if action is not taken on an item within a particular time.

### *Agenda Management*

- Communicate regularly with your Committee clerk regarding agenda development, meeting preparation, and report generation.
- Map out a schedule of meetings for the calendar year with an understanding of the goals for the year and each meeting.
- Prepare an agenda for each meeting that includes topics to be discussed and the estimated length of the discussion for each item.
- Plan so that no meeting is normally longer than three hours.

- Work with department heads and others who will present at the meetings to review presentations in advance so that they are well-organized and complete. Presentations should not go forward (except with rare exception) unless complete back-up materials are provided to Councilors as part of the Friday packet.
- Keep an open dialogue with department heads under the purview of your Committee. Try to schedule a regular call or meeting with them and develop and share the standards that you have for the type and delivery time of back-up materials you expect to accompany items while being mindful of the workload of their staff.
- Group similar items that can be discussed together to consolidate the docket and avoid duplicate discussions.
- Periodically arrange informational presentations on topics related to the purview of your Committee if you think it will make later work on the topic more effective.
- Develop agendas early to allow for ample notice to attendees and lead time for City staff.
- Review the requested invitees for a docket item and, if necessary, invite others that you feel should attend.
- Discuss items with the person docketing the item in advance of meetings.
- Anticipate the types of questions that will come up with each docket item and the people who are most likely to have the answers.
- For all docket items on the agenda, confirm that the person who has docketed the item is prepared to present, the appropriate back up materials are available for the packet, and all necessary personnel have been notified.
- Review new docket items and, if you believe that the topic might be better addressed informally, speak to the person docketing the item about how to do so.
- Take advantage of opportunities to have joint meetings for items that are referred to multiple committees to save time for the presenters, allow for a consistent and comprehensive discussion of the item, and eliminate duplicate meetings on the same topic.

#### *At the Meeting*

- Dress appropriately (business attire for Committee meetings where a public hearing will be held or a significant public turnout is expected; business attire or business casual for all other meetings).
- Begin on time.
- State that meetings are audio and/or videotaped and introduce Councilors and staff.

- State at the outset of the meeting what is intended to be covered, with an estimate of the time when the meeting will end.
- Monitor the pace of the meeting to make sure that there is appropriate time for discussion for each item while ending on time.
- Assess the interests of the audience before the meeting and manage expectations for public comment (including whether any public comment will be taken and, if so, how it will be done) and Committee and Council action.
- Reserve comment until other members of the Committee have spoken, unless to clarify matters of background or procedure.
- Make sure that all Councilors get a chance to speak before allowing others to speak again.
- Politely guide Councilors who are straying off point or talking for a lengthy period of time to remain on topic and be concise while not limiting their right to speak on the issue.
- Set and enforce clear rules for public comment at public hearings, while always remaining calm and polite.
- Always remember that we are in public setting acting as representatives of the city and that our words (and sometimes actions) are being recorded.
- At the end of each meeting, offer Councilors a preview of items to be discussed at the next meeting and in the future.

*After the meeting*

- Work with the Committee clerk to make sure that Committee Reports are prepared in a timely fashion.
- If ordinances or other materials requiring law department review are to be reported to the full City Council, make sure that the materials have been reviewed for legal form and character.
- If financial items are involved, make sure they have been reviewed by the Comptroller before being reported to the full City Council.
- Review presentations with department heads and other presenters to evaluate the presentations and provide constructive feedback for improvement.
- Meet individually on a periodic basis with the President and Vice President and Committee members to provide and receive feedback on meetings and suggestions for improvement.