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# STATE OF MINNESOTA

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Article for *Minnesota Township Insider*

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### Meeting Minutes

*By Rebecca Otto, State Auditor*

The Office of the State Auditor (OSA) receives questions from township officials about their township's meeting minutes. Minnesota law contains clear requirements for meeting minutes, yet a township's board still has discretion over some aspects of their meeting minutes.

#### What are Meeting Minutes?

Minutes are a written record of a meeting taken during the meeting. Minnesota law requires that minutes of township meetings be taken at the meeting and maintained by the township. Minutes serve several uses in addition to serving as the official record of the meeting. Minutes are reviewed to determine if actions taken at the meeting meet statutory requirements. When appropriate, auditors review the minutes of a governing body when performing financial and compliance audits.

Minutes typically describe who is present and what is discussed and acted upon at the meeting. Minutes may be defined as a record of the "proceedings" of a township board, which Minnesota law defines to include (at minimum):

- The subject matter of a motion;
- The persons making and seconding a motion;
- The roll call vote on a motion;
- The character of resolutions or ordinances offered, including a brief description of their subject matter; and
- Whether the motion to approve a resolution or ordinance was defeated or adopted.

Minnesota law also requires that minutes include the individual votes of each member of the board on any action, including each appropriation of money other than "payments of judgments, claims, and amounts fixed by statute."

Audio or video recordings of meetings are not meeting minutes and are not a substitute for meeting minutes. With certain exceptions, however, a governing body must electronically record all closed meetings at its own expense.

## **How Detailed Should Minutes Be?**

The decision regarding how elaborate or extensive the minutes should be is up to the township board's discretion. The minutes do not need to record every word of the discussions at a meeting. Minutes should not be cluttered with unnecessary detail that might make it more difficult for someone to review the minutes at a later date. Minutes become a record of the proceedings: they should never reflect the clerk's or secretary's opinion on anything said or done at the meeting.

There will be instances where it would be wise to include other information in the minutes. For example, a township board's reasons for reaching a particular decision may be important if in the future there is a challenge to an action the board has taken. In those cases, the minutes should include all findings of fact, conclusions, and reasons for the conclusions that the board reaches.

## **Recommendations**

The OSA often reviews meeting minutes. Our office has a number of recommendations for information that should be included in meeting minutes. Those recommendations include:

- Describe the type of meeting (regular, special, emergency, etc);
- Identify the type of group that is meeting (*i.e.*, the township board or a committee);
- Note the date and place the meeting was held; and
- Provide a listing of all bills (including per diems) allowed or approved for payment, noting the recipient, purpose and amount.

We also recommend that the minutes be signed by the clerk or secretary. Meeting minutes should be approved by the town board, usually at the next meeting after board members have had a chance to review them for accuracy. The minutes should be signed and dated by a designated member of the board to indicate that they are the official meeting minutes. The approved minutes are the official record of the proceeding.

For the full listing of recommendations, see our Office Statement of Position, "Meeting Minutes." You can find it on our website at [www.osa.state.mn.us](http://www.osa.state.mn.us). Under the "For Local Officials" menu item, select "Statements of Position" and go to the section "Data Practices & Record Maintenance." Click on "Meeting Minutes". The link will open a copy of the Statement of Position.