

# Selectboard Handbook



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# Selectboard Handbook

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## How To Use This Handbook

This handbook is designed for use by a municipality's legislative body (e.g., selectboard, city council, aldermen, village trustees, or prudential committee) or their support staff. In this manual we will use the term selectboard for consistency's sake, but the information contained within is applicable to any legislative body. This handbook is intended to focus your efforts navigating the wide range of MAC resources relevant to the selectboard's discharge of their duties. The information contained in the former publication, *The Selectboard Handbook*, has been updated and posted to the website as distinct resources organized by topic and are updated on an ongoing basis.

**This handbook explains the overarching context of the information for selectboards. While it is possible to download and print the full handbook, using it on the web will ensure you always are referencing the most current information.** This handbook will be regularly updated as we develop more resources and to account for changes in the law; therefore, we recommend reviewing previously printed materials for accuracy before you rely on the information.

Visit the [Municipal Assistance Center \(MAC\)](#) webpage to find in-depth information and resources from VLCT and other relevant organizations on various [municipal topics](#).



The Municipal Assistance Center attorneys and staff are here to help you. If you have any questions about your role as a member of a selectboard, city council, village board of trustees, or prudential committee, please call 800-649-7915, submit a question using the [Municipal Assistance Portal](#) (MAP), or email [info@vlct.org](mailto:info@vlct.org).

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**Disclaimer:** This resource is only intended to provide information and it does **NOT** constitute legal advice. Readers with specific legal questions are encouraged to contact an attorney. The use or downloading of this resource does **NOT** create an attorney-client relationship and will not be treated in a confidential manner.

If you have additional questions please use the ask a question button to submit them.

Ask a Question



# Roles and Responsibilities of the Selectboard

## Introduction

As a selectboard member, **you are responsible for the "general supervision of the affairs of the town"** and must ensure that all duties required of towns are performed when those duties are not committed by law to another town officer. [24 V.S.A. § 872](#).

At first glance, this authority might seem vague. However, the term "general supervision of the affairs of the town" has been interpreted broadly by the Vermont Supreme Court to touch upon almost every aspect of local government. This includes, among other things,

- setting compensation of town officers (elected and appointed) and town employees if voters have not;
- setting bonds of certain officers;
- appointing certain officers and, if allowed and necessary, removing them;
- setting and maintaining the municipal budget;
- overseeing town employees and negotiating with unions;
- creating ordinances and policies for the welfare and safety of the community;
- deciding certain legal matters as a quasi-court (e.g., vicious dog hearings or property assessment appeal hearings); and
- consulting with the town attorney, as needed.



The law provides that each town must have at least three selectboard members, but a town may elect up to two additional selectboard members if the voters so chose. [17 V.S.A. §§ 2649, 2650\(b\)](#). In towns with a three-member selectboard each elected member holds a three-year term. [17 V.S.A. §§ 2646\(4\), 2649](#). In those towns with a five-member selectboard, the answer is more complicated. Three members of the selectboard will hold three-year terms, but the remaining two members hold one and two-year terms respectively. 17 V.S.A. § 2650(b).

To help you understand and navigate the myriad expectations and often complex responsibilities of your position, we have compiled information and resources into this Selectboard Manual for quick reference and to share with other members of your board.

## Governance

As a member of the municipality's selectboard, you must understand some basic principles of Vermont municipal law to best serve your municipality. **This includes the sources, scope, and limits to your authority both as a local government and as a selectboard.**

The [Governance](#) topic page provides an overview of

- local government authority,
- municipal governance charters, and
- the selectboard's relationship with other statutory officials.

As you become familiar with your role and responsibilities, the resources found on [the Governance](#) page offer helpful information on a wealth of topics over which the selectboard has control, including filling vacancies in elected office, sovereign and qualified immunity, and finding the law so you can confirm you have authority to act



before you act.



### [Model Open Burn, Junk, and Solid Waste Ordinances](#)

April 29, 2025



### [Model Flag Policy](#)

March 11, 2025



### [Failure to Elect Officers Info Sheet](#)

March 10, 2025

- [Load More](#)





# Three Roles of the Selectboard

While state and federal government establishes and maintains three separate and distinct branch of government – **judicial, legislative, and executive** – a **Vermont selectboard serves all three of these roles** and sometimes all at the same meeting.

The main tools the selectboard uses to effectuate these powers are policies, ordinances, regulations, and bylaws. Visit our MAC [Policies and Ordinances](#) topic page for more information.

## Executive Powers of the Selectboard

**A selectboard's executive powers are those related to the administration and management of the town.** The primary tool for carrying out your executive functions is a policy. A policy is a statement regarding a course of action, guiding principle, procedure, or strategy designed to influence and determine decisions while conducting general municipal affairs. A policy is adopted by resolution (i.e., by majority vote of a legislative body at a duly warned meeting), making them easy to adopt and amend. Policies are executive in nature and oriented inwards to guide internal decision-making processes. Generally, policies apply to employees, town facilities or property, or the selectboard itself. We have models of many different policies available online found under their respective topic on the [MAC Home page](#).

## Legislative Power of the Selectboard

**The selectboard's legislative power is the ability to make, amend, and repeal local laws,** which will generally come in the form of an ordinance or bylaw. The State of



Vermont delegates some of its regulatory power to municipalities by expressly granting them the authority to adopt ordinances or bylaws to regulate certain subjects. A selectboard may not enact an ordinance unless the Legislature has expressly granted it the authority to adopt local legislation on that subject, but a Vermont selectboard's regulatory authority is quite broad. According to the Vermont Supreme Court, an ordinance is "an expression of the municipal will, affecting the conduct of the inhabitants generally, or of a number of them under some general designation." An ordinance must be adopted in a very specific way so, these are not as easily adopted or amended as a policy. We have many model ordinances available for your consideration, but we always strongly recommend a legal review be performed prior to final adoption or amendment of an ordinance or bylaw.

### **Judicial Powers of the Selectboard**

The selectboard has **judicial powers**, when it acts in a "quasi-judicial" capacity. During these proceedings, called hearings, selectboards will sit in judgment of the legal rights of parties by weighing the evidence and applying it to the relevant laws. Selectboards act in this capacity when conducting hearings on classifying roads, vicious dogs, tax assessment appeals, and requests for tax abatement, among others.

**For more information visit the related pages.**

- [Appendix: Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- [Topic Page: Governance](#)
- [Topic Page: Policies and Ordinances](#)
- [MAC Home](#)

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# Transparency Laws for Selectboards

Transparency is an essential element of open and democratic government. In Vermont, the primary means of providing transparency are the State's open meeting law, [1 V.S.A. §§ 310-314](#), and the public records law, [1 V.S.A. §§ 315-320](#). These laws implement the command of Chapter I, Article 6 of the Vermont Constitution that officers of government are "trustees and servants" of the people and are "at all times, in a legal way, accountable to them." Ultimately, the selectboard is responsible for ensuring the town's public bodies comply with these laws, as well as the town's conflict-of-interest policy.

All public bodies (e.g., boards, committees, and commissions) in local government must adhere to Vermont's Open Meeting Law. The law requires public bodies to notice all meetings, create and post agendas, take and post meeting minutes, conduct business in the open, and allow public comment at their meetings. Every municipality must adopt a conflict-of-interest policy containing certain criteria as prescribed by state law, and take steps to avoid and mitigate conflicts and bias in its decision-making. Finally, all municipalities must comply with requests to inspect and for copies of public records in accordance with the Public Records Act.

**For more information on each of these laws, visit the related pages:**

- [Appendix: Transparency](#)
- Topic Page: [Open Meeting Law](#),
- Topic Page: [Public Records Act](#)
- Topic Page [Conflicts of Interest and Ethics](#)



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# Finance for Selectboards

## Budget Management

Selectboards are responsible for planning and managing the budget throughout the year. In addition to signing orders for the treasurer to pay the bills for the municipality, they develop capital budgets with allotments for projects and major purchases, set the tax rate and due dates for the year, develop budget articles for the annual meeting, and have oversight over the current year budget. These extensive financial duties require an understanding of recommended basic governmental auditing and accounting practices (GAAP), borrowing and bonding, and budgeting. The [Finance](#) topic page has information on auditing municipal finances and a dozen model policies for your reference.

## Property Taxes and Tax Abatement

Selectboard members are de facto members of the Board of Civil Authority (BCA) and the Board of Abatement (BOA), along with other municipal officers. BCA members are tasked with hearing appeals of taxpayers who disagree with the Board of Listers' assessment of their property's taxable value. As members of the BOA, officers are responsible for reviewing property owners' requests for property tax relief. Learn more from the [Property Taxes](#) topic page which contains many resources, including toolkits for both BCAs and BOAs.

**For more information on each of these subjects, visit the related pages:**



- [Appendix: Finance](#)
- Topic Page: [Finance](#)
- Topic Page: [Property Taxes](#)

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# Town Meetings for Selectboards

Vermont town meeting is direct democracy practiced in its purest form. It is the key to town government, as voters determine the town business for the coming year.

Selectboards play a significant role in their municipality's annual town meeting and local elections, including:

- serving on the town's Board of Civil Authority;
- developing the town meeting warning;
- filling vacancies between elections;
- determining the proposed budget for the coming year;
- notifying registered voters and the public of informational meetings, elections, and annual and special meetings; and
- validating any errors in town meeting conduct or warning, if needed.

The [Town Meeting](#) topic page contains resources on a variety of town meeting subjects; in addition, the [Municipal Calendar](#) includes additional town meeting related deadlines.

**For more information on each of these subjects, visit the related pages:**

- [Appendix: Town Meeting](#)
- Topic Page: [Town Meeting](#)
- [Municipal Calendar](#)

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# Roads and Trails for Selectboards

Town roads and trails (also referred to as town highways) are under the general supervision and control of the selectboard of the town in which they are located. Town highways are divided into different classes, each class with its own maintenance requirements.

## Selectboards have the authority to

- lay out a new town highway or alter an existing one,
- regulate or restrict the use of highways and trails,
- set speed limits on municipal highways,
- name and address streets, and
- lower weight limits on its local roads and bridges.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**

- [Appendix: Roads and Trails](#)
- Topic Page: [Roads and Trails](#)

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# Human Resources for Selectboards

Selectboards are directly responsible for a broad range of personnel management and workplace safety matters (unless the municipality employs the municipal manager form of government). This includes

- setting the compensation of the municipality's officers and employees,
- establishing personnel policies,
- managing staff, and
- performing other human resource related responsibilities.

Select boards must do this all while adhering to state and federal employment laws and regulations. Hiring and managing employees is more complex than ever, given the frequent changes in state and federal law and increasing litigation between employer and employees.

To improve selectboard compliance with legal requirements and reduce the risk of employment practice lawsuits, PACIF's [Human Resources Consultation Program](#) helps members evaluate their needs and provide guidance so they can understand and implement sound employment practices. Its [EPL Referral Program](#) arranges for qualifying members to have a no-cost discussion about employment practices with a skilled legal firm.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**



- [Appendix: Human Resources](#)
- Topic Page: [Human Resources Consultation Program](#)
- [Employment Practic Liability Referral Program](#)

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# EPL Referral Program

PACIF's EPL Referral Program helps member municipalities avoid creating costly employment risks by facilitating free and timely legal consultation from qualified Vermont employment attorneys.

## EPL Referral Program Basics

- Call us at 800-649-7915 or email [EPLreferral@vlct.org](mailto:EPLreferral@vlct.org) and ask for an EPL referral. We will quickly follow up to discuss the details. If our internal employment experts aren't able to assist you directly, we will refer you to one of the Vermont municipal employment attorneys with whom we collaborate.
- PACIF will cover the cost of up to three (3) hours of legal assistance under this program. When a matter involves an employment separation, PACIF will pay for up to eight (8) hours of an attorney's time.

## Impressive Results

Members consistently comment that this program provides exceptional value. We aim to support leaders in uncertain moments and help them make sound decisions to manage their legal risks.

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# Dog and Domestic Pet Control for Selectboards

Animals are a frequent cause of concern and complaints from the public. State law directs how select boards may manage many animal issues, such as dog bites, rabies control, licensing, and cruelty to animals. In addition, the selectboards have authority to adopt ordinances regulating the keeping of domestic pets and wolf-hybrids, and to enforce many of the state statutes regarding domestic animals (e.g. cows, horses, etc.). The [Dog and Domestic Pet Control](#) topic page is available for reference.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**

- [Appendix: Dog and Domestic Pet Control](#)
- Topic Page: [Dog and Domestic Pet Control](#)

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# Land Use for Selectboards

Municipal land use planning is the process of assessing current conditions in a community, envisioning a desired future, and charting a course towards that future. Zoning regulations (typically called bylaws) and subdivision regulations are tools adopted by the selectboard to implement the plan's vision. Local planning and zoning administration involves various town officials. Most municipal officials have distinct roles that are delineated both by statute and by function. Within the local land use system, there are legislative, quasi-judicial, and administrative functions.

Depending on the town's structure, the following players are typically involved in municipal land use administration:

- the administrative officer ("zoning administrator"),
- planning commission,
- development review board, or zoning board of adjustment, and
- the selectboard.

Some municipalities have a robust professional planning staff if the demand requires it and the resources exist to support the positions. Other municipalities are supported entirely by the efforts of their part-time volunteer community. Regional planning commissions exist to support both. Selectboard members will oversee these appointed positions and planning and zoning staff. The selectboard also plays a role in the adoption, amendment, or repeal of the zoning bylaws and ultimately determines the approach to violation enforcement.



The selectboard plays an important role in developing a successful land use and implementation program in any municipality. One of its most important functions is to appoint and oversee these appointed positions and any planning and zoning staff, including the administrative officer (commonly referred to as the zoning administrator). In this capacity, the selectboard represents the voters, serves as the accountability mechanism, and ensures that the expectations of the position are being fulfilled. In addition to managing the people involved in the land use program, the selectboard retains much of the final authority over the adoption of the various non-regulatory documents (including the municipal plan), capital budget, and any regulatory tools, such as zoning and subdivision regulations.

Finally, it is crucial for the selectboard to maintain an ongoing relationship with the various land use officials. An open dialogue will foster a better understanding of land use planning and implementation in the community, and will help keep difficult situations from becoming outright political battles. Some municipalities have instituted annual or other regular meetings between the legislative body and the various boards and commissions in order to promote strong relationships and open communication. To this end, it is worth noting that the selectboard members of a rural town, or two appointees of the selectboard in an urban municipality, are ex-officio members of the planning commission. Visit the [Land Use](#) topic page for more information.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**

- [Appendix: Land Use](#)
- Topic Page: [Land Use](#)

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# Tree Law for Selectboards

The selectboard has the power "[t]o provide for the location, protection, maintenance, and removal of trees, plants, and shrubs . . . on or above the public highways and sidewalks, or other property of the municipality." 24 V.S.A. § 2291(3). To implement this, the selectboard must appoint a tree warden and may adopt an ordinance concerning trees. For more information, see the [Tree Law](#) page.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**

- [Appendix: Tree Law](#)
- Topic Page: [Tree Law](#)

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# Technology and Cybersecurity for Selectboards

Proper technology use and information security are paramount concerns for all manner of business and governmental entities. PACIF has created and compiled technology-related guidance, resources, training, and support for members. See the [Technology & Cybersecurity](#) page for more information.

**For more information on this subject, visit the related topic page:**

- [Appendix: Technology & Cybersecurity](#)
- Topic Page: [Technology & Cybersecurity](#)

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# Appendix: Selectboard Manual

## Selectboard Manual Resources

Jump to section: [Roles & Responsibilities](#) | [Transparency Laws](#) | [Finance](#) | [Town Meeting](#) | [Roads & Trails](#) | [Human Resources](#) | [Dog & Domestic Pet Control](#) | [Land Use](#) | [Tree Law](#) | [Technology & Cybersecurity](#)

### Roles & Responsibilities

Topic Page: [Governance](#)

#### Informational Resources

- [Finding the Law](#)
- [How Is a Municipal Ordinance Adopted, Amended, and/or Repealed?](#)
- [Ordinance Adoption, Amendment, and Repeal Toolkit](#)
- [Local Government Organizational Structures](#) (Town Manager/Administrator)
- [Vacancies in Elected Office FAQs](#)
- [Appointment of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers FAQs](#)
- [Sovereign Immunity](#)
- [Immunity for Public Officials](#)
- [Changing the Size of Your Selectboard](#)



- [Signing Orders for Payment](#)
- [Quick Guide to Charter Procedure](#)
- [Houselessness](#)

## Articles

[How Is a Municipal Ordinance Adopted, Amended, and/or Repealed?](#)

## Models and Templates

- [Model Rules of Procedure for Municipal Boards](#)

# Transparency Laws

Topic Page: [Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#)

## Informational Resources

- [Quick Guide to Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#)
- [Open Meeting Law FAQs](#)
- [COVID-19 Open Meeting Law FAQs](#)
- [Hybrid Public Meeting Toolkit](#)
- [Remote-Only Public Meetings Toolkit](#)
- [Avoiding Zoombombing During Virtual Public Meetings](#)
- [Signing Orders for Payment](#)

## Articles



- [Norwich Settles Lawsuit Over Whether Subcommittees are Subject to Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#)

## **Models and Templates**

- [Model Rules of Procedure for Municipal Boards](#)

## **Topic Page: [Public Records](#)**

### **Informational Resources**

- [Public Records Act FAQs](#)
- [Be Aware of First Amendment Audits](#)

## **Models and Templates**

- [Model Public Records Policy](#)

## **Topic Page: [Ethics and Conflicts of Interest](#)**

### **Informational Resources**

- [Conflicts In Land Use FAQs](#)
- [Chart of Incompatible Offices](#)

## **Articles**

- [Ask MAC: Do Selectpersons Have to be Impartial?](#)

## **Models and Templates**

- [Model Ethics and Conflicts of Interest Policy](#)
- [Model Social Media Policy](#)



- [Model Purchasing Policy](#)
- [Model Municipal Financial Policies](#)
- [Model Rules of Procedure for Municipal Boards](#)

## **Finance**

**Topic Page:** [Finance](#)

### **Informational Resources**

- [Internal Financial Controls Checklist for Municipalities](#)
- [Financial Auditing & Reporting](#)
- [Changing Your Municipal Budget Cycle](#)
- [Taxation and Budgets: 2022 Municipal Action Paper](#)
- [Annual Auditors' Report FAQs](#)
- [Signing Orders for Payment](#)
- [Helpful Links for Finance Officers](#)
- [Federal Funding Assistance Program](#)

### **Models and Templates**

- [Model RFP for Auditing Services](#)
- [Model Purchasing Policy](#)
- [Model Municipal Financial Policies](#)



# **Town Meeting**

Topic Page: [Town Meeting](#)

## **Informational Resources**

- [Quick Guide to Vermont Town Meeting](#)
- [Town Meeting 2023-2024 COVID-19 FAQs](#)
- [Elected Officers – Required and Optional](#)
- [Voter-Backed Petitions FAQs](#)
- [Australian Ballot Info Sheet](#)
- [Australian Ballot Checklist](#)
- [Remote Informational Hearing Toolkit](#)
- [Post Town Meeting Process Info Sheet](#)
- [Quick Guide to Warning Special Town Meetings](#)

## **Models and Templates**

- [Model Town Meeting Articles](#)
- [Model Town Meeting Warnings](#)
- [Model Social Services Appropriation Policy](#)
- [Model Australian Ballot Informational Hearing Notice](#)
- [Model Special Town Meeting Warnings for Ordinance Adoption](#)

# **Roads and Trails**



**Topic Page: [Roads and Trails](#)**

**Informational Resources**

- [Restricting Use of Town Highways](#)
- [Winter Road Maintenance](#)
- [Limiting Winter Highway Maintenance](#)
- [MUTCD Road Standards Update Designed to Improve Safety](#)

**Articles**

- [Are Residents Putting Snow on Your Town Highways?](#)

**Models and Templates**

- [Model ATV Ordinance](#)
- [Model Class 4 Highway Policy](#)
- [Model Snowmobile Ordinance](#)
- [Model Highway Access Policy](#)

## **[Human Resources](#)**

**Topic Page: [Human Resources Consultation Program](#)**

**Informational Resources**

- [Compensation and Benefits](#)
- [Recruitment and Hiring](#)



- [Hiring Toolkit](#)
- [Job Descriptions Toolkit](#)

## **Dog and Domestic Pet Control**

**Topic Page:** [Dog and Domestic Pet Control](#)

### **Informational Resources**

- [Vicious Dog and Domestic Pet Bite Hearings FAQs](#)
- [Vicious Dog and Domestic Pet Bite Hearings Toolkit](#)
- [Dog License Types and Fees](#)

### **Models and Templates**

- [Model Dog Control Ordinance](#)

## **Land Use**

**Topic Page:** [Land Use](#)

### **Informational Resources**

- [Conflicts In Land Use FAQs](#)
- [Open Meeting Law and Land Use Hearings](#)



- [Short-Term Rental Regulations](#)
- [HOME Act Changes Zoning Bylaw Process in Rural Towns](#)

## **Tree Law**

**Topic Page:** [Tree Law](#)

### **Informational Resources**

- [Tree Law Roles and Responsibilities](#)
- [Tree Law FAQs](#)
- [New Tree Warden Laws in Effect](#)

## **Technology and Cybersecurity**

**Topic Page:** [Technology & Cybersecurity](#)

### **Informational Resources**

- [Hybrid Public Meeting Toolkit](#)
- [Remote-Only Public Meetings Toolkit](#)
- [KnowBe4 Reimbursement Program](#)

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