

April 16, 2025

To the Voters of Oakham:

As part of the upcoming June 24, 2025, Annual Town Meeting, a Citizens Petition was submitted today to the Board of Selectmen exceeding the required number of 10 voter signatures. This petition proposes a new town bylaw to require Online Posting of Meeting Agendas, Timely Approval and Posting of Meeting Minutes, and Remote Participation in Public Meetings, helping to ensure greater accessibility, transparency, and community engagement.

**Why this matters:**

Not all residents or elected or appointed officials can attend meetings in person due to work, health, or family obligations. This bylaw is about making local government more accessible for all—allowing flexibility to boards, commissions and committees and ensuring residents can stay informed and involved.

**Flexibility and Exceptions:**

As with all town bylaws, there must be practical considerations. That's why Section 7 of the proposal outlines clear exceptions, including:

- Executive sessions
- Emergency meetings
- Technical issues beyond control

I have additionally submitted to the Board of Selectmen my written intention to propose an amendment to Section 7 on the Town Meeting floor, which offers a case-by-case flexibility option. You can see the proposed amendments below in bold italics.

Section 7. Exceptions

- This bylaw shall not apply to:
  - Executive Sessions exempt from public disclosure.
  - Emergency Meetings where posting compliance is not feasible, in accordance with the Open Meeting Law.
  - ***Remote Participation and Audio/Visual Recording and Archiving of meetings affected by unavoidable technical issues***, provided a good faith effort is made and the issue is documented in the meeting minutes.
    - ***Board of Registrars / Election Officials, which are governed by state and federal election laws. Certain processes may not allow for remote or recorded access.***
    - ***Certain Advisory or Temporary Ad Hoc Committees, as some short-term or informal committees may not meet the criteria for remote access unless established as a public body under the Open Meeting Law.***
- ***In all cases, any public body of the Town of Oakham—including but not limited to elected and appointed Boards, Committees, and Commissions—wishing to request an exemption to this bylaw must submit a written request to the Board of Selectmen for annual approval.***

Next Steps:

The petition must first be approved by Town Counsel. If so, it will be officially presented for discussion and vote at the Annual Town Meeting. As always, any registered Oakham voter may make amendments or speak on articles from the floor, so long as they don't change the article's scope.

Please reach out if you have questions or feedback—I welcome community input and respectful dialogue on this important step toward a more accessible government and engaged community. I can be reached at [aaronlanglois@me.com](mailto:aaronlanglois@me.com)

With appreciation,



Aaron Langlois

# Proposed Citizen's Petition as submitted to the Board of Selectmen on April 16, 2025

**\*Subject to amendments from the floor that the moderator determines do not change the article's intended scope.**

## For Town of Oakham voter consideration on June 24, 2025, at the Annual Town Meeting

### Online Posting of Meeting Agendas, Timely Approval and Posting of Meeting Minutes, and Remote Participation in Public Meetings

***To see if the Town will vote to adopt the following bylaw to require the online posting of meeting agendas, timely approval and posting of meeting minutes, and remote participation in meetings, or take any other action relative thereto:***

#### **Section 1. Purpose**

This bylaw is enacted to promote transparency, accessibility, and accountability in local government. It ensures that Oakham residents have timely access to meeting agendas, can remotely observe public meetings, and can review approved meeting minutes online. These requirements support compliance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and reflect the town's commitment to open government.

#### **Section 2. Applicability**

This bylaw applies to all public bodies of the Town of Oakham, including but not limited to elected and appointed Boards, Committees, and Commissions subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (M.G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18–25).

#### **Section 3. Posting of Agendas**

All meeting agendas must be:

- Posted online on the Town of Oakham's official website, no later than 48 hours prior to the meeting, excluding weekends and legal holidays.

Agendas must be in a readable format including the name of the Board of Committee and the date and time of the meeting.

#### **Section 4. Approval and Posting of Meeting Minutes**

All public bodies shall approve meeting minutes in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, at the next feasible meeting. Once approved, the minutes shall be:

- Submitted to the Town Clerk within 5 business days of approval.
- Uploaded to the Town of Oakham website within 7 calendar days of submission to the Town Clerk.

#### **Section 5. Remote Participation**

All covered public bodies shall offer live remote participation options for meetings, including but not limited to:

- Real-time video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Teams)
- Teleconferencing with public call-in capability
- The way an individual can access the remote conferencing platform must be on the meeting agenda

This requirement may be waived only if technology is unavailable or temporarily non-functional.

#### **Section 6. Audio/Visual Recording and Archiving**

All covered public bodies shall audio and/or visually record all meetings and shall make such recordings available to the public through the Town website or other widely accessible platforms within 7 calendar days of the meeting. Recordings shall be retained for a minimum of 90 days following posting or as required by law.

#### **Section 7. Exceptions** \* Amendments to be offered to add additional flexibility as seen on page 1

This bylaw shall not apply to:

- Executive sessions exempt from public disclosure.
- Emergency meetings where posting compliance is not feasible, in accordance with the Open Meeting Law.
- Meetings affected by unavoidable technical issues, provided a good faith effort is documented in the minutes.

#### **Section 8. Implementation and Oversight**

The Board of Selectmen and Town Clerk shall coordinate implementation of this bylaw. Designated staff or volunteers may be assigned to assist with posting and technical support. Public bodies may request assistance as needed.

#### **Section 9. Effective Date**

This bylaw shall take effect upon approval by the Attorney General as required under M.G.L. Chapter 40, Section 32.