

TOWN OF BRIDGTON
Ordinance Review Committee (ORC)

REMOTE PARTICIPATION POLICY

Section I. Purpose

Maine law, 1 M.R.S. § 403-B, allows members of public bodies, in limited circumstances, to participate remotely in public meetings. While all members of the Town's public body should endeavor to attend meetings in person, the law seeks to promote greater participation in government meetings by allowing members to participate remotely when physical attendance is not practicable.

Section II. Acceptable Methods of Remote Participation

1. Remote methods of participation may include telephone, internet, or satellite-enabled audio or video technology allowing simultaneous reception of information and may include other means necessary to accommodate disabled persons.
2. Remote participation shall not be by text-only means such as e-mail, text messages, or chat functions.
3. Any other technology that enables the remote participant and all other persons present at the meeting location to be clearly audible and, if possible, clearly visible to all persons present at the meeting location.
4. The ORC shall determine which of the acceptable methods may be used by its members.
5. If technical difficulties arise as a result of utilizing remote participation, then the Chair or presiding member should suspend discussion while reasonable efforts are made to correct any problem that interferes with the remote participant's ability to hear or be heard clearly by all persons at the meeting location. If technical difficulties result in a remote participant being disconnected from the meeting, that fact and the time at which the disconnection occurred and subsequent reconnection, if achieved, shall be noted in the meeting minutes. A remote participant who is unable to reconnect shall be noted as absent.

Section III. Permissible Reasons for Remote Participation

Members of the ORC are expected to be physically present for public meetings except when being physically present is not practicable. The chair or presiding member of the ORC, in consultation with other members, if appropriate and possible, will make a determination that remote methods of participation are necessary. Circumstances in which physical presence for one or more members is not practicable may include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. Illness, other physical condition, safety concerns, or temporary absence of a member that causes a member of the ORC to face significant difficulty traveling to the meeting location; and
2. The existence of an emergency or urgent issue that requires the ORC to meet via remote methods.

It is the express desire of the ORC and the Bridgton Select Board, whom appoints the ORC, that remote participation in meetings be an infrequent event for individual committee members.. The Chair or presiding member shall interpret this Policy strictly and their decision to allow or not to allow remote participation shall be final and shall not be appealable.

Section IV. Procedures for Remote Participation

Any member of the ORC who wishes to participate remotely who is unable to attend a meeting in person will notify the Chair or presiding member of the Ordinance Review Committee at least 72 hours in advance of a scheduled meeting of his or her desire to do so and the reasons and facts supporting the request. Staff assigned to support the ORC should be notified at the same time as the Chair or presiding member.

1. Notice of all meetings will be provided in accordance with 1 M.R.S §406. When the public may attend via remote methods, authorized under law or this policy to attend by remote methods, said notice must include the means by which the public may access the meeting using remote methods and will provide a method for disabled persons to request necessary accommodation to access the meeting. Notice will also identify a location where the public can attend in person. The ORC will not restrict public attendance to remote methods except in the case of an emergency or urgent issue that requires the ORC to meet using remote methods of attendance.
2. Prior to the meeting the chair or presiding member shall make every effort to ensure the equipment is available and functioning properly. If the required equipment is not available, then the Chair or presiding member shall deny the request for remote participation.
3. At the start of the meeting the Chair or presiding member shall announce the name of any member who will be participating remotely. This information shall be recorded in the meeting minutes.
4. All votes taken during a meeting using remote methods will be by roll call vote that can be seen and heard if using video technology, or heard if using audio technology only, by other members of the ORC and the public.
5. A member of the ORC who participates remotely for an executive session shall affirm at the start of such session that no other person is present and/or able to hear the discussion at the remote location and that the session is not being remotely recorded by any device.
6. A member of the ORC who participates remotely will be considered present for the purposes of a quorum and voting.

Section V. Minimum Requirements for Remote Participation

1. Except when an emergency or urgent issue requires the ORC to meet by remote means, at a minimum, the person authorized to chair the meeting shall be physically present at the meeting.
2. Members of the public must be afforded a meaningful opportunity to attend via remote methods when any member of the ORC participates via remote methods and reasonable accommodations must be provided when necessary to provide access to individuals with disabilities.
3. If the ORC allows or is required to provide an opportunity for public input during the meetings, then an effective means of communication between the members of the ORC and the public will also be provided.
4. The ORC will make all documents and other materials to be considered by the ORC available, electronically, or otherwise, to the public who attend by remote methods to the same extent customarily available to the public who attend the meetings of the ORC in person, as long as no additional costs are incurred by the ORC.
5. Members of the ORC who participate remotely and all person(s) present at the meeting location shall be clearly seen and heard if using video technology, and clearly heard if using only audio technology, by the other members of the ORC and the public.
6. The public will also be provided an opportunity to attend the meeting in person unless there is an emergency or urgent issue that requires the entire ORC to meet using remote methods.

This policy is adopted by the Ordinance Review Committee under the direction of the Bridgton Board of Selectmen on the following day and will remain in force indefinitely unless amended or rescinded by the Board of Selectmen.

Dated: _____

Signed: _____
