

Town of Durham Select Board Workshop

Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

July 8, 2025

Who We Are



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Executive Director



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What is GPCOG?

Communities working together

- GPCOG serves 29 cities and towns in Cumberland, York and Androscoggin County. These municipal leaders guide GPCOG's work.
- GPCOG helps cities and towns do together what they can't do alone.
- GPCOG has multiple roles: a Regional Planning Organization, a Metropolitan Planning Organization and an Economic Development District. We also do work in broadband, housing, energy, and sustainability.
- But our mission is simple: We strengthen communities and connect the region to build a vibrant, inclusive, resilient future.

How GPCOG Serves Durham

- **Save money.** Durham regularly participates in GPCOG's cooperative purchasing program, reducing the town's administrative burden and combining volume to help save money, an estimated \$15,000 on road salt alone in 2024-2025, and more on road striping, fuels, and snowplow cutting edges.
- **Get services.** Durham has often benefited from GPCOG's planning services, most recently in a vision for a new municipal center.
- **Networked in.** Durham takes advantage of peer exchanges hosted by GPCOG: town and city managers, planners, economic development, "Coffee with COG" meetings on timely topics, "Chairs in a Circle" sessions for board leadership, and the annual summit.
- **Tailored workshop.** Each GPCOG member has one facilitated workshop, like this one, per year included in its membership.
- **Advocacy.** Through GPCOG, Durham's voice is added to those of other communities in matters of regional interest, engaging decision makers in Augusta and Washington, D.C.

Agenda

- 6:45 Your Goals for Tonight
- 6:55 Durham's Form of Government.
- 7:00 Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships
- 7:15 Discussion, Q&A
- 7:15 Habits of Highly Effective Select Boards
- 8:30 Discussion and Next Steps
- 8:45 Adjourn

What are your goals for tonight?



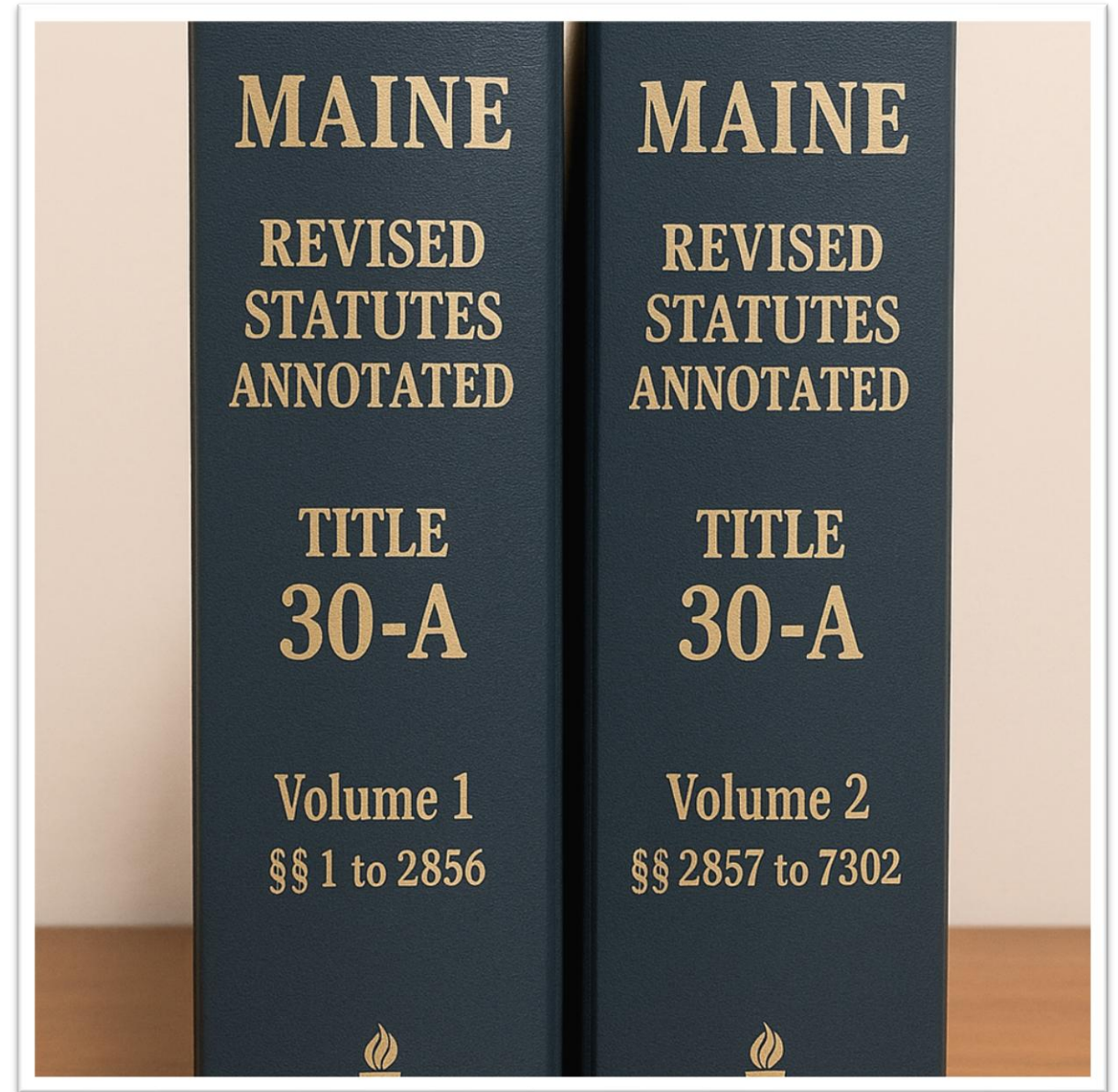
Durham's Form of Government

Maine local governments come in different shapes and sizes, but do the same things.

Since 2021, Durham's form of local government has been:

- Town Meeting
- Select Board
- Manager

30-A MRSA §2631-2639



Voters and Town Meeting

- Any time the voters act as the legislative body it is a “town meeting,” sometimes at the polls, sometimes in an assembly. Either is fine and may depend on the subject matter.
- Elect municipal officers, other officials. This happens at the polls. Members of the Select Board are municipal officers and are collectively Durham’s governing body.
- Approve the municipal budget, as an assembly (see the photo to the right).
- Enact and amend ordinances and plans.



Select Board

- Proposes a budget for approval by town meeting.
- Appoints the town manager and other officials as prescribed by law or ordinance.
- Adopts policies, bylaws, plans relating to the operation and affairs of the town.
- Acts only as a body (30-A MRS § 2635), directs the town manager, may not give orders to town manager's subordinates.



Town Manager

- Proposes a budget for review by the Select Board.
- Appoints officials and hires employees except those who are elected.
- Carries out laws, ordinances, administers policies, bylaws, plans, and priorities of the Select Board.
- Serves as chief executive and administrative officer of the town.



Summary

- Voters elect the Select Board
- Town meeting approves the budget
- The Select Board
 - Hires and oversees the town manager
 - Sets agenda, priorities, and direction
 - Proposes a budget to town meeting for approval
- The town manager is
 - Responsible to the Select Board for the operations of the town and accomplishing priorities
 - Hires and oversees town staff
 - Contributes to agenda, priorities, and direction
 - Proposes an annual budget for the Select Board's review



Discussion, Q&A.



Habits of Highly Effective Select Boards

Congratulations! You were elected to the Select Board!

Now what?

How will you spend your time at meetings?

How will you get things done?

How do you want to work together?

Start Here.

1. Learn

Get to know all you can about your community, how the Town works, what the Budget prioritizes, and what it means to be a Select Board member. There's a lot to learn. Be curious. Be open.

2. Cooperate

You ran as an individual, but you serve on a board that only ever acts as a body. Work together.



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

3. Prepare

Read your packets. Ask the Town Manager questions in advance. Seek out community input. Don't underestimate the time it takes to be prepared for meetings and to make decisions.

4. Be Ethical and Open

Of course, you'll be ethical and open, but this job can come with conflicts that are hard to see.



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

5. Follow the Money

It's important to understand the Town's budget. You will be balancing providing or expanding services with keeping costs and taxes as low as possible.

6. Promise Little

You are each one member of a board that decides collectively. Be careful with what you promise to supporters and constituents.



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

7. Meetings Matter

You're in the public eye – always. You are setting an example with how you behave. Be self-aware and careful with what you say, how you say it, and how you listen.

8. Be Judicious

Sometimes you will be required to act in a judicial capacity, in a hearing or on an application. Be careful to remain impartial.



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

9. Honor Boundaries

Work through the system. Respect the manager and the staff. Your focus should be policy and priorities, not managing people or details.

10. Be Resourceful

You are not alone. Reach out to officials in other towns, to MMA, and especially to GPCOG!



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

Take a Breath.

Do you see any practices where you could improve?

Do you see any practices where the board could improve?



Credit: Maine Municipal Association

Form These Habits

- Honor Boundaries
- Focus on Priorities
- Have Productive Meetings
- Have Healthy Communications



Honor the Boundaries*. Clarify the Gray.

Selectboard	Manager
Sets priorities, levels of service, tax rate	Provides advice and input
Recommends budget to Town Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drafts proposed budget• Manages resources, once adopted
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommends ordinances to Town Meeting• Adopts policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involved in the development of proposed ordinances and policy• Implements adopted ordinances and policy
Appoints and supervises Town Manager	Hires and supervises Town staff
<i>*Note that this is a simplification of roles. Planning Board, Appeals Board, others have roles.</i>	

Focus on Priorities.



Best Practices:

- Know your goals
- Stay on track and only add priorities if you understand the impact on your original goals
- Work through the manager to advance the priorities

Does Durham have a process for setting priorities for the year?

Your Thoughts on Your Meetings:



What makes your meetings go well right now?

What isn't going so well?

Select Board Agendas.

What's your process for developing the agenda?

Town Manager:

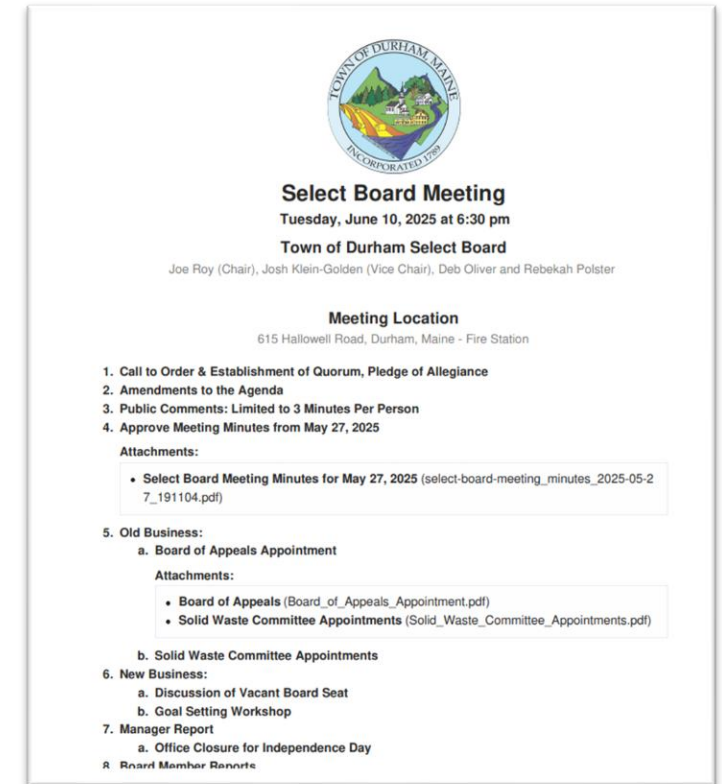
- Identifies agenda items.
- Provides background information and analysis (“staff report”).
- Makes staff recommendations (if welcomed by the Select Board).
- Prepares and posts agenda.

Chair and Vice Chair:

- Contribute ideas for agenda items to Town Manager.
- Meet with Town Manager ahead of meeting to review issues and discuss recommendations.

Each Selectboard Member:

- Can suggest agenda items to the Chair & Vice Chair.



Managing Precious Time

- Do your homework
 - Read your packet
 - Ask Town Manager questions ahead of time
 - Be prepared to make decisions
- Get out of the weeds
- Avoid rabbit holes
- Be clear on how you take & respond to public comment
- Share the air
- Keep it moving...



Meeting Flow

- Chair – Responsible for moving the body through the agenda
- Town Manager – Provides staff reports on agenda items and answers clarifying questions
- Chair -
 - **Runs** public comment (timekeeper role played by another person)
 - **Listens** for misunderstanding, different viewpoints
 - Tries to **balance** all perspectives to find harmony and compromise



Healthy Communications

Between Select Board Members & with Town Manager...

- Set tone of respect
- Appreciate each other
- Bring spirit of collaboration: “Team Durham!”



Healthy Communications

From Town to its residents...

- Provide regular information through multiple, official channels
- Have a policy to guide employees in posting Town information on social media
- Know how you'll professionally handle negative comments, misinformation, and personal attacks



Healthy Communications

From Select Board members to residents...

- Telegraph respect (lead by example)
- Share accurate, factual information
- Distinguish personal communication from official Town communication
- Know how you'll professionally handle negative comments, misinformation, and personal attacks
- Have a code of conduct



Discussion, Q&A.



Next Steps



Thank you!