



Town Council Rules 2025-2027

Section 1: Term and Effect of the Town Council Rules

These Rules are effective during this 2025-2027 Term¹ of the Coventry Town Council (hereinafter “Council”) now serving and so constituted.

Section 2: Officers of the Town Council; Presiding Officer - Duties/Authority

Officers of the Council. The officers of the Town Council shall be the Town Council President (hereinafter “President”) and Town Council Vice-President.

Presiding Officer. The President is the presiding officer for all meetings of the Council. In this capacity, the President shall chair² all Council meetings and exercise all the authority granted to the President by these Rules, the Coventry Town Charter (“Charter”), the Town of Coventry Code of Ordinances (“Code”) and any applicable general law of the State of Rhode Island, other law or necessity that requires the President to represent the Town as its elected head of government.

In the absence of the President, the Vice-President shall preside over, be the chair of the Council meetings, and exercise that authority granted to the President. In the event that the office of the President, from any cause arising, shall become vacant for the balance of the Term, the Vice-President shall become President. If at any Council meeting both the President and Vice-President are absent and a quorum³ of the Council is present, the Council shall elect, by majority vote of the members present, a presiding officer for the purpose of conducting the docketed business of that meeting.

Duties/Authority of the Presiding Officer. The President shall:

- A. Preserve decorum and order.
- B. Speak on points of order in preference to other members as well as decide all points of order subject to an appeal to the Parliamentarian or to the Council by any member

¹ The Term of the Council is from November 25, 2024 until a new Council shall be legally constituted, sworn in and seated in accord with the General Laws and Regulations Governing Elections, as well as the Charter; and following the general election scheduled to occur in November 2026.

² For purposes of meeting governance, the terms “President”, “presiding officer” and “chair” shall be given the same meaning and effect.

³ A “quorum” is any four (4) members of the Council.

on a motion made and seconded. No other business shall be in order until the question on appeal is decided by a majority vote of the members present.

- C. Distinctly put all questions to the Council membership then present and decide all votes. The “yeas” and “nays”⁴ of the members of the Council shall be recorded by the Town Clerk (hereinafter “Clerk”) and entered on the record using a roll call vote by District in ascending order followed by the Council Vice-President and the Council President.
- D. Decide the docketed items of business to be brought before the Council where such determination is not otherwise made by law, Charter or Ordinance.
- E. Call all special, emergency, and workshop meetings of the Council as well as all joint meeting with other public bodies of the Town such as the School Committee.
- F. Set the time and place of Council meetings.
- G. Decide to adjust the order of any Docket or Agenda unless an objection is raised. If so raised, the order may only be adjusted by the assent of a majority of Council members present.
- H. Make appointments to boards, commissions, authorities, ad hoc committees or any other body, that do not otherwise require a vote of the Council, to which the Council may have a right of appointment. Not more than two (2) Council members may be appointed per body.
- I. Any actions or duties the may devolve upon the Council President as the elected head of Town government by operation of law or by necessity.
- J. Perform any other such duties as may be required to facilitate Council business or as may be assigned by a majority vote of the Council.
- K. Take any action or perform any duties as may be conferred by these Rules.

Section 3: Meetings; Docket; Public Participation; Open Meetings Act

Meetings. It is preferable that the Council convene in Council Chambers for meetings; however, based on necessity, exigent circumstances, convenience or unforeseen circumstances the President shall determine the time and place of meetings.

Generally, the Council shall meet on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. for its Regular Monthly Meeting(s), unless set forth differently in the approved Council meeting schedule or unless changed subsequently. Members of the Public may consult

⁴ The terms “yea” and “nay”, respectively, are given the plain meaning of “yes” and “no”, respectively. When voting Council members are free to use the terms interchangeably as they so choose.

the Town's website for current meeting information. No meeting of the Council shall recess later than 10:30 p.m., unless there is a majority vote to extend the meeting in half-hour increments.

Docket⁵Generally. The Council Docket shall set for the items of business before the Council for its consideration at any Council meeting. The order of business for the Regular Monthly Meeting Agenda is set forth in the attached Exhibit A to these Rules. The order of business of any special, emergency or other meeting of the Council may be determined by the President, but in all material aspects follow the format of the Monthly Meeting Agenda.

Docket Preparation and Content. For the benefit of all⁶, the Clerk, with the assistance and approval of the President, shall prepare, cause to be printed (or otherwise produced) and publish a Docket on which there shall be a definite, summary statement of all business items to be considered by the Council at all meetings including, but not limited to ordinances, resolutions, and orders. Any Council member may add an item to the Docket by providing timely notice to the Clerk in accord with these Rules. The Clerk shall maintain a record of all business acted upon by the Council and only business contained on the Docket shall appear. The Council Docket shall be prepared and available by 4:30 p.m. on the 3rd business day prior to a Council Meeting. For example, the Docket shall be published by 4:30 p.m. on Friday before the next Tuesday meeting of the Council.

Prior to any Council meeting, all proposed ordinances and resolutions must be reviewed by the Town Solicitor (hereinafter "Solicitor") as to legal form and substance as well as legal compliance with the Charter and Code as well as state law, federal law and any federal or state regulation.

Docket Item Submission Deadline. Submission of new business and other business items by Council members must be done no later than 4:00 p.m. on the sixth (6th) business day prior to the filing deadline⁷.

Obligation of Council Members for Docket Content. Every member of the Council has an obligation to read and understand the contents of the Docket and its addenda prior to a Council meeting. Questions and concerns should be addressed to the President, Town Manager or Solicitor (depending on the nature of the question) during normal business hours of the days leading up to a meeting date. The President may rule Council members out of order during any meeting if they continually demonstrate evidence of failure to read or familiarize themselves with the information and contents of the Docket and addenda material provided.

Public Participation. The Council recognizes the importance of public participation in business items on the Council Docket. For this reason, the Dockets for both Regular Monthly Meetings provide for participation and members of the public may be limited to (4) minutes of time to speak. Such participation is not always permitted, however. For example, the public is

⁵ The term Docket and Agenda have the same meaning and may be used interchangeably.

⁶ Members of the public, members of Town departments and Council members.

⁷ The "filing deadline" is that date required by the Open Meetings Act for the submission, posting and publication of a Docket or Agenda by the Clerk. The OMA requires a minimum of 48 hours before a Council meeting for the posting and publication of a Docket.

not permitted to participate in Executive Session matters and may not be permitted to participate in a workshop meeting of the Council.

The public's participation is subject to the Council Rules section concerning meeting Order, Decorum, Debate and Voting. Members of the public must state their name and address for the record, be recognized by the President and comply with the Rules on Order and Decorum.

Open Meetings. All aspects of any Council meeting is governed exclusively by R.I. Gen. § 42-46-1 et seq., the so-called "Open Meetings Act" (herein referred to as the "OMA"). In an instance where there may be a conflict between the OMA and any Charter or Code provision, the OMA is controlling and takes precedence.

Section 4: Committees of the Council; Committee Assignments

Standing Committees of the Council. The following are standing committees of the Council: Finance; and Safety Services/Licenses. These committees shall meet at least once monthly as Town or Council business may so require.

Standing Committees – Generally.

The President shall appoint all committee members from the Council membership and designate the chair and vice-chair of each committee. The presiding officer at committee meetings is the chair, unless absent, at which time the vice-chair shall preside. If the vice-chair is absent, then the majority of those members present shall select a presiding officer for that meeting only, subject to the presence of a quorum.

Each committee shall seat four (4) members of the Council. The President or vice-President shall be a member ex-officio of all committees and shall be entitled to vote on all matters before the committee. The schedule of meetings shall be established by the chair of each committee with the approval of the President.

Special meetings of a committee may be called by the chair or three members of that committee upon notice given in accord with the OMA. The docket and all meeting materials shall be emailed (or provided in some fashion) to all members at the time of meeting publication.

The presiding officer has discretion to limit the remarks of a member of the public to four (4) minutes and to speak only once. The presiding officer is authorized to preserve order and decorum (see Section 5 infra) among committee members and anyone else present in Council Chambers.

In addition to the general scope of matters assigned to standing committees, such committees, on the initiative of the chair or at the request of a majority of the Council as a whole, and with the approval of the President may make special and specific inquiry into matters before it or into matters generally within the scope of that committee's responsibility.

Special committees may be established by a majority vote of the Council at any time and from time-to-time.

Finance Committee. Any matter related to the finances of the Town and first introduced as new business and docketed as such on a Town Council regular monthly meeting Docket, including but not limited to financial reporting presented to the Council, internal and external audit, annual budget, cash flow, debt service, revenue and all other expenditures of the Town - shall be referred to the Finance Committee.

Safety Services and Licenses. Any matter related to public safety and licenses, and first introduced as new business and docketed on a Town Council regular monthly meeting Docket, including but not limited to: the storage and transportation of petroleum products, hydrocarbons, and other explosives; the management, control care and maintenance of the police department; all licensing matters related to the Council sitting as the de facto board of license commissioners over which they have control and/or jurisdiction – shall be referred to the Safety Services and Licenses Committee.

Committee Dockets.

All provisions of Section 3 herein shall apply to Dockets; however, the order of committee business for each standing committee Docket is set forth in the attached Exhibit B to these Rules.

Miscellaneous. Council members may be assigned to standing committees, special committees or to outside or joint committees by the President (i.e., the School Building Committee). Council members assigned or appointed to committees shall maintain an active interest the subject matter of the assignment or appointment and shall have a working knowledge of business before the committee. The committee chair shall report to the full to the Council at regular monthly meetings as to the disposition and votes related to any matter referred to the committee.

The President may remove and replace any committee member who fails to attend committee meetings and/or who fails to attend to or actively participate in committee business, but only with approval of 2/3 of those Council members voting at a regular meeting of the Council. The President may appoint a special committee of the Council, subject to these Rules, for limited purpose and for a limited duration.

All debate, motions and voting is governed by Section 6 herein. Notwithstanding, and assuming a quorum of a committee is present and voting on a matter, and the vote on the matter has the majority of members voting in the affirmative, then the matter will be reported out by the chair to the full Council for its consideration with a recommendation of “passage”. Matters recommended for passage, including the budget, shall be considered by the full Council as amended and passed by the committee. In addition, assuming a quorum of a committee is present and voting on a matter, and the vote on the matter has the majority of members voting in the negative, or results in a tie vote, then the matter will be reported out in the minutes of the committee that the matter has been voted in the negative or tie vote, and the matter will be placed

on the Council Docket for informational purposes only and no vote will be taken by the full Council.

Any matter that fails passage in committee, may be ineligible for re-introduction as new business for a period of one (1) year, unless there is substantial change in circumstances.

Council Sitting as a Committee. The Council shall serve as committee of the whole on all other matters brought before it. However, as indicated herein Council members may be assigned to outside, joint, or special committees such as the School Building Committee. The participation of Council members assigned or appointed to such committees is subject to these Rules.

Section 5: Order and Decorum of Meetings

Order and Decorum. Unless invited by the presiding officer, no person shall be allowed inside the rail of the Council Chamber, at the tables adjacent to the rail or on the rostrum during a Council meeting with the exception of Council members, the Town Manager, Clerk, Finance Director, Solicitor and other department heads. Public media may be assigned designated space by the presiding officer. The President shall determine seat assignments for Council members and members of the Town administration.

Disruptive behavior in Council Chambers during a meeting is prohibited. The use of cell phones or other electronic devices in a manner that is audible and disturbing to others is also prohibited. Any conversations in chambers during a meeting should be kept to a respectful tone so as to not disturb or disrupt the proceedings. The presiding officer shall warn those who are disruptive or otherwise disturbing the proceedings to be respectful and considerate of those attending to the business of the meeting. If such behavior continues and is unyielding to the presiding officer's admonishment, then the presiding officer may order those engaged in the unacceptable behavior to be removed.

The President is authorized to act to ensure order and decorum during Council meetings, to ensure the efficient and orderly flow of Council business and to ensure civility in the proceedings.

Section 6: Debate; Motions; Voting

Debate.

The President shall have the right to call for a motion before debate begins on a docketed items or to simply close public comment on the item and commence discussion among the Council members. Once public comment is closed and the Council has commenced debate or discussion on a docketed item, the right to speak is reserved for Council members only.

Any Council member desiring to speak shall address the President, and after being recognized and shall speak uninterrupted unless there is a call to order. The member's remarks shall be confined to the motion or business items under consideration and the member shall avoid personalities.

No Council member shall speak more than once on the same motion or item until all other members have had the opportunity to do so. There shall be no conversation among the members while another Council member is speaking, while a roll call is being taken, while any paper is being read, or while a question is being stated by the Chair.

For any item that is scheduled for a final vote, the Council may accept “new” or “revised” documentation for consideration at any Council meeting only by approval of a majority of the Council members present and only if there is no material change to the question or item before the Council so as to trigger additional legal requirements being met such as re-advertising.

Motions.

It is intended that Robert’s Rules of Order be authoritative and serve as a guide to motions. However, it is also important that Robert’s Rules be liberally construed to effectuate the business before the Council, so long as such liberal construction does not alter the procedural effect of the Rules. For this reason, the Council recognizes the following as to motions:

1. The *order of precedence of motions* shall be as follows:

- a. Take a recess
- b. Raise a question of privilege
- c. Lay on table
- d. Suspend the rules
- e. Previous question
- f. Limit or extend limits of debate
- g. Postpone to a certain time
- h. Commit or refer
- i. Amend
- j. Postpone indefinitely
- k. Main motion

The highest in rank being at the head of the list and lowest in rank at the last of the list. When any of them is immediately pending, the motion before it on the said list is in order and shall be acted upon first, and those below are out of order.

2. The following motion shall be *non-debatable*⁸:

- a. To adjourn
- b. Take a recess (when privileged)
- c. Raise a question of privilege
- d. Lay on the table
- e. Suspend the rules

⁸ There is no “discussion” of non-debatable motions.

- f. Previous questions
 - g. Limit or extend limits of debate
 - h. Motion to move the question (call for a vote)
3. The following motions only can be *amended*:

- a. Take a recess
- b. Postpone to a certain time
- c. Commit or refer
- d. Amend
- e. Main motion

Subject to the procedural motion as to debate on a main motion and any amendment thereto, the President may call for a vote at any time after all Council members have been heard on a main motion.

Voting.

As a demonstration of a Council member's fiduciary duties, actions must be always being performed in good faith and in good care as an ordinary, prudent person would exercise in the same position. After a roll call vote is ordered, the roll call vote shall not be interrupted, delayed, or stopped by the President or any member of the Council for any reason whatsoever. In case of a tie vote, the motion fails. No main motion shall be debated or called for vote until it is seconded.

Council members may vote "yea/yes", "nay/no", abstain⁹ or recuse. An abstention is a refusal to vote and the vote shall not constitute "yea" or "nay". Recusals are addressed later in these Rules.

Any motion may be withdrawn by the maker at any time before taking of a vote thereon, or before an amendment is made to said motion. The effect of the withdrawal removes the motion from consideration and the second to the motion is moot and does not require withdrawal.

Reconsideration of a Vote. When a vote has passed, it shall be in order for any member voting with the majority to move a reconsideration thereof at the same meeting, or to give notice in writing of his or her intention to move a reconsideration at the next regular meeting, provided, however, that the presiding officer shall not entertain any motion until the motion to reconsider has been acted upon. When such notice of an intention to reconsider has been given, the Clerk shall retain possession of the papers until the next meeting, and no subsequent motion to reconsider the vote passed shall be in order at the same meeting, unless upon a withdrawal of the notice, and when a motion to reconsider has been decided, that vote shall not be reconsidered. Any resolution or ordinance may come only once before the Council for reconsideration.

⁹ To abstain means to refrain from voting, and, consequently, there can be no such thing as an "abstention vote".

Recusal. It shall be the individual Council member's obligation to recognize when he or she has a conflict of interest or any other reason why he or she should or may vote and to recuse from voting or engaging in debate. Any recusal from a vote on any motion or business item before the Council requires a Council member to state their recusal and reason for it on the record, leave the rostrum, fill out a recusal form (on forms and in a format provided by the Rhode Island Ethics Commission), provide a copy of the recusal to the Clerk for filing with the meeting record, and file the recusal with the Rhode Island Ethics Commission in the manner so required by the Commission. Recusals are a member's individual responsibility.

Members may also have additional responsibilities under state law in regard to recusals and conflicts of interest. For this reason, each member is encouraged to fully inform themselves of their responsibilities by becoming acquainted with R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-1 et seq. regarding the Code of Ethics and the Rhode Island Code Regulations for the regulations of the Rhode Island Ethics Commission.

Section 6: Miscellaneous

Executive Sessions and Privileged Communications. Council members recognize that a failure to handle privileged communications appropriately most likely prejudices the interests of the Town and puts the Town at a strategic disadvantage concerning the matter at hand.

Whether in Executive Session or in a direct communication to Council members, no Council member shall disseminate any communication or information, oral or written, designated in any fashion as "privileged" or "confidential", except to the Solicitor, the Town Manager (in the case of an Executive Session), or an attorney in the employ of the Solicitor and authorized by the Solicitor to receive such communication. All such information is privileged and confidential and may not be republished or repurposed in any medium of informational exchange. Additional protections from disclosure may apply in the case of attorney-client privileged communication or attorney work product.

Any of the foregoing privileges, may only be waived by consent of all Council members at a meeting of the Council, or if the Council has been ordered by a court of competent jurisdiction to reveal such privileged information. Any violation of this section shall be referred to the full Council for action in accord with the Charter, Code and/or state and federal law.

Rules Amendments. These Rules may be amended or suspended by a majority vote of the Council.

Robert's Rules of Order. Robert's Rules of Order shall be authoritative and serve as a guide for the Parliamentarian and the Council on all matters in connection with the Council Rules, including conflicts, and, where appropriate to effectuate the intent of the Council Rules, may be liberally construed to effectuate the business before the Council without losing their effect.

Parliamentarian. The Solicitor, or their designee, sitting with the Council at a Council meeting or committee meeting shall also serve as parliamentarian.

Council Member Absence. Any Council member who expects to be absent from any Council meeting shall notify the President and Clerk as soon as possible upon knowledge that they will be unable to attend.

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