

Norwich Planning Commission Statement on Subcommittees Adopted 4/9/24

In performing its work, the Norwich Planning Commission wishes to strike a reasonable balance between encouraging public participation and providing for orderly and consistent conduct of the town's business.

Topical subcommittees have a long and successful history of being used to incorporate a wide range of opinions from many interested town residents.

During recent Selectboard conversations, some Selectboard members argued that more control over such groups is needed, including requiring all members of any group working on any aspect of the town's business to be officially appointed by the Selectboard.

Not even considering the time commitment that would be required by the SB to review every applicant, this change would be harmful to public participation and is unnecessary by statute. The message sent to community members would be clear; you need permission to volunteer your time. This would discourage participation of residents in town affairs and insult the many residents who devote huge amounts of time to volunteer activities associated with subcommittees of the Planning Commission and other town groups.

This level of centralized control is also unnecessary given that Planning Commission subcommittees operate under the following guidelines. Most importantly, these are advisory groups without independent authority to make decisions. They are informal extensions of the PC to help widen our capability and engage town-wide participation. Any specific ideas and proposals are brought back to the full Planning Commission for a vote and official decision.

Norwich Planning Commission Subcommittee Policy

A group can be chartered by the PC as a standing or ad-hoc subcommittee devoted to a specific task or topic.

They shall:

- Create a charter statement to be approved by the PC describing the group's focus area and overall goals.
- Include at least one member of the Planning Commission, with a target membership of at least 5 resident members.
- Adhere strictly to all OML regulations for posting of meeting agendas, minutes, etc.
- Regularly update the PC on their activities and initiatives

The PC reserves the right to dissolve a subcommittee when it is no longer needed or to incorporate the work back into the full PC. We will maintain a list of active subcommittees on the PC page of the town website.

These subcommittees advise the Planning Commission on their respective topics. The PC maintains the decision-making authority over any proposals. A PC subcommittee cannot act as an independent entity representing the Town of Norwich.