



Legislation & Administration Committee of the RTM Meeting Minutes
June 15, 2026 | 6:30PM

Members Present: Erica Casper, Mary Childs, Emmy Franklin, Paul Goldstein, Danielle Steward-Gelinas

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Sue Driscoll, RTM moderator; Elizabeth (Betsy) Ritter, Ethics Commission chair; Alan Messier, Ethics Commission member

1. Confirmation of Quorum and Call to Order

L&A Chair Erica Casper called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Consideration and Action on Minutes of the March 30, 2026 Committee Meeting

Motion by Mary Childs, seconded by Danielle Steward-Gelinas to approve the minutes. **Vote: 2 Unanimous**

4. Review of Matters Currently Referred to the Committee

a. Review of Ethics Ordinance 2.50 (RTC 10/7/24)

Following introductory remarks from Ethics Commission Chair Betsy Ritter, lengthy discussion by the L&A Committee regarding potential revisions to the Town Ethics Ordinance, based on recommendations from the Ethics Commission and issues that arose during recent ethics proceedings.

The L&A Committee reviewed three proposed amendments (see letter from Ritter posted with the L&A Committee meeting agenda for the 6/15/2026 meeting) originally submitted by Ritter in October 2024:

1. Terminate investigations if confidentiality is breached prior to a probable cause finding.
2. Add enforcement language for confidentiality violations.
3. Separate complaints when the same alleged violation involves multiple individuals.

Committee members and Ethics Commission representatives agreed that recent ethics cases exposed ambiguities in the ordinance, particularly around:

Definition of "substantial conflict of interest"

Definition of "financial interest" versus "direct monetary gain"

Interpretation of advisory opinions

Appearance of impropriety

Immediate family and financial relationships

How conflicts of interest should be evaluated consistently over time

The Old Lyme ethics ordinance was referenced several times as a potential model because it provides more specific definitions and examples.

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ATTEST: *Erica Casper*
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There was significant discussion about the role of advisory opinions. Topics raised included: advisory opinions are intended to address specific fact patterns and circumstances. They should provide guidance before an action is taken. Members expressed concern that advisory opinions may have been interpreted too broadly in past situations. The committee discussed making advisory opinions more accessible to elected officials and the public, including publishing them in a clearly identified location online.

Extensive discussion centered on confidentiality during ethics investigations.

Issues raised included:

- Whether a confidentiality breach should automatically terminate an investigation.
- Potential loopholes if respondents intentionally disclose information to derail complaints.
- Difficulty determining who breached confidentiality.
- Distinction between intentional and accidental disclosures.
- Whether confidentiality requirements should apply differently to complainants, respondents, and Ethics Commission members.

No consensus was reached, but several members felt additional review and refinement of the proposed language is needed.

The group discussed Ethics hearings procedural improvements, such as allowing official captioned video recordings to satisfy public hearing documentation requirements; updating notification methods because certified mail has become unreliable in some cases; and exploring modern communication methods while preserving confidentiality and legal requirements.

Members discussed whether current definitions sufficiently address modern family and financial relationships, including how relatives who do not reside in the same household should be treated; whether financial impacts to extended family members create conflicts; whether additional definitions or examples would help elected officials determine when abstention is appropriate.

Key Takeaways

- There is broad agreement that portions of the Ethics Ordinance could be clarified.
- The committee generally supported exploring language similar to portions of the Old Lyme ordinance.
- Proposal #3: Committee members appeared to agree on the Ethics Commission's third proposed amendment: requiring separate complaints when the same alleged violation involves multiple respondents. Members described the change as straightforward and helpful for keeping cases distinct and easier to manage.
- Proposal #2 (enforcement provisions) received less support and may not require ordinance changes.
- Proposal #1 (automatic termination after confidentiality breaches) requires additional discussion because of potential unintended consequences.
- Members want to avoid making the ordinance overly complicated while still providing clearer guidance.

Action Items / Next Steps

Committee members to conduct individual research before the next meeting

- Review Groton, Old Lyme, and other municipal ethics ordinances.

- Compare conflict-of-interest definitions and identify language that may improve the current ordinance.
- Review ordinance sections discussed during the meeting and propose edits or recommendations.
- Consider revisions related to:
 - Substantial conflict of interest
 - Financial interest definitions
 - Confidentiality provisions
 - Advisory opinions
 - Immediate family definitions
 - Hearing documentation requirements
 - Develop draft ordinance language for further discussion.

b. Review of a “Public Comment Ordinance” (RTC 2/6/23)

Casper stated she had prepared the report to the RTM and would share it with the committee before submitting to the RTM moderator for consideration at the August meeting (attached to these meeting minutes).

c. Review how RTM considers recommendations for committee assignments (RTC 6/6/22)

Discussion focused on whether RTM members should receive more information about nominees before voting or if that is too much of a burden for nominees; if basic background information is required, what would that entail; providing nomination materials earlier; exploring alternative voting methods, including ranked-choice approaches for appointments.

Committee did not reach consensus; discussion will continue at a future meeting.

5. Future Meeting Schedule

Next meeting tentative date: July 20, 2026, 6:30pm

6. Adjournment

Motion by Childs, seconded by Franklin to adjourn. Vote: unanimous in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:16pm

Submitted by: Erica Casper

Chair, Legislation & Administration Committee of the RTM

Encl: L&A Committee Report on recommendations to the RTM on the review of the public comment ordinance.



**LEGISLATION & ADMINISTRATION STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE RTM
COMMITTEE REPORT
REVIEW OF A PUBLIC COMMENT ORDINANCE (RTC 2/6/23)**

Background

Sep. 18, 2023 Committee Meeting. Review of a "Public Comment Ordinance" RTC 02/06/23 Brief discussion. More work to follow.

Feb. 24, 2024 Committee Meeting. Initial meeting for new committee. Public comment: Consensus that with limited board/commission response to RTM Jan 2023 recommendation to include public comment periods, providing written guidance to these specialized groups would be helpful-e.g., setting parameters such as time limits for each speaker or restricting comments to agenda items, and explaining that it is not a Q&A session, but speakers could contact boards/commission members after the meeting if questions weren't answered in deliberation. The FOIC's requirement that while there is some flexibility in handling public comment periods, the standards/rules during each public comment period must be applied equally to all speakers. Town Attorney will be consulted on whether RTM options include codifying universal public comment periods through ordinance, resolution, or "strong recommendation.

Aug. 15, 2024 Committee Meeting. Brief discussion on requiring all boards and commissions to provide public comment periods. Dembek expressed concern for the volunteers serving on those bodies, and the additional time department heads would have to wait after work-hours to present their agenda items. Questions as to whether there are special exemptions or legal considerations for certain bodies, such as Planning & Zoning and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Feb. 13, 2025 Committee Meeting. No discussion on this issue; with Attorney Avena present, focus was on ethics and YFSB/Senior Citizens ordinances. Consensus to defer other issues to future meeting.

Current Committee Action

Jan. 21, 2026 Committee Meeting. Initial meeting of the new committee; general overview of all pending issues. Discussion noted limited background was available for this referral. Following discussion, the committee agreed that the intent of the referral was to ensure the public has a chance to comment on decisions or recommendations that committees, commissions, boards, etc. are considering. Committee generally agreed the matter could be referred, but drafting a letter encouraging all committees to offer public comment with basic guidelines was warranted. Franklin agreed to draft that letter for discussion at a future meeting.

Feb. 9, 2026: The Committee continued discussion regarding public comment at board and committee meetings. Members reiterated general agreement that amending ordinances to require public comment at every meeting was not advisable, noting that such a requirement may be inappropriate in certain circumstances or inconsistent with state statute. The Committee discussed the alternative approach of encouraging public comment through a guidance letter to boards and committees, including general best practices to ensure public comment is

appropriate and manageable. Emmy Franklin presented a draft letter for consideration. Discussion included whether to use a previously issued, attorney-vetted letter or Franklin's newly drafted, more comprehensive version, as well as the possibility of attaching Robert's Rules guidance on public comment and distributing the materials annually or as part of new member orientation packets. No action was taken, and discussion will continue at a future meeting.

March 19, 2026: The committee discussed concerns regarding public awareness of when and how to provide comment, as well as consistency in how public comment is handled across meetings. While noting that opportunities for comment may occur during designated public hearings, members emphasized the importance of clear guidance and consistent practices. The committee agreed that an ordinance change is not necessary at this time and voted to refer the matter to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed boards and commissions.

Motion by Steward-Gelinas, seconded by Childs, to report the item out of committee with a recommendation to refer Public Comment Guidelines to the Education Committee, with the suggestion to develop a consistent approach for educating boards and commissions. Voice vote unanimous in favor.

Recommendation: The Committee voted unanimously to report this item out of committee with the recommendation that the RTM refer this item to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed chairs of boards and commissions and the public of these guidelines.

Submitted by:

Erica Casper

Chair, Legislation & Administration Standing Committee

Representative Town Meeting

Town of Waterford

Attached: Summary of RTM discussion on public comment prior to referral to L&A Committee and recommendations on next steps

Summary of RTM Discussion and L&A Recommendations re: Review of a Public Comment Ordinance (RTC 2/6/23)

(minutes of Oct 3, 2022 regular meeting of the RTM): Public Comment: RTM Member Larder spoke in regard to her concerns on how the body handles PUBLIC COMMENT and noted that some other boards don't offer public comment. Ms. Larder asked Town Attorney Kepple how we can handle. Attorney Kepple replied that the body is free to take a position on a topic such as this and communicate its position to other appropriate town agencies or one of the standing committees of the RTM

(minutes of Dec 5, 2022 regular meeting of the RTM): brief discussion about the issue raised by Maria Lopez in PUBLIC COMMENT ensued. First Selectman Brule will look further into the issue. The body discussed the need of other boards and commissions to provide for public comment as part of their meetings. MOTION by Driscoll, seconded by Olynciw, refer the subject of Public Comment on Boards and Commissions to the Legislation and Administration Standing Committee of the RTM. WITHDRAWN MOTION by Larder, seconded by Welch, to direct Moderator Goldstein to write a letter to the other committees in town of the need to provide for Public Comment as part of a public meeting. MOTION PASSED: Unanimous

(correspondence at the Feb 6, 2023 regular meeting of the RTM): Date: 1/5/23 To: *All Waterford Boards & Commissions, At the RTM Regular Meeting on October 3, 2022 discussion took place regarding the need to provide public comment at public meetings for all Waterford Boards and Commissions. Further discussion and deliberations took place at the December 5, 2022 Regular RTM Meeting. The consensus of the RTM was that Public Comment is vital to an inclusive and transparent government and should be part of Public Meetings. The RTM strongly recommends moving forward that all Waterford Boards and Commissions make Public Comment an agenda item as part of their meetings. The RTM recognizes that the timing and scope of such public comment is best left to the judgement of each Board or Commission. Sincerely, Paul Goldstein, Moderator RTM*

(minutes of Feb 6, 2023 regular meeting of the RTM): MOTION by Gauthier, seconded by Larder, to have the Legislation and Administration Standing Committee of the RTM review the creation of **an ordinance to require PUBLIC COMMENT on all agendas**. MOTION PASSED: Unanimous

(minutes from March 19, 2026 L&A committee meeting): The committee discussed concerns regarding public awareness of when and how to provide comment, as well as consistency in how public comment is handled across meetings. While noting that opportunities for comment may occur during designated public hearings, members emphasized the importance of clear guidance and consistent practices. The committee agreed that an ordinance change is not necessary at this time and voted to refer the matter to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed boards and commissions.

Motion by Steward-Gelinas, seconded by Childs, to report the item out of committee with a recommendation to refer Public Comment Guidelines to the Education Committee, with the suggestion to develop a consistent approach for educating boards and commissions. Voice vote unanimous in favor.

Additional Context:

During its review, the current committee (established January, 2026) discussed both the value of public participation and the practical differences among boards and commissions, including the varying purposes and structures of their meetings.

The committee noted that opportunities for public input may already exist through public hearings, agenda items, correspondence, and other established procedures, though these opportunities are not always clearly communicated or consistently understood by the public.

The committee considered the communication from Paul Goldstein (the moderator) to Waterford Boards and Commissions significant, as it reflected an existing RTM position supporting public comment as a matter of best practice while allowing flexibility among boards and commissions.

The committee's discussion ultimately focused on improving consistency, transparency, and public awareness through education and guidance rather than through the creation of a mandatory ordinance requirement.

Recommendations of L&A Committee to the Education Committee:

- The committee does not believe an ordinance requiring public comment at all meetings is warranted at this time.
- The committee does support public comment as a best practice and encourages boards and commissions to include an opportunity for public comment as part of regular meetings whenever appropriate.
- Develop a brief "Public Comment" reference guide or checklist for board and commission chairs, including suggested procedures and best practices.
- Consider including public comment guidance materials in packets provided to newly elected or appointed board and commission members.
- Review whether there is an existing process to ensure newly appointed chairs receive guidance and training materials related to meeting procedures and public comment.
- Develop a basic public-facing guide explaining how and when residents may provide comment, raise concerns, submit correspondence, or participate in public meetings and hearings.
- Explore the creation of a page on the Town website with information regarding public meetings, public hearings, submitting correspondence, identifying the appropriate board or commission for an issue, and other methods for public participation.
- The committee notes that, while concerns regarding consistency and public awareness were discussed, the issue has not generated ongoing complaints or recurring concerns since being referred to the committee.