

# Norwood School Committee

## New Member Handbook



*(Approved with revisions by School Committee March 26, 2025)*

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Dear New School Committee Member,

On behalf of the current members of the committee, congratulations on your election to the Norwood School Committee!

The first thing you need to know is that you must be sworn in before you attend your first School Committee meeting. In Norwood, this turnaround happens very quickly! For the 2025 elections, you will be elected on Monday April 7, 2025, and your first School Committee meeting will be on Wednesday April 9, 2025. Please contact [MaryLou Folan](#), Town Clerk, at Town Hall to arrange being sworn in. You'll need to submit a copy of this paperwork to Priscilla Reardon in the Superintendent's office as well.

Once you are sworn in and officially a member, now what?

This Handbook is intended to be used as a general introduction to your responsibilities as an elected public official and school committee member and provide you with resources to get you up to speed on the wide breadth of issues relevant to school committee work. Building this knowledge happens incrementally, so give yourself time. Listed below are four important steps to get started:

1. Contact the Chair and Superintendent immediately to discuss access to School Committee materials, your email address, and other important information as you on-board into this role. Currently the Chair is Anne Marie Mazzola and her email address is [amazola@norwood.k12.ma.us](mailto:amazola@norwood.k12.ma.us) and Mr. Tim Luff's, Superintendent, email is [tluff@norwood.k12.ma.us](mailto:tluff@norwood.k12.ma.us).
2. Complete your required orientation course. Our state organization, the [Massachusetts Association of School Committees](#), runs a day-long new member orientation called Charting the Course. You must complete this course sometime within your first year, but it is recommended to complete it as soon as possible. For information on this course, as well as other valuable information a new member should review, can be found [here](#). Our School Committee Administrative Assistant, Lisa Liff, can help you locate a course and complete the course registration. Lisa's email address is: [lliff@norwood.k12.ma.us](mailto:lliff@norwood.k12.ma.us).
3. Start to familiarize yourself with the Norwood School Committee policies on the district website. A good place to start includes all of Section B, Policy AA, and Policy CA (see [here](#)). You should also spend time reviewing the [School Committee Protocols](#).

4. Complete the required [Massachusetts Conflict of Interest Law/Ethics](#) training found online, and submit your completed certificate to the School Committee Administrative Assistant, Lisa Liff ([lliff@norwood.k12ma.us](mailto:lliff@norwood.k12ma.us)) within 30 days of taking office.

Thank you in advance for your commitment to the Norwood Public Schools and welcome!

### **About School Committee Meetings**

School Committee business meetings are usually held bimonthly on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m, but there are times of the year they are held 3-4 times a month. Additionally, we often have executive sessions either before the business meeting at 6/6:30pm, and/or immediately following the business meeting. You can view the current School Committee meeting calendar on the NPS Website. For the remainder of School Year 24-25, we have the following business meetings scheduled: April 9 and 30, May 14 and 28, and June 4 and 18. We hope you will be able to join us at all of these meetings. We will schedule for July 2025-June 2026 soon with your input. Meeting agendas, which are determined collaboratively by the Superintendent and School Committee Chair, are posted on the district website and town hall at least 48 business hours in advance of the meeting. The School Committee Administrative Assistant shares it with members on the shared google drive in a timely manner in order to give Committee members adequate time to prepare and ask clarifying questions. Please submit any questions on the meeting packets to the Superintendent (cc-ing the School Committee Chair) at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting in order to allow adequate time for a response. You may peruse archived agendas and packets on the School Committee Google Drive.

Regular attendance at our business meetings is important, as school committees are empowered only when a quorum of its members are present to vote or establish consensus. A quorum is a fixed number of members whose presence is required in order to transact business. If a quorum cannot be achieved, the meeting cannot take place. In Norwood, since we are a committee of five, we achieve a quorum when no fewer than three (3) members are present. If you are unable to attend a meeting or will be arriving late to a meeting, please contact the School Committee Chair as early as possible. The School Committee has voted to approve [the Town of Norwood's remote participation](#) for members if they are unable to attend in person due to the reasons listed in the policy. For an in-person meeting, there must be a quorum of members present in the room, but other members may join remotely. If you wish to take advantage of this option, please contact the SC Chair as early as possible.

The School Committee holds business meetings in order to:

- Develop and, ultimately, adopt the budget for the upcoming fiscal year along with monitoring spending for the current fiscal year;
- Participate in annual district goal development;
- Discuss & vote on policies that govern teaching and learning and general operations;
- Perform the superintendent's evaluation.

We also regularly receive reports and presentations on a variety of topics including enrollment trends, staffing, school improvement plans, special initiatives and updates on student achievement, special education, transportation, capital projects, etc. In addition, we invite our Program Directors and Principals to update the Committee on a rotating basis on athletics, physical education, arts, and other areas of the curriculum. Elected student representatives to the School Committee and other groups are invited to speak to us at the Chair's discretion. Our business meetings follow parliamentary procedure (Robert's Rules of Order), which is a widely accepted set of protocols aimed at maximizing meeting efficiency and ensuring that all members have an opportunity for full and fair participation in debate and group decision-making before taking action.

Some basic meeting procedures that you should be aware of include:

- You must be recognized by the Chair in order to speak;
- Debate may not begin until there is a motion on the floor;
- No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone who wishes to speak has had a chance to do so;
- All remarks must be directed to the Chair.

You should familiarize yourself with common protocols ([Robert's Rules Of Order | Quick Reference \(robertsrules.org\)](https://robertsrules.org/)) for making, amending, voting on and withdrawing motions and for extending, limiting, suspending and closing debate. On the rare occasion that you are unable to adequately prepare for a business meeting, please contact the Chair and let him/her know your situation so accommodations can be provided.

The annual reorganization meeting happens at the second scheduled meeting in June. The only caveat to this would be if the sitting chair is running for re-election and is not elected, the chair would change the first meeting following the annual Town Election with the Vice Chair becoming Chair. In the event the Chair and Vice Chair are no longer members of the School Committee, the senior member (years served) will act as the Chair Pro-Tem. At the second meeting in June, the committee members elect the Chair as well as the Vice-Chair (one year terms). In the spring meetings of the committee (April or May), we determine our meeting schedule for the upcoming fiscal year, July-June. See Policy BDA for further information.

### **Meeting Broadcasts**

As meetings are public, The Norwood School Committee Meetings are broadcast on Norwood Community Media and can be lived streamed (Website: <https://norwoodcommunitymedia.org/>)

and can be viewed on live TV: Norwood Light Channels 24 or 624; Verizon Channel 33, or Comcast Channel 22.

### **Rules of Conduct for Members of the Public**

Though our meetings are held in public, they are not public meetings in the same way that a public hearing is held intentionally and for the explicit purpose of informing the public on a targeted topic and receiving public input. We designate a time at the beginning of every meeting called “Public Comment” where the public is invited to speak to us on topics under the authority of the School Committee. The Chair determines the length of time each speaker will have (as per policy, 3 minutes unless the Chair grants additional time) and designates a time-keeper. Public comment is a maximum of thirty minutes. It is not a time for discussion, debate, or dialogue. It is a time for the School Committee to listen to members of the public on issues that are under School Committee Purview. Speakers are required to begin their remarks by stating their name and street address. See Policy BEDH for more details. Anyone from the public who wishes to record or photograph the meeting must first notify the Chair who then makes a public announcement. Audio or video recordings may not interfere with the meeting.

### **School Committee Members’ Authority**

A school district is analogous to a business in that the Superintendent functions as its Chief Executive Officer overseeing day-to-day operations while the School Committee serves as its Board of Directors. It is critical that members know enough about the work of administrators & educators to be able to assess and support their efforts and be partners in the conversation without dictating what should be done. The authority of the Committee comes from the group, not from any particular individual member. While you are asked and encouraged to express your individual opinions and ideas, once the Committee has voted, the expectation is that all members uphold and support the decision, regardless of your individual viewpoint and regardless if you voted against a motion or abstained from voting. Our Committee has composed operating protocols that articulate norms for our School Committee-see [website](#) for this as it is annually voted on and signed.

### **Open Meeting Law**

The Open Meeting Law (OML) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is intended to protect the public’s right to access the deliberations of its elected representatives and promote transparency in government. Open Meeting Law Requires:

- provide the public with notice of our meetings 48 hours in advance (excluding weekends and legal holidays) except in cases of emergency;

- hold our meetings in a publicly accessible venue;
- and create, approve, and maintain accurate minutes which include the date, time and location of the meeting, a list of the names of members present and absent, a summary (not a transcript) of discussions, and a record of all decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes (outlined through meeting minutes).

The OML applies to both our business meetings as well as our subcommittee meetings. Meeting minutes as well as any other documents, emails, and correspondence that you send or receive (including texts) in your capacity as an elected public official become public documents and are subject to the Public Records Law of the Commonwealth.

The OML also restricts how and where elected officials can deliberate. With certain exceptions, expressions of opinion on matters within our jurisdiction must be open to the public. The legal definition of “deliberation” is an oral or written communication through any medium (including electronic mail and social media) between or among a quorum of a public body.

### **Executive Sessions**

Executive sessions are exceptions to the Open Meeting Law-this means they are closed to the public due to the sensitive nature of the content that are being discussed and as a result, are confidential/closed to the public. Additionally, members are prohibited from discussing the content of these meetings. For more information, see Policy Section BEC on Executive Sessions. Below are a few common reasons for entering into Executive Session:

- Deployment of security devices, strategies, or personnel;
- Investigating charges of criminal misconduct or filing of criminal complaints;
- Strategizing with respect to collective bargaining or litigation, but only if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on our bargaining or litigation position & if the chair declares this to be so at a public meeting;
- Discussing the reputation, character, or physical or mental condition (but not the professional competence or performance) of an individual;
- Discussing the discipline or dismissal of or complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff or individual, provided that the individual to be discussed in executive session is notified in writing by the public body at least 48 hours prior to the proposed executive session.

For a full list of reasons why a School Committee can enter into Executive Session, please review this [resource](#) from the State.

## Communication

Communication is critical as a member of the school committee. It is important to understand the roles and responsibilities an individual has when they are elected to a public committee.

Compliance with policy and laws around communication and open meeting law as well as best practice with other groups and stakeholders, including communication between members, district administration, staff, and faculty, the press, public (including social media) and families. When communicating, please use your official School Committee Email, to comply with public records law. Along with this, if an email is addressed to the School Committee, please allow the chair to respond. See the Do/Don't chart on the next page to help:

Do	Don't
Contact the School Committee Chair, a fellow member of the committee and/or the Superintendent with any questions that arise about your role, packet materials, etc.	Speak or act publicly on behalf of the entire district or School Committee unless specifically authorized by the entire Committee to do so. It is the job of our Superintendent & School Committee Chair to speak and act on behalf of the district and Committee. No other member has this authority.
Refer inquiries by the press to the Superintendent and/or School Committee Chair. If you are contacted by the press regarding an issue before the Committee, you may give your opinion, but you must clarify that you are not speaking on behalf of the entire Committee. It is advisable to carefully consider your impact when opining on matters that are controversial and/or potentially polarizing.	Contact district employees (including principals, teachers & staff) on matters pertaining to School Committee business without first obtaining permission from the Superintendent. Please be aware that no matter how well-intended, such interactions may and often are perceived as an attempt to meddle in the day-to-day operations of a school.

Refer parents/caregivers who approach you for help resolving personal concerns to the district website. This will assist them in contacting appropriate building/district personnel who can address their specific questions/concerns.	Use your position for personal gain for yourself, family members, relatives or constituents. This is a violation of state conflict of interest laws.
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### **Additional Resources**

Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC)-take a look:

<https://www.masc.org/>

Norwood Public Schools Website:

<https://www.norwood.k12.ma.us/>

Roberts Rules Resources:

<https://robertsrules.com/>

<https://robertsrules.org/>

## **Appendix A: Robert's Rules of Order**

### **What is a Motion?**

A motion is a proposal pertaining to an issue upon which the entire membership can take action or take a stand. Individual members may:

- Make a motion
- Second a motion
- Debate a motion
- Vote on a motion

Main Motions introduce an item to the membership for consideration. They cannot be made when any other motion is on the floor.

### **How to Present a Motion**

1. Obtain the floor by doing the following:

- Wait until the last speaker has finished.
- Obtain the Chair's attention by raising your hand (or rising).
- Wait until the Chair recognizes you.
- Address the Chair by saying, for example, "Mr./Madame Chair"

2. Make Your Motion

As our Business Meetings are when we discuss issues, we are not as strict with the move to make a motion. Generally, due to presenters and receiving information during a presentation or at the meeting, we ask questions and discuss before a motion. When a motion is ready to be made, Say, "I move that we ..." rather than, "I move that we do not ..." Speak in a clear and concise manner, always state a motion affirmatively and stay on topic. On occasion, after a motion is made, we further discuss or clarify-this happens both before a formal motion and after.

3. Wait for Someone to Second Your Motion Another member will second your motion or the Chair will call for a second. If there is no second, your motion is lost.

#### 4. The Chair Restates Your Motion

The Chair will say, "It has been moved and seconded that we ..." thus placing your motion before the membership for consideration and action. The membership then debates your motion or may move directly to a vote. Once your motion is presented to the membership by the Chair it becomes the 'property of the assembly' and cannot be changed by you without the consent of the members.

#### 5. Debating a Motion

This is the time for members to speak in favor or against your motion. The person who made the motion is always allowed to speak first. All comments and debate must be directed to the Chair and must adhere to the time limit for speaking that has been established. The mover may speak again only after other speakers are finished, unless called upon by the Chair.

#### 6. Putting the Motion to a Vote

The Chair asks, "Are you ready to vote on the question?" If there is no more discussion, a vote is taken. If debate continues a member may make a motion to "move the previous question". If this motion is adopted members are required to move directly to a vote.

### **Voting on a Motion**

The method of vote on a motion depends on the circumstances and the by-laws of your organization. There are five voting methods used by most organizations:

- **Voice Vote.** The Chair asks those in favor to say, "aye", those opposed to say "nay" and calls for any who would like to abstain from voting. Any member may move for an exact count.
- **Roll Call Vote.** Each member answers "yes" or "no" when called. This method is used when a record of each person's vote is required.
- **General Consent.** When a motion is not likely to be opposed, the Chair may state, "If there is no objection ..." The membership shows agreement by their silence; however, if even one member says, "I object" the item must be put to a vote.
- **Division Vote.** Members raise hands or stand with the ayes or the nays. A count is not necessarily required.

## **Appendix B: School Committee Hours & Sub-Committees**

As an elected member of the Norwood School Committee, below is information on sub-committees and an average number of hours per week as a member (position dependent) that you usually need to commit.

In conjunction with your commitment to Business Meetings and Executive Sessions, you will also be asked to complete certain tasks, serve on sub-committees, and be involved in the business of the committee. We are a committee of five individuals, which means you will be expected to serve on a sub committee and other groups to complete the work expected. To start (without being on a sub-committee), you should expect about 8-10 hours per week. As you acclimate to the committee and work on sub committees, you should expect at least 12-15 hours a week-this can vary by position (Chair, Vice Chair or Member) and the sub committees you work on and the time of year.

Examples of this could be the Policy Subcommittee and Budget Subcommittee, which are the two standing subcommittees in Norwood; negotiations with our unions; task forces that are under the direction of the superintendent; serving on the town-wide Capital Outlay and Budget Balancing Committees; and working on other projects that come across the committee's purview. Generally, the chair will ask for volunteers to serve on other committees and to spearhead other projects that need to be accomplished, usually with a second member of the committee. In keeping with open meeting law, any sub committee that you serve on should have someone assigned (usually our School Committee Admin, Lisa Liff) there to take notes, create an agenda of what needs to be done, schedule and post meeting dates and times, as well as the to do list-objectives and goals the group wants to accomplish.

In your first year, having conversations with the superintendent, chair or other members of sub-committees is helpful-you generally will be placed with a second member-work with them if you have any questions on the how-to of these things. The only way you learn how is to do!

### **School Committee Hours**

Below is a conservative estimate of hours served by month. Our public business meetings that take place at least twice a month are usually at least three hours-that combines a regular business meeting with an executive session, usually a few hours of prep reviewing the meeting agenda and packet to preview before the meeting, a few hours for sub-committees and any sort of other projects or tasks (negotiations, budget, task force) that are required of general members (the Chair is more hours-they create the agenda and coordinate meetings). As stated above, to start (without being on a sub-committee), you should expect about 8-10 hours per week. As you acclimate to the committee and work on sub committees, you should expect at least 12-15 hours a week-this can vary by position (Chair, Vice Chair or Member) and the sub committees you work on and the time of year. If you have questions, feel free to ask any member of the committee!

## **Town-wide committees**

School Committee members may be asked to serve on town-wide committees. In accordance with [Article XV of the Town By-Laws](#), there must be a School Committee member on the Capital Outlay Committee.

According to the Financial Policies (see [here](#)), two School Committee members shall serve on the Budget Balancing Committee. The past practice of the School Committee has been that the two members of the Budget Subcommittee serve on the BBC as well.

From time to time, there may be Ad-Hoc town-wide committees that are formed, such as the Joint Facilities Committee, or the Middle School Building Committee. The Middle School Building Committee is currently in existence and will be at least through school year 25-26.

## **Appendix C: Budget/Annual Budget Cycle**

The Town budget operates on a fiscal year that runs from July 1 to June 30. The Fiscal Year is named after the calendar year in which the fiscal year ends (i.e., FY23 runs from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023.) The budgeting process typically starts in January each year. [Linked](#) is an overview of the Town Budget Flow Chart; although it should be noted this process is actively under review of the Budget Balancing Committee for FY27 and beyond.

The School administration prepares a proposed budget for the School Committee to review. Separately, the Town's Director of Finance and Accounting prepares estimates of Town revenues and Shared Costs. Typically, the first estimates of revenues are made available in January after the Governor's Budget and the associated "cherry sheet" with preliminary local aid numbers are released. The Town-wide Budget Balancing Committee votes on target numbers for the size of the School, Facilities, and General Government Budgets. To learn more about the current FY26 budget process, you can review [NPS budget information](#), see the [Budget Calendar](#) NPS adhered to, and the [State's cherry sheet information](#). We encourage you to spend some time acclimating to this information. Although the School Committee approved the FY26 budget on March 26, 2025, once you join the School Committee in April, you will be part of our team preparing for Town Meeting in May.

Note that, in 2019, the Town approved an operational override. Prior to that override referendum, the School Committee signed a "pledge" that limits the growth of the school budget from year to year. The Override Pledge can be found [here](#). Although the Override Pledge has ended, it is important history and context for School Committee members to be aware of, since it will likely be referenced in ongoing meetings as the Town and NPS work on FY27 and beyond budgets.

It is the responsibility of the School Committee to approve a budget for the upcoming year. Once this budget is approved, the School Committee and School administration present the budget to the Finance Commission. The School Committee is also required by law to have a formal Budget Hearing. We held our Budget Hearing for FY26 on March 19, 2025.

Town money can only be appropriated by Town Meeting. Annual Town Meeting is convened on the second Monday in May. Town Meeting must vote to approve the bottom line of the School Budget; however, state law grants School Committees the authority to make budget transfers within the approved budget after Town Meeting has allocated the funds.

The School Committee is also responsible for monitoring the budget throughout the year to make sure that the money is spent appropriately. The School Committee must approve warrants to allow the payment of bills and the processing of payroll. Typically, the School Committee votes to authorize one member to sign warrants on behalf of the Committee. Please see section D of the policy manual for more information about the Fiscal Policies of the District and the responsibilities of the School Committee in this regard.

In addition to the Town appropriation, the Schools receive money from grants, federal title programs, and state reimbursement programs such as the special education circuit breaker money. All of these revenue streams must be approved by the School Committee before expenditure; and the School Committee receives quarterly reports from the business office on all funds: operating budget, grants, revolving funds, federal title monies, state reimbursement programs.

Some programs in the Schools such as Food Service are self-funded. The fees collected for lunches are kept in revolving funds which are used to pay the expenses of the program. Revolving funds are also used to offset portions of the costs for other programs that collect fees: transportation, preschool tuition, athletics, and extra-curricular fine arts.

## **Appendix D: School Committee Roles**

On The Norwood School Committee, there are three distinct roles that you may hold: Member, Vice Chair, or Chair of the Committee. While all have shared expectations and responsibilities, below is a brief overview of each position to give you an idea of what it entails. In your first year, you will serve as a member. Vice Chair and Chair are possible after you complete your first year.

**A Member** is someone who does not hold a position of leadership on the board. They are expected to read their packets & prepare for business meetings and executive sessions, as well as get involved in projects/tasks the board has outlined with its goals, and serve on other sub-committees, joint committees with the town, negotiating teams, and others as outlined previously. They may be asked to present or help present at business meetings or in executive session. Each member is also expected to meet regularly 1:1 with the superintendent.

**The Vice Chair**, along with the regular duties of a member, has the added responsibility of having to step in if the Chair, for whatever reason, cannot run the meeting or cannot conduct the other aspects of the chair position.

**The Chair** is described as the “Servant of the Assembly,” “First among equals,” and “Chief Volunteer” in training materials from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. The chair works closely with the superintendent to keep the committee organized and focused on the

district mission, vision, and goals. This means: (1) the chair and superintendent create the meeting agendas-topics and presenters; and (2) the chair also has the responsibility to ensure that the committee stays organized in regular yearly tasks by co-creating the Long Term Agenda with the superintendent.

In conjunction, the chair runs the business meetings and executive sessions. The chair appoints members to subcommittees with the approval of the full committee. The chair also meets with school counsel as needed, or grants the access to school counsel for other committee members when appropriate. Traditionally in Norwood, the chair coordinates Norwood School Committee specific workshops and trainings with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees; however all School Committee members may reach out individually to MASC with questions or to participate in their public workshops.

The chair is the spokesperson for the school committee and represents the committee at certain school events. In dealing with the media and with the public, it is important to remember that the chair represents the committee and not his or her own views. The chair can explain the votes and decisions the committee has made and the rationale behind those votes. The chair can talk about ongoing committee work, but should be wary of making predictions about outcomes. When an email or communication is addressed to the School Committee, it is the chair or vice chair who have the responsibility to respond as the representative of the board.

**Handbook Approved on March 26, 2025 by School Committee Members:**

Chair, Anne Marie Mazzola (Term ends April 2026)

Vice Chair, Teresa Stewart (Term ends April 2026)

Joan Giblin (Term ends April 2025)

David Hiltz, Jr (Term ends April 2027)

Kate Sibbing- Dunn (Term ends April 2025)