

A guide to writing, approving, and archiving minutes
for those who write meeting minutes for city boards and committees (BCs).

The written story of the city's BC work should be *action-oriented* with *brief summaries* of discussions. Present and future readers should be able to quickly and clearly identify actions taken and have an idea of how the conversations went. Verbatim or overly detailed minutes are not efficient or necessary.

1. Writing Minutes

Meeting minutes are an efficient historical summary of a group's actions and decisions.

What to include: who/what/where/when. Use a standard template to ensure that the information documented is consistent and includes the basics:

- A. **Name of the body** and the **type** of meeting (regular, work, special, etc.).
- B. **Date & place** of the meeting and when it **begins & ends** (adjourns).
- C. **Members** of the body who are present and absent, and names of city staff present. A list of representatives from other groups and special guests may also be included.
 - i. Titles should be included in the members list. Ex: the chair and secretary.
 - ii. Whether a quorum is present. (By providing a list of all members, both present and absent, the presence of a quorum is documented.)
 - iii. Pronouns. It is the city's practice that gender specific pronouns (she/her, he/him) not be used in BC minutes. This is to ensure that all feel welcome and included and to prevent the minutes writer from guessing a speaker's preferred pronouns. See attached handout on general neutral language.
- D. **Standing agenda items.** It is recommended that BCs use a standard agenda order. This is so members, staff, and the public know how a meeting will flow and when they may expect to speak. For a general order, the city has adopted Robert's Rules of Order as a guide (attached). Basic agenda items to include:
 - i. Approval of previous meeting minutes.
 - ii. When reports are given.
 - iii. When public comment will be taken.
- E. **Motions** are the most formal action taken by a BC and must be documented in the minutes. Include: the texts of motions considered by the body (as finally voted on), and what the body did (passed, defeated, postponed etc.).
 - i. In Milwaukie we note the members who moved and seconded, the vote total, and how each member voted.

Ex: It was moved by X and seconded by Y to approve the resolution in support of divestment from fossil fuel industries. Motion passed with the following vote: Councilors Falconer, Batey, Nicodemus, and Hyzy and Mayor Gamba voting "aye." [5:0]

Minutes are Not: verbatim, personal, cumbersome. While we appreciate the instinct to capture as much of the meeting as possible, such a practice is not sustainable and is inefficient for the writer and the reader. The following should not be included:

- F. Things that didn't happen don't belong.** Sometimes after the meeting a member wants to put something in the minutes that didn't happen. Don't do it! Minutes are the official and legal record of your meeting. It is crucial that they be accurate.
- G. Detailed discussion doesn't belong.** The purpose of minutes is to record the actions taken by the body. Yet somehow there is a tide that sweeps people away into writing down what Member A said, and then what Member B said. [Read the Jurassic Parliament blog post about why this is a bad idea.](#) In Milwaukie we do provide a summary of the discussion. The tricky part can be writing an efficient summary while not getting into the back-and-forth of a conversation.
- H. Personal remarks don't belong.** It is a big mistake to include personal opinions in the minutes. The writer must not editorialize, and members' personal remarks should not be included. [Read the Jurassic Parliament blog entry](#) for an example of the problems this can present.
- I. Putting something "on the record" – don't do it, usually.** Board members and elected officials sometimes want to put something "on the record." Including something in the minutes is a privilege of the body, and technically speaking, a board or council could vote to allow this. Usually, don't do it. Turning the record of official actions into a platform for opinions is a mistake.
 - i. Note:** in Milwaukie it has been the practice to include certain things:
 - Example A: when Council introduces a new resolution at a meeting without having included it in the agenda or meeting packet. Staff recommends the entire resolution be read out loud once during the meeting and included word-for-word in the minutes.
 - Example B: when someone submits a written comment and asked someone else to read it for them. While the submitted written comments would be included in the meeting record, we have included read statements in full in the minutes.
- J. Details about motion amendments don't belong.** This is a Robert's Rules of Order recommendation and one that does not come up very often in Milwaukie. The writer must keep careful track of amendments during discussion. Once the motion is adopted, however, the details of who proposed what do not belong in the minutes. Instead, this phrase can be used: "After discussion and amendment, the following motion was adopted..."

2. The Approval Process

- A. **Write & Review.** Once written, minutes may need to be reviewed by staff or the BC chair – but not in all cases. Each BC may develop an appropriate review process prior to presenting a set of minutes for consideration and approval by the entire BC.
- B. **Vote to approve.** Once ready, the minutes should be placed on an upcoming agenda for approval. This should be an action item with the BC voting (verbally is fine) to approve the minutes. This gives the BC a chance to weigh-in and make any corrections to their official record. By acknowledging and voting on approving the minutes, the BC places a legal seal on the minutes as the official record.
 - i. **Approval Timeline.** Each BC should determine what an appropriate turnaround timeline should be and try to stick to it. Some BCs meet monthly so it may be feasible for a set of minutes to be ready for approval at the next meeting.

Example: Staff’s goal is to write and present City Council minutes within two meetings. This is a workable goal that balances staff’s workload and the need to be transparent and provide the public with the record in a timely manner.
- C. **Signing.** The minute writer should sign the approved minutes. As the creator of the record, the writer signature is sufficient – be it city staff or BC member.

3. The Archival Process.

Meeting minutes, along with the agenda and packet materials, are a permanent record and must be retained forever. Appropriately storing approved minutes is the most critical step.

- A. **HPRM.** The city stores meeting records in Hewlett-Packard Enterprise Records Manager (HPRM). After minutes are approved, they and the agenda and packet should be entered in this system. BC staff liaisons should work with OCR to ensure this is done.
 - i. **Digital Archives.** Through the [Digital Archives on the city’s website](#), records can be published in the public facing web portal so anyone can search and view them. Staff liaisons can work with the OCR to ensure this step is taken.
- B. **Online.** It’s city practice to publish approved minutes on the city’s [BC’s meeting page](#).
- C. **Audio/video recordings.** If a meeting is audio/video recorded, the recording is a public record and must be retained for 12 months after the approval of the written minutes.
 - i. **Inform:** If you chose to record a public meeting you must inform all meeting participants that it is being recorded.
- D. **Paper copies.** Once the approved minutes are stored in HPE Records Manager they become the official record copy. All other copies are reference only and may be deleted or recycled once they are no longer needed.

Sample Minutes: check out the March 2, 2021, City Council [work session](#) and [regular session!](#)

Attached: Gender Neutral Language Handout

Gender neutral language

The use of gender-neutral language is meant to ensure that all participants in the city’s public meetings feel welcomed and included in the conversation. It is also meant to decrease the chance that a minute writer unintentionally assumes the incorrect preferred pronouns for a meeting participant. It is the city’s policy that **BC minutes should avoid gender-specific language wherever possible.**

- **Remove:** Mr., Ms., Mrs., and Miss.
- **Retain** gender-neutral titles: Councilor, Commissioner, Mayor, Chair, Vice-Chair.

Minute-takers should be mindful and use gender-neutral pronouns, such as ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’, or ‘themselves’, instead of gendered pronouns such as ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘hers’, ‘himself,’ ‘herself’.

The use of masculine words such as ‘he’ and ‘manpower’ can give the impression that women are excluded. While some may note that masculine words refer to all, the impression that matters is that of the reader, not the writer.

Using non-gender specific language in minutes helps the writer summarize discussions. By writing in broader terms, minutes are more focused on the group discussion and actions, which supports the city’s overall preference for efficient, action-oriented minutes.

Principal	Example	Suggested alternative
Use ‘they’ instead of ‘he’ or ‘she’.	Each respondent was asked whether he wished to participate.	Respondents were asked whether they wished to participate.
Change the sentence to avoid the need to state a gender.	The member should be given time to familiarize himself with the material.	Ample time should be allowed for the member to become familiar with the material.
Change to gender neutral alternatives.	The manpower needed to complete the task was estimated at two employees.	The workforce needed to complete the task was estimated at two employees.

Examples from City of Milwaukie minutes:

Principal	Example	Suggested alternative
Do not use gender-specific titles.	Mr. Stauffer polled the Council.	Stauffer polled the Council.
Use ‘they’ instead of ‘he’ or ‘she’	Kolias reviewed the project criteria. She explained that the developer proposed fewer structures.	Kolias reviewed the project criteria. They explained that the developer proposed fewer structures.
Change the sentence to avoid the need to state a gender.	He reviewed the applicable city and state standards.	Staff reviewed the applicable city and state standards.