

Policies and Procedures for the Bristol, Vermont Planning Commission

Revised and approved April 21, 2026

1 - MISSION

In planning for the future of Bristol, the Planning Commission has kept in mind four fundamental charges:

- ❖ To protect the health and beauty of this remarkable natural setting;
 - ❖ To foster a vibrant, prosperous, and socially inclusive human community;
 - ❖ To support the historically successful and commercially sound downtown; and
 - ❖ To sustain our foundation of value-added natural resource-based industries.
- (2020 Town Plan)

2 - MEMBERSHIP

The Bristol Planning Commission consists of nine voting members who are appointed by the Selectboard. These members should express a variety of interests and bring a range of skills to the Commission. The interests of any single town's group should not be favored. Terms of Commission members are established upon appointment. It is the expectation that Commission members not be absent more than two times per year. If two absences occur, the Chair or Vice Chair will contact the member and review.

The Zoning Administrator will attend Planning Commission meetings on "an as-needed basis"

3 - POWERS AND DUTIES

The powers and duties of the Planning Commission are set forth in **24 V.S.A. 4325**

4 - RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICERS

The Bristol Planning Commission shall elect 1) a Chairperson and 2) a Vice-Chairperson at its organizational meeting. The Planning Commission organizational shall be the first regular meeting after the Selectboard organizational meeting in March. The Chairperson is responsible for the overall organization and conduct of the Commission. The Vice-Chairperson assumes the responsibilities of the Chairperson in his or her absence. The Town Zoning Administrator (or Town Administrator in the Zoning Administrator's absence) will work with the Planning Commission officers to meet their responsibilities for minutes of meetings, filing of public notices, notification of applicants, and distribution of public documents in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 117. **24 V.S.A. 4323(b)**.

The terms of all officers shall begin on the date of the annual meeting at which they are elected and end one year later, but officers shall hold office until their successors have been elected. All officers shall be elected for a term of one year.

If the Chairperson resigns mid-term, the Vice-Chair assumes the position of acting Chair until the next regularly scheduled organizational meeting.

5 - SCHEDULING OF MEETINGS

The Bristol Planning Commission typically meets each month on a re-occurring day of the month posted on the Town website. Additional meetings may be required to conduct business in a timely manner and scheduled accordingly. All meetings are warned and open to the public. They are scheduled to be held at the Town Offices or at other Town meeting spaces.

The agenda and all relevant documents should be provided to Commission members at least one week before the meeting.

6 - QUORUM

A quorum shall be constituted by a majority of the full nine-member Commission. Any action must be taken by a concurrence of the majority of the Commission members – not a majority of those present.

7 - RULES

The following rules are attempts to guide and clarify the conduct of the Commission's work. In formulating them, members of the Planning Commission have consulted three documents: *Rules of Procedure and Ethics Manual*, published by the Vermont Land Use Education & Training Collaborative in May, 2005, *The Planning Manual for Vermont Municipalities*, published by the VT Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs in 2000, and an article on managing discussion of controversial issues by Paul D. Wilson and Jennifer K. Alcares in a March/April 2010 issue of *Municipal Lawyer*. When drawing directly from either of these documents, we will provide citations. In general, though, the principles that follow have grown directly out of our own experiences in Bristol. We hope to increase the sense of inclusiveness, transparency, and responsiveness in our public meetings, even or especially, when deliberating about highly controversial issues.

7.1 - PUBLIC NOTICE FOR COMMISSION MEETINGS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

Notices of when and where regular planning commission meetings will be held are posted at the Town offices at least 48 hours before each meeting. An agenda for each meeting is also posted.

- *More Specific Information in Advance About Each Meeting's Agenda*

The Bristol Planning Commission communicates directly with members of the public about the focus for upcoming meetings. Posting our agenda on the Town Website and on Front Porch Forum, as well as making available meeting minutes at the Town Offices, have been important parts of this effort. We also include a “written agenda of the topics for discussion at each public hearing . . . in advance” (Wilson and Alcaarez, p. 9). Such topics will both frame the Commission’s own conversation and determine the placement and focus of comments by the public. If maps are to be discussed, they will also be made available in advance.

7.2 - VERMONT’S OPEN MEETING LAW

The Bristol Planning Commission endorses and is subject to Vermont’s Open Meeting Law, **1 V.S.A. 310-314**.

- *Opportunity for Public Comments*

At the beginning of each meeting, the Chair will go over any necessary administrative matters and then “review the order of events, remind all present of the importance of order, and make copies of the rules [these procedures] available.” (*Rules of Procedure and Ethics Manual*, p. 7.) During deliberations for Public Hearings, a fifteen-minute period of time will be reserved for public comment of that session’s deliberations. Speakers are asked both to restrict themselves to that particular topic and to limit their remarks to two minutes. The Chair may extend or reduce this period of time when necessary. Additionally, general comments will be heard at the conclusion of each meeting’s deliberations.) We should have public comment but seems to be over detailed.) All comments should be addressed to the Chair, as they are to the Moderator in Town Meeting. Members of the Planning Commission will not engage directly with speakers at this time, since the Commission as a whole will not yet have had a chance to pursue its own consensus. But its individual members may choose to respond to these comments by the public in the Commission’s own discussion that follows.

Residents of Bristol may choose to bring a written statement that goes into more detail than allowed by the limited time of a meeting. Similarly, persons who are not able to attend a given meeting but who have a strong interest in the topic to be discussed can submit their own written statements in advance. All such statements will be included in the minutes for a given meeting.

The Planning Commission must be cautious in weighing the comments of those who are active in the planning process with the interests of those who do not participate. Above all, members must put the general welfare of the Community above any personal interests. (*Planning Manual for Vermont Municipalities*, p.37)

7.3 - SUSPENSION OF AGENDA

A member of the Planning Commission may at any time call for a suspension of the agenda when he or she is concerned about whether that is still the best way to proceed. Such a proposal will be voted up or down, and passage will require support by a two thirds majority of the Commission's total membership.

7.4 - THE ROLE OF INFORMAL CAUCUSES, WORKING GROUPS, and AD HOC COMMITTEES

Informal caucuses or working groups may be called for during meetings when consensus-building or exploration of a topic is needed. Such breaks from the formal meeting agenda will continue to be carried out in public and if possible viewed and recorded by NEATV, if present. In addition, two or three members of the Commission will sometimes be asked by the Chair to review a topic, proposal, or project, for instance, and prepare recommendations or ideas for consideration by the full Commission. No final decisions or formal communications will be delivered by the ad hoc committee alone. Presentation to the Commission, typically during the ad hoc committee reports section of the meeting agenda (with written materials and recommendations made available to the public), will then allow for the full Commission's consideration and action. Ad hoc committees should report to the full Commission after each of their meetings. Typically, ad hoc committees will disband once their specific assignment has been completed.

7.5 -RECORDS

A record of the Planning Commission's business, including all meetings, transactions, and decisions, in the form of meeting minutes is kept on file and available to the public at the Town offices.

7.6 - ANNUAL REPORT

The Bristol Planning Commission makes an annual report to the municipality. This report is circulated as part of the Bristol Annual Report.

7.7 - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The Planning C-commission shall seek technical assistance when necessary to fulfill its needs during plan preparation and implementation of by-laws. The Planning Commission will obtain assistance from the Addison Regional Planning Commission as needed.

7.8 - EXPENSES

Necessary and reasonable funds are appropriated for Planning Commission use by the Town of Bristol.

7.9 - ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

In conducting its meetings and work, the Planning Commission will use as a guide and refer to Robert's Rules of Order. The current edition, **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, 11th Edition** By: Robert, Henry M. III or its revised edition shall be used.

8 - AVOIDING CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members of the Planning Commission shall be subject to and abide by the Conflict of Interest Policy adopted by the Town of Bristol as it applies to their service on the Planning Commission. The Commission will annually recognize, review, and make available to its members the Town's Conflict of Interest Policy.

CHANGES TO POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Amendments to this guiding document may be suggested and voted on by Commission members at the annual organizational meeting of the Planning Commission. Any changes to the Policies and Procedures document shall require a two-thirds vote of the Commission's full (nine) membership. An updated copy will then be distributed to members and made available to the public.