

**Village of Martin's Additions
Guidelines for Village Committees
(Draft 02/07/2022)**

Introduction

The Village of Martin's Additions, a municipality in the state of Maryland, encourages service to our community and participation in its activities. Maryland's municipalities have the authority to establish advisory boards, commissions, and committees. For example, in Martin's Additions, Council-appointed committees of residents manage elections, oversee ethics requirements, and have advised the Village Council on issues requested by Council resolution. They provide recommendations, generate new ideas, conduct research, and analyze procedures and operations that underlie good governance. Note, however, that the Village of Martin's Additions Council takes all official actions. The Village relies on the contributions of several types of committees.¹

Mandated committees: The Village Charter and Code of Ordinances establish certain committees to oversee elections and ethics, as well as the position of tree supervisor who helps implement the Village's tree policies.²

Standing committees: The Village Council establishes standing committees by Council resolution or other means to serve continuing functions with specific missions; one example is the Community Engagement Committee, which plans and executes various social activities.

Ad-hoc committees: The Council may also establish temporary advisory committees dedicated to a limited objective for a specified duration. The Council defines the committee's scope of work and time limit. Past ad-hoc committees have advised on the Village building code, storm water management, trees, walkability, and safety.

General Guidelines

To strengthen and clarify the role of Village committees and their members, ensure transparency, and promote the employment of best practices, the Council has adopted these guidelines.

Mission statement: The Council provides committees a mission statement at the time it creates them. Some are enshrined in the Village Charter and Code, while the Council creates the others, usually by resolution. The mission statement describes the reasons for setting up the committee; lists specific questions and issues to be considered; describes the committee's goals and responsibilities; specifies the time expected for the committee's work; and may include suggested tasks and operational procedures such as regularly scheduled meetings, reports to the Council to review the committee's work, and submission of a written report to the Council.

Orientation, training: As required by Maryland's Open Meetings Act, at least one member of each Committee must complete the online training offered by the Open Meetings Compliance Board and inform the Village Manager that the training has been completed. However, since all committee members

¹ Some groups in the past have been designated as "Task Forces," a term that has no special meaning. In this document, all groups are called "committees."

² The Village Charter, Section 602, mandates an Election Committee; the Charter also refers to an Ethics Committee, but without further detail. The Code of Ordinances Article 1, Section 2 specifies the structure of both the election and ethics committees as well as provides for the authorization of "other committees to assist the Council in carrying out its responsibilities." Chapter 9-103 mandates a Tree Supervisor.

are charged with following the law, the Village Council strongly encourages all members to complete the training, available at: https://www.igsr.umd.edu/VLC/OMA/class_oma_title.php.

Meetings: A majority of committee members constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. A majority vote of those present at any meeting, but not less than the number necessary for a quorum, is sufficient for any official action taken by the committee. Committees require majority affirmation of meeting minutes and reports sent to the Village Council in the name of the Committee; minority reports may also be submitted. Meetings must be conducted in compliance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act and not stray from the committee's mission. Committee meetings typically take place in the Village office, but other convenient places may be chosen so long as they are accessible to the public; in addition, meetings may be conducted remotely if the open meetings requirements are observed. Public notice and an agenda must be issued prior to the holding of a meeting that is subject to the Act.

The Open Meetings Act specifies that meetings are either open or closed.

Open: meeting to engage in a function covered by the Act, e.g., legislative (policy making), quasi-legislative (contracting and budgeting), or advisory (forming a recommendation to provide to the Council). Open meetings are the usual type for most committee activities.

Closed: meeting to discuss something confidential that falls within the committee's scope and the fifteen exceptions included in the Act (e.g., hearing legal advice or considering an ethics complaint).

Minutes: Committees should promptly prepare minutes of their meetings, as required by the Open Meetings Act. Minutes should be brief and reflect committee decisions and recommendations. Once approved by a committee majority, the meeting minutes are given to the Village manager for posting on the Village website and other distribution. Committees should post their minutes as soon as possible, which may necessitate informal approval, formalized at the next Committee opportunity.

Public involvement: If a meeting is open (the usual type), the notice of a meeting must indicate that everyone is welcome; the agenda should include a time for hearing public comments. At times, it may be necessary to impose time limits on comments or to request that they be limited to the current agenda item. Rarely, committees may meet in closed sessions that are not open to the public.

Email policy: All committees must comply with the Maryland Public Information Act, which states that emails are part of the official record. Mandated committees have a Village-issued email account. Other committees must ensure compliance by coordinating with the Manager.

Council liaison: The Village Council will appoint one of its members as a liaison to each committee. The liaison ordinarily attends all meetings but is not a voting member and should act primarily as an observer and advisor on the Council's mission statement. The Council liaison may also organize the first meeting of a new committee to initiate routine operations. The primary purpose of the liaison is to facilitate communication between the committee and the Council. However, the liaison is also responsible for ensuring that the committee complies with its responsibilities (e.g., staying within scope, producing agendas, and publishing minutes). Any Council member may attend, and indeed is encouraged to attend, any committee meeting as would any other resident.

Village manager: Committee meetings are coordinated through the Village manager, who notifies the public of the meetings, acts as support or assigns staff as appropriate, maintains the public record of meetings (including posting the minutes), facilitates contract support, and updates the Village website with Committee information. Of note, the manager is not responsible for taking notes, drafting minutes, or acting in the stead of the committee, Council, or Council liaison.

Staff, budget, legal advice: The Village Council provides an annual budget for routine committee operations. Any minor additional expenditures must be within that budget and approved by the Village manager, while any significant additional expenditures must be approved by the Council. If committees wish legal advice, the request must be approved by a committee majority before submittal to the manager; if substantial time is involved, the Council must approve the request. Committee members should review the Village's Document Retention Schedule to ensure that records are retained following the requirements.

Committee Members Guidelines

Individuals serving on Village committees provide an invaluable service to our community. Subject to the requirements of the Charter and Code, the Council specifies the number of members, terms of office, and criteria for membership. All Village residents are encouraged to apply for committee membership, their application implying agreement to engage actively in the work of the committees, attend scheduled committee meetings, and follow all applicable laws.

Appointments: The Village Council openly solicits volunteers for its committees in an "annual call" near the end of the fiscal year in late June. Soon after taking office, the new Council appoints all members in closed session as is typical for personnel decisions. Members should schedule their first meeting soon after their appointment to establish plans and procedures for the coming year. The appointment process considers various factors: keeping committees to a reasonable size; ensuring that Village-wide views are represented; and including relevant expertise and a diversity of experiences. Residents interested in joining an ongoing committee during the year may be allowed to do so upon application to and appointment by the Council. Subject to the needs of the Village, the Council may request that applicants include a brief statement about why the applicant would like to serve on that body and any special expertise that may be valuable to the committee's work. Committee members normally serve through the end of the Village fiscal year (July 31) in which they are appointed. Members may resign from a committee at any time, informing the committee chair and Council. Committee appointments and removals are at the discretion of the Council.

Swearing in and training: Following their appointment and prior to taking part in committee business, committee members will take the prescribed oath of office and complete the Village's conflict of interest form. Committee members will also be trained in and must follow all relevant laws in the performance of their public duties including applicable laws on conflicts of interest, financial disclosures, open meetings, and official Village regulations, policies, and procedures. In compliance with the oath of office and the Village Code, members must execute their duties with strict impartiality.³

Operations: Committees usually appoint their own officers at their first meeting; officers include a chair, a vice-chair who presides in the absence of the chair, and secretary who is responsible for minutes. From time to time when allowed by the Charter and Code, the Council may appoint either a Council member or another resident as chair.⁴ The secretary may be a rotating position with members alternating in the job of taking minutes.

Committee chairs typically set meeting agendas with the input of their committee members. They are responsible for assuring that each meeting is properly noticed; that the public is welcomed to attend and have an opportunity to speak; that meeting minutes are prepared, approved by a majority of members, and

³ The oath of service and conflict-of-interest questionnaire is on the Village website: [https://www.martinsadditions.org/No.%202019-10-2%20\(oath%20and%20conflicts\).pdf](https://www.martinsadditions.org/No.%202019-10-2%20(oath%20and%20conflicts).pdf)

⁴ For example, the Council selected sitting members to chair the Storm Water Task Force and Tree Committee.

posted; and that committee reports and recommendations are written, reviewed, approved by a committee majority, and presented to the Council. All official Village actions are taken solely by the Village Council.

Email, file management: All committees must follow the Maryland Public Information Act (PIA). Accordingly, the following have been adopted to facilitate compliance, primarily for the mandated Election and Ethics committees.

Password access: For those committees assigned an email account, all committee members shall have direct access to the password and account, including any electronic committee files, through the end of their term. If a member resigns, the password is changed immediately, and the new password shared with the remaining members and new members upon appointment. The Village manager also generally has all the passwords as the Village's designated public information custodian. However, the manager will only access any committee account to comply with requests made under the PIA, also notifying the committee and Council liaison.

Logistics: The account should be checked for new emails daily; new emails should be sent to all committee members as soon as practical by whomever sees them first. Should any member receive an email on committee business at a personal account, the email must be sent to the official account for a response.

Emails from the committee are signed by the full committee, sent from the official account, and distributed to all committee members. Only the official (not personal) email account is the committee contact in official communications. The official email account is copied on all communications on official business between committee members and between the committee and others (e.g., staff and Council) to facilitate compliance with the PIA and provide records for future committees.

Other:

- Appointees will prepare in advance for meetings, commit to regular attendance, and participate in the production of any required work.
- The Village does not tolerate harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, or discrimination in any form.
- Committee members should not present themselves as spokespersons for the Village unless specifically directed to do so by the Council.
- Committee members should report irreconcilable conflicts or disputes to the Council for possible remediation.
- Members will work for the common good of the community and not for any private or personal interest and will strive to ensure fair and equal treatment to all persons, claims, and transactions coming before the committee.

The Village Council may deviate from or alter these guidelines as the Village Council determines appropriate based on the circumstances.