

TOWN OF MARION  
BOARD/COMMITTEE/COMMISSION  
HANDBOOK



Approved: September 4, 2018

*Norman A. Ho*  
Chairman, Board of Selectmen

## **I. Introduction**

Marion is fortunate that many residents chose, through appointment or election, to contribute their time, effort, and experience to the betterment of the Town. Because of the varied backgrounds of the volunteers, the Board of Selectmen consider it important that the volunteers clearly understand the legal, programmatic, and policy requirements that govern their efforts. This knowledge will facilitate meetings while at the same time insuring that applicants and members of the public are fairly and consistently heard and evaluated.

This Handbook provides basic policy to be followed by each committee and its members. For simplicity, this Handbook will use the term “committee” to mean board/committee/commission,

## **II. Committee Function and Formation**

### *The Role of the Committees*

Committees serve many vital functions in Town government. The roles of committees include advisory, regulatory, investigative, and planning functions. While the specific role of each committee may differ, committees may have overlapping responsibilities and jurisdiction. The Board of Selectmen can provide each committee with written guidance with respect to the committee’s function and purpose in order to reduce confusion and overlapping responsibility and jurisdiction. The Board of Selectmen expects that committees will cooperate and coordinate activities so that all decisions reflect that which is in the best interest of the Town. Each committee member is expected to learn and understand the appropriate requirements necessary to become a knowledgeable, participating member of the committee.

The following are general responsibilities of committees:

- Protect and act in the best interest of the Town within the function and purpose;
- Understand the laws and regulations related to the committee’s function and purpose;
- Exercise power and authority cautiously, fairly, and responsibly;
- Adhere to the laws that guide procedures and decision making;
- Actively seek effective solutions to the problems and dilemmas that confront the Town:  
and
- Represent the Town residents, not just a segment.

Commensurate with the general responsibilities are the following general rights of appointed committees:

- To be treated with respect;
- To be candid and forthcoming without fear of personal consequences;
- To relevant information within the committee’s responsibility and jurisdiction; and
- To be fully informed about, and participate in, actions that impact the committee.

### *Committee Membership*

Massachusetts General Law requires that the Town establish some committees, while others are established based on the unique needs of the community. Some committees are appointed by the Board of Selectmen, others are elected. The goal of the Board of Selectmen is to appoint candidates who are broadly representative of the community and whose qualifications and interests match the needs of the committee. However, applicants do not need to be an expert in any particular area to be appointed, but should be open minded and interested in becoming educated so that they can positively contribute to the functioning of the committee.

Committee vacancies may be advertised in local weekly newspapers or listed on the Town website. The Town website provides an application form for potential applicants to be submitted to the Board of Selectmen. Applicants may be asked to have an interview with the Board of Selectmen at a regular meeting. Although committees may recommend and recruit potential members, Massachusetts General Law designates the Board of Selectmen as the appointing authority and does not allow committees to appoint new members.

Applicants for elected positions must register with the Town Clerk and submit papers signed by 20 registered voters to be listed on a ballot. Successful candidates are expected to participate in continuing education and/or training events during their tenure that address the requirements and processes of the appropriate committee so that they can contribute to the proper functioning of the committee. Successful candidates are also expected to participate in education and training events regarding the Open Meeting Law and other state law applicable to elected officials.

Appendix A provides a list of organizations that provide training and educational material or classes appropriate to some or all of the Town committees.

#### *Duration of Term and Reappointment*

Committee terms vary in length. If an appointment is the result of a committee member resigning prior to completing a term, then the appointee serves the duration of the original term. In any case, reappointment is not automatic as each member must formally request reappointment. The Board of Selectmen may evaluate the member's contribution, attendance at meetings, and the changing needs of the committee and community.

Elected committee terms are generally three years and staggered so that members are elected/re-elected each year.

#### *Associate Members*

The Board of Selectmen shall appoint Associate Members to select committees. Associate Members are expected to attend committee meetings, actively participate in discussions, and participate in appropriate training. Having Associate Members provides a cadre of knowledgeable replacements when regular members are not present, have to recuse themselves, or cannot participate because of the Mullin Rule (for those committees that have adopted the rule). At the discretion of the Board of Selectmen, the Associate Members may be given voting rights when they are acting in the place of a regular member.

### *Certification*

Appointed and elected members must be sworn in by the Town Clerk and will receive a Certificate of Appointment. Committee members may not act in any official capacity until the member is sworn in by the Town Clerk. Each new, reelected, or reappointed member shall be given a copy of: (1) The Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Guide, (2) the Open Meeting Law MGL c30A, s18-25, (3) the Attorney General's Regulations 940 CMR 29.00-29.11, and (4) a copy of each Open Meeting Law determination issued to that public body by the Attorney General within the last five years. Each member is required to sign and return a Certificate of Receipt that the documents have been received and reviewed.

Additionally, the Open Meeting Law requires that within two weeks of receipt of the educational materials, the public body member shall certify that s/he has received the educational materials using a form prescribed by the Attorney General that will be provided by the Town Clerk.

### *Attendance Guidelines*

Volunteers who accept appointment/election to committees accept a responsibility to regularly attend scheduled meetings. Without regular attendance, the business of that committee and, hence, the Town, cannot be conducted. While some absences will invariably occur, habitual, repeated or consistent absence cannot be accepted. To better serve the interests of the Town, the following guidelines will be used for all committees:

- Missing three consecutive monthly meetings or four consecutive semi-monthly meetings or a majority of meetings in an appointed year by a member may be taken that the person does not want to continue serving and may be asked to resign or not be reappointed;
- To prevent the perception that a Chairman is giving preference to some individuals, the Chairman will simply report the situation to the Board of Selectmen on a semiannual basis and leave it to the Board of Selectmen to take whatever action is necessary.

### *Resignation*

The Board of Selectmen expects that all committee members will fulfill the duration of their term. However, the Board does recognize that, in special circumstances a member is not able to complete a term. It is hoped that the committee member will work with the committee Chairman to determine a timely manner and process in which the member can resign from the committee. A written resignation must be submitted by the committee member to the Town Clerk, the Board of Selectmen, and the committee Chairman. The Board of Selectmen can fill vacancies on appointed committees by appointing a new member. The process for filling a vacancy on an elected committee varies as required by Massachusetts General Law.

### *Committee Officers*

Massachusetts General Law requires that some committees elect certain officers. However, all committees must elect a Chairman and designate a clerk. A Vice-Chairman may be elected at the committee's discretion. Committees must notify the Selectman's office whenever a committee elects new officers.

*Chairman.* The Chairman presides at all meetings, decides questions of order, calls special meetings and signs official documents that require the Chairman's signature. The Chairman has the same rights and responsibilities as other members to offer resolutions, make or second motions and vote.

*Vice-Chairman.* Performs the Chairman's duties in his/her absence.

*Clerk.* Unless the committee has an assigned staff person, the clerk or secretary should record and prepare minutes, prepare and distribute agenda and other meeting materials, schedule a meeting room and post meetings with the Town Clerk. These responsibilities may be shared with other members.

### *Staff Support*

Some committees do have a town employee to serve their committee. The staff person is hired to provide assistance, rather than perform the duties that are expected of committee members. The staff member may record minutes of meetings, prepare and circulate information for meetings, serve as a liaison and perform clerical duties. Please be aware that most committee staff have limited hours and committees should not ask for more than can reasonably be accomplished in those hours.

## **III. Conduct and Policies**

### *Conflict of Interest Law*

The conflict of interest law (MGL Chapter 268A) strictly regulates the activities and conduct of public officials, including committee members, *during and after their service*. The purpose of the law is to ensure that public officials' financial interests and personal relationships do not conflict with their public obligations. The law is broad and expansive to prevent an official from becoming involved in a situation that becomes a conflict or creates an appearance of conflict. Committee members must not accept gifts, privileges or employment provided as a result of acting in a capacity as a public official.

The law prohibits a committee member from engaging in deliberations, votes or any other form of committee participation in which the committee member or any of the following have a financial interest:

- Immediate family;
- Partner or business associate;
- Business organization where the member serves as an officer, employee, or other position; and
- Any person or organization with whom the member is negotiating with or has any arrangement concerning prospective employment.

Any committee member who has a conflict or suspects there may be an appearance of a conflict must abstain from committee involvement regarding that matter. In some cases, the member may

not be required to abstain if full disclosure is made prior to the committee's action. Violations of this law may result in large fines, legal action and/or imprisonment. Prior to accepting an appointment, candidates should consider any potential conflicts. Be aware that the law also limits activities of members after they have left the committee. Any questions or perceived conflicts of interest should be directed immediately to the Town Administrator.

The conflict of interest law (MGL Chapter 268A) requires that every member shall, within 30 days after becoming such a member, and every 2 years thereafter, complete the online training program (<https://www.mass.gov/online-conflict-of-interest-training>). Print out the Certificate of Completion and provided it to the Town Clerk.

### *Budget and Fundraising*

In general, committees have limited budgets. Funds are only allocated for expenses directly related to the committee's sphere of responsibility including mailings, postage, and travel expenses for seminars and meetings. Contact the Town Administrator or Town Accountant with any questions concerning budget.

All payments and purchases must be coordinated with the Town Accountant's office. Items purchased without first contacting the Town Accountant may not be reimbursable.

Massachusetts General Law requires that any funds or donations received by the committee must be placed in the Town's general fund unless a special fund has been dedicated to receive funds or donations.

### *Outside Consultants*

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44, section 53G permits committees to employ outside consultants (typically technical or legal) using funds provided by the Applicant. It is Town policy that committee members who intend to use outside consultants shall use competitive procedures in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 30B (Uniform Procurement Law). Generally getting at least three competitive bids will fulfill this requirement. Before attempting to procure an outside consultant, confer with the Town Administrator (the Town's Procurement Officer) to verify the proper actions.

### *Sexual Harassment Policy*

The Town of Marion sexual harassment policy pertains to all Town officials and employees, as well as committee members. Sexual harassment (including same-sex sexual harassment) in the workplace is unlawful.

There are two main categories of sexual harassment: "*quid pro quo*" harassment and "hostile work environment" harassment.

- Quid Pro Quo Harassment – Massachusetts law describes *Quid Pro Quo* harassment as sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct, which

- the submission or rejection thereof become the basis for employment decisions or a term of condition of employment
- Hostile Work Environment – Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual’s work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment.

It is the policy of the Town of Marion that no employee be sexually harassed by another employee or supervisor and that no personnel action be taken affecting any employee (either favorably or unfavorably) on the basis of conduct that is not related to work performance. It is unlawful to retaliate against anyone for filing a complaint about sexual harassment or for cooperating with an investigation into sexual harassment.

This policy was formulated to protect Town employees and officials – both males and females – against unsolicited and unwelcome sexual overtures or conduct, either physical or verbal. It prohibits misconduct that may upset morale and interfere with work and efficiency. Some forms of misconduct may constitute a violation of equal employment opportunity law.

Each committee member will be provided a copy of the Town of Marion Sexual Harassment Policy when s/he is sworn in. Each committee member shall read the Policy and return the signed acknowledgement statement to the Town Clerk.

#### *Misuse of Position*

Misuse of position is expressly prohibited in the Massachusetts General Laws. No unwarranted privileges should be sought or accepted if the reason for the privilege results from serving in an official capacity. This includes gifts, favors, employment, and preferable treatment.

#### *Use of Town Equipment and Facilities*

Each committee is responsible for its own clerical work. Town equipment and facilities should not be used for personal purposes that are unrelated to the committee’s work.

#### *Annual Town Report*

Each year, the Selectmen’s office prepares the Annual Town Report. Committees are required to submit a short, but detailed report on the committee’s membership, activities, accomplishments, and future plans. The Annual Town Report submission shall be subject to vote by the committee. The Annual Town Report is the official historical record of Town government activities for the year. Committee reports must be submitted to the Selectmen’s office by January of each year. Contact the Selectmen’s office for more information.

### **IV. Meetings and Procedures**

#### *Meeting Definition*

A meeting occurs at any time a quorum (majority) of the committee members meet to deliberate any public business or policy over which the committee has jurisdiction or advisory power. Deliberation is oral or written communication (including email, texts, and under some circumstances, social media use) that expresses a member's opinion.

Several specific exemptions are provided:

- Site visits and on-site inspections – when board members meet at or near the locus of a project that is the subject of permit approval or permit review, so called site visits do not constitute a meeting so long as the members do not deliberate. Site visits are data gathering events.
- Attendance by Board Members of one Board at another Board's meeting – attendance by a quorum of a public body at a meeting of another public body that has complied with the notice requirements of the open meeting law, so long as the visiting members communicate only by open participation in the meeting on those matters under discussion by the host body and do not deliberate is not a meeting. With sufficient notice, it would be prudent for the visiting committee to also post a meeting notice and produce meeting minutes.
- Attendance at Town Meeting – attendance by a quorum of a public body at Town Meeting does not constitute a “meeting”.

### *Attendance and Quorums*

It is expected that committee members will regularly attend meetings. Members are chosen based on their unique qualities and needs of the committee. The effectiveness of each committee depends upon the knowledge and dedication of its members. All meetings must have a quorum – a majority of members - present in order to conduct official business. Some committees require a super-majority to act on certain applications or petitions. All votes require a majority (or super-majority) of the full committee – not a majority of those members attending.

Remote participation has been approved by the Board of Selectmen. Any member of a public body may participate remotely only if physical attendance would be unreasonably difficult. Note that the Attorney General strongly encourages members to physically attend meetings whenever possible. Members of public bodies have a responsibility to ensure that remote participation does not result in loss of transparency with regard to deliberations and decisions on which public policy is based.

Acceptable means of remote participation include telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing that enables the remote participant and all persons present at the meeting location to be clearly audible to one another. Use of remote participation during a meeting requires the following:

- A quorum of the body, including the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, must be physically present at the meeting location. The chair must identify the member participating remotely
- Members of a public body who participate remotely and all persons present at the meeting location must be clearly audible to each other

- All votes taken during a meeting in which a member participates remotely must be by roll call vote.

### *Public Hearings*

Many communities are required by Massachusetts General Law to conduct public hearings. Other committees may also choose to have a public hearing in order to receive input from the community. All public hearings must be conducted in accordance with the Open Meeting Law and Town by-laws. It is recommended that a formal procedure be developed to conduct the hearing, which may include the following:

- Chairman states guidelines and procedures, including time limits and decorum;
- Where necessary, Chairman states background information;
- Petitioner makes presentation;
- Information presented from Town officials and other committees;
- Committee members question petitioner;
- Public directs questions and comments through the Chairman, allow only questions and comments that are relevant to the discussion;
- Committee closes public hearing;
- Committee begins deliberation;
- Motions may be made and votes taken where appropriate. Where decisions are to be issued, certain steps must be taken.

### *Open Meeting Law*

The Open Meeting Law (MGL Ch. 30A) requires that meetings be conducted in open session. When any elected or appointed Board, committee, or subcommittee meets, the public and press are allowed to attend. However, the open meeting law does not require that the public be allowed to participate. A copy of the open meeting law will be given to all committee members when they are sworn in.

*Posting of Notice of Meeting.* It is the responsibility of each committee to ensure that all meetings are posted. A meeting notice must be posted at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. Note that Saturdays and Sundays do not count as part of the 48 hours. The date, time, and location of the meeting must be provided. If a meeting date, time, or location changes, or the meeting is canceled, a reposting may be required. The meeting notice shall be filed with the Town Clerk and posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours. The meeting notice must include an agenda of the meeting that lists topics that the chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed during the meeting. Only the Town Clerk has the authority to remove meeting notices from the posting Board.

*Control of Meeting.* It is the responsibility of the Chairman to maintain order and decorum at the hearing, no person shall address a meeting of a public body without the permission of the chair. The Chairman must be consistent and fair, but may put restrictions on the nature, number, and frequency of individual's comments and questions. It is within the Chairman's power to order the removal of an individual from the hearing if the individual does not adhere to the guidelines and

procedures established by the committee; however, a Chairman should carefully consider this action before exercising it.

*Audio and Video Recording.* Any person may record a public meeting with audio or video recording equipment, provided that there is not active interference with the meeting; the Chairman should be advised of such recording. Upon opening the meeting the Chairman shall inform other attendees of any such recording. Note that the board may not refuse to allow a recording.

*No Votes by Secret Ballot.* The law prohibits the taking of any votes, whether in open or executive session, by secret ballot.

*Executive Session.* An executive session is a meeting of a public body closed to the public to discuss, deliberate, and at times vote on certain matters specified by statute. See G.L. c. 30A, s.21. A committee may meet in executive session *only for a specific purpose identified in G.L. c. 30A s. 21(a)(1)*. Several of the more commonly-invoked purposes of G.L. c. 30A s. 21(a)(1) include:

- Strategy for litigation if an open meeting would have detrimental effect
- The purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property
- The interviewing of applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee.
- Discuss reputation, character, physical condition, or mental health rather than professional competence or discuss discipline, dismissal, complaints against individual

A committee must comply with certain specific procedures to enter into, and to exit an executive session: further there are requirements for actions taken within executive session. Committees with little experience with executive sessions may want to consult with the Town Administrator prior to scheduling the meeting. Violations are investigated by the Attorney General and may result in penalties.

*Meeting Minutes.* The law requires that a formal and permanent written record be kept of all meetings, both open and executive session. The minutes must be typed and include (as a minimum):

- Date, time and location of meeting;
- Names of those members present and absent;
- A record of all votes, decisions, and actions taken;
- Names of residents and others who speak before the committee;
- Brief summary of the discussion (note that the Attorney General requires that the minutes should contain enough accurate detail so that a member of the public who did not attend the meeting could read the minutes and have a clear understanding of what occurred);
- A list of documentation and other exhibits used at the meeting.

Minutes should be reviewed and approved by the committee in a “timely manner”. A “timely manner” will generally be considered to be within the next three public meetings or within 30 days, whichever is later. The Attorney General encourages public bodies to approve minutes at the next meeting whenever possible. Copies of approved minutes should be forwarded to the Town Clerk as soon as they are available and a file including minutes and copies of the agenda should be maintained. Unless related to an executive session, minutes from a public meeting are a public

record and must be disclosed, whether in draft or final form, if a proper request for a copy has been made within 10 days. The law requires withholding disclosure of executive session minutes and records for a period no longer than necessary to support the lawful purposes of the executive session. More specifically, the law requires that when the purpose for which a valid executive session was held has been served the materials discussed and recorded during the executive session must be disclosed.

*Open Meeting Law enforcement* – the Massachusetts Attorney General enforces the Open Meeting Law. The law provides very broad investigative authority to the Attorney General’s Office to investigate claimed Open Meeting Law violations and similarly broad authority to enforce the law. Certain procedures must be followed upon receipt by any committee of an Open Meeting Law Complaint. These include distribution of the Complaint to all committee members, who must meet within fourteen days to discuss the Complaint and advise the Complainant and the Attorney General of steps taken, if any, to remedy the violation. Any Open Meeting Law Complaint received by a committee, committee member, or committee clerk should be copied to the Town Administrator, who may ask that Town Counsel advise the committee on the required actions.

#### *Meeting Schedule.*

Meetings may be held weekly, bi-monthly, monthly or less frequently, depending upon the nature of the committee’s work; committees may meet more often in one time of the year than others. Meetings are generally held in the evenings, but may be held at other times. The Board of Selectmen urges committees to schedule meetings at times that are convenient for the public to attend – weekends and holidays should be avoided. Massachusetts General Law requires that meetings are open to the public and that the meeting be accessible to the public. Committees must make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, including holding the meetings in an accessible location.

#### *Meeting Rooms*

Please note that the posting of a meeting does not constitute reserving a meeting room, conversely, reserving a meeting room does not constitute the posting of a meeting. Each committee using a meeting room is responsible for ensuring that the lights are turned off, that the room is free of trash and that the building is locked up when the meeting is concluded (if no other committees are in the building). Doors should not be locked while a meeting is in progress and ideally should not be closed at all except when the committee is meeting in executive session. When meeting in executive session with doors closed, best practice is to post a sign on the door so indicating.

*Town House.* The Town House has three public meeting rooms that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the main conference room used for Selectmen’s meetings, the space in the Town House that was previously used by the Council on Aging, and the Town Administrator’s office. Meeting rooms must be reserved by contacting the Administrative Assistant at 508-748-3520.

*Music Hall.* The Music Hall has a large and a small meeting room. Rooms must be reserved by contacting the Music Hall coordinator at 508-748-9556.

*Police Station.* The Police Station has one modern conference room. The meeting room must be reserved by contacting the Police Chief at 508-748-1212.

*Elizabeth Taber Library.* The library has a small meeting room. The meeting rooms must be reserved by contacting the Librarian at 508-748-1252.

*Waste Water Treatment Facility.* The Waste Water Treatment Facility has one modern conference room. The meeting room must be reserved by contacting the Administrative Assistant at 508-748-3540.

*Atlantis Drive Facility.* The Atlantis Drive Facility has a common room that can be used for meetings. Note that this room may not be accessible to all members of the public. The room can be reserved by contacting the Administrative Assistant at 508-748-3520.

*Benjamin W. Cushing Community Facility.* The Benjamin W. Cushing Community Facility has a small conference room that may be available for use. The room must be reserved by contacting the Council on Aging Program Coordinator at 508-748-3570.

## APPENDIX A

### RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

*Massachusetts General Laws.* ([www.malegislature.gov/laws/general](http://www.malegislature.gov/laws/general) laws) Provides a complete list of all Massachusetts General Laws and their complete wording.

*Massachusetts Attorney General* ([www.mass.gov/ago](http://www.mass.gov/ago)) Provides rules and regulations protecting consumers, combating fraud and corruption, protecting civil rights. Specifically responsible for the Open Meeting Law and ethics requirements.

*Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Water Resource Policies and Guidance Documents* ([www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/regulations/water-resources-policies-and-guidance-documents.html#21](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/regulations/water-resources-policies-and-guidance-documents.html#21)) Provides state regulations and guidance policies.

*Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management* ([www.mass.gov/eea/czm](http://www.mass.gov/eea/czm)) Provides guidance and regulations to balance the impacts of human activity with the protection of coastal and marine resources.

*Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program* ([www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/natural-heritage)) Overall goal is protection of the state's wide range of native biological diversity through regulation and education.

*Massachusetts Municipal Association* ([www.mma.org](http://www.mma.org)) Provides information and guidance for municipal managers.

*Community Preservation Coalition* ([www.communitypreservation.org](http://www.communitypreservation.org)) Provides detail of the Community Preservation Act requirements, technical assistance, guidance, and database of approved CPA projects.

*American Planning Association – Massachusetts Chapter* ([www.apa-ma.org](http://www.apa-ma.org)) Professional organization providing guides, publications, and presentations related to municipal planning.

*Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions* ([www.maccweb.org](http://www.maccweb.org)) Provides training primarily for Conservation Commissions in the fundamentals of the Wetland Protection Act. Throughout the year training classes are provided; each spring the Annual Environmental Conference and associated workshops is held.

*Community Planning Training Collaborative* ([www.masscptc.org](http://www.masscptc.org)) Provides workshops, courses, and presentations related to Town planning and zoning. Content is focused towards Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and Selectmen.

*Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve* ([www.waquoitbayreserve.org](http://www.waquoitbayreserve.org)) Provides educational programs to promote science-based decision-making that leads to healthy coastal ecosystems.

*Government Finance Officers Association* ([www.gfoa.org](http://www.gfoa.org)) Represents public finance officials and provides best practice guidance, consulting, networking opportunities, publications including books, e-books, and periodicals, recognition programs, research, and training opportunities for those in the profession.

*Association of Town Finance Committees* ([www.mma.gov/members/finance-committees](http://www.mma.gov/members/finance-committees)) Publishes The Finance Committee Handbook, organizes educational and professional meetings for finance committee members, and provides, through its affiliation with the MMA, an avenue for member towns and their committee members to influence state government policies that affect municipalities.