



Town of Rowe
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MASSACHUSETTS
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Office of TOWN CLERK

March 13, 2020

Dear Town Boards and Committees,

With the ongoing COVID-19 (Coronavirus) situation, I'm sure that people are beginning to have concerns about public meetings and assemblies. Last night Governor Charlie Baker signed an order that suspends certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, primarily those that impact remote participation requirements. The takeaways from this order are as follows:

- Meetings no longer have to be conducted in a place accessible to the public PROVIDED that anyone wishing to "attend" a meeting may still do so by telecommunications, i.e. calling into a conference call or video chat.
- The quorum requirement (a quorum must be physically in the room) is waived. Therefore, all members of the body are permitted to participate by remote participation if they should desire, including the chair (who previously had to be physically in the room).
- If anyone must "attend" your meeting at your board's request (i.e. an employee, vendor, etc.), they must be able to call in.
- All other aspects of the Open Meeting Law, including posting requirements, are still in place. You must post 48 hours in advance, must include an agenda, etc.
- This does not affect town meeting or elections.

The town will be exploring ways to allow for free conference calls by phone and potentially by video. If you are planning on holding a remote-participation meeting, please contact town hall so that a phone number and access code can be supplied for your agenda. If this is the case, **please allow for more than 48 hours notice when posting** as we are unsure yet of how staffing levels may be affected by COVID-19.

You may also use your own service if you should desire, but you will need to include this information on the agenda so that community members can call in by phone/video. Any agendas not including this information will be presumed to be held in person. Any meetings without this information publicly available that occur via telecommunications will be considered in violation of the state's open meeting laws.

If you have any questions, I urge you to reach out to me to ensure compliance. While we are in a state of emergency, it is important that we adhere as close as possible to our democratic institutions and practices.

Sincerely,

Paul McLatchy III
Rowe Town Clerk