

# VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 9, 2023

**To:** Planning and Zoning Commission

**Through:** Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development

**From:** Valerie Berstene, Village Planner

**Topic:** Right-Sizing Meeting Minutes

## BACKGROUND

At the February 23, 2023 meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Commission Members and Staff discussed the content of minutes from the previous meeting. The discussion highlighted a disconnect between Commission Members' expectations and deliverables from Staff.

The purpose of this memo is to:

1. Identify the key objectives of meeting minutes to build consensus between Staff and Commission Members;
2. Provide a summary of findings on best practices for meeting minutes; and
3. Provide the Commission with several approaches to documenting meeting minutes.
4. Frame a discussion to reach a point of consensus on the matter.

## OBJECTIVES

To facilitate reaching a consensus, it is important to start with a common end goal. For the purpose of this discussion, these end goals are framed as the objectives of the meeting minutes. These objectives are the result of research into meeting minutes and the most common recommendations for best practices. The best practice objectives for meeting minutes are:

1. Record actions taken. Document votes, who made the motion, who seconded, and the roll call. "There is no object in reporting the debates; the duty of the secretary, in such cases, is mainly to record what is "done" by the assembly, and not what is said by the members." – Robert's Rules of Order
2. Document the facts that shaped the action. Minutes should include the points of discussion that shaped the action. This serves future staff and commission members by creating a concise record of what factors were considered in a decision. Minutes are an impartial, unbiased record. "There can be a lot of debate that happens at a meeting as people offer their opinions, research, and experience, which should not be recorded. The minutes should summarize the outcome of the discussion, not every single point that was considered." – Legal Zoom

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3. Identify and track open items. List items of new business, future action, and highlights of the discussion.
4. Provide a record for people who were absent. This also creates a public record that is subject to the Freedom of Information Act. By recording only the facts Commission Members are protected from their opinions being misconstrued or taken out of context.

“The intent is not to re-create the discussion but to capture the key points and the specific commitments for each topic so that non-attendees have a sense of what happened and all have a record of who will take further action.” – Harvard Business Review

### TYPES OF MEETING MINUTES

#### 1. Quasi-Transcript

This approach to documenting meeting minutes is common and akin to what the Homewood Planning and Zoning Commission meeting minutes may have been in recent years. This captures in-depth detail of discussion points, beyond the best practices of recording action items, decision-making processes, and tracking open items.

Pros:

- Creates a detailed record resembling blow-by-blow discussion. May be valuable documentation to current members.

Cons:

- Requires significant time resources from staff to transcribe, edit, and review.
- Introduces the risk of misrepresenting talking points by being so detailed.
- Discussions are not always linear, so transcript-like minutes can be confusing to follow.
- Harder to distinguish between facts and opinions expressed.

#### 2. Summary, By Chronology

This approach to documenting meeting minutes is a simplified version of a Quasi-Transcript approach and is very common. This follows the discussion as it unfolded, but pares down the documentation to those items related to recording action items, decision-making processes, and tracking open items.

Pros:

- Creates a concise record.
- Requires moderate time resources from staff to summarize, edit, and review.

Cons:

- Discussions are not always linear, so chronological minutes can be confusing to follow.
- Risks veering back towards Quasi-Transcript.

#### 3. Summary, By Topic

This approach to documenting meeting minutes is a further departure from a Quasi-Transcript approach. This is used within professional organizations more commonly than by public bodies. This approach provides the same level of information as a Summary By Chronology, but rather than following the flow of the discussion as it occurred, this groups the common topic items together.

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### Pros:

- Creates a concise record.
- Requires moderate time resources from staff to summarize, edit, and review.
- Consolidates discussion by topic, providing an easy reference for anyone absent from the meeting or to serve as a future reference by Staff or Commission Members.
- Highlights the important talking points by grouping them by topic.

### Cons:

- Summarizing by topic would not align with the flow of a recording.
- Requires slightly more critical thought from staff to prepare.

#### 4. Record of Actions

This approach to documenting meeting minutes is less common among deliberating bodies, such as the Planning and Zoning Commission, and may be more commonly used by Village Boards. This approach captures a record of only action items and decisions made, referring to a recording of the meeting for all other details.

### Pros:

- Least amount of time required from Staff to document.
- Minimizes risk of misrepresenting talking points by not including them.

### Cons:

- Relies upon clear audio/video recordings and access to those recordings in the future.
- Does not offer a summary for anyone absent from the meeting or to serve as a future reference by Staff or Commission Members. It is less likely someone will watch an entire video/audio recording to get the highlights of what happened.