

CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

Plymouth Select Board

August 11, 2026

PURPOSE

- The Town of Plymouth has always expected elected and appointed officials, and members of the public attending Town meetings and events, to act with respect, integrity and civil behavior
- In the past year, several incidents occurred that the public and many Town officials believed warranted corrective action, however, the Town had no official policy for filing complaints or taking disciplinary action
- This policy clearly communicates expectations, procedures for filing complaints, and what actions a board or committee can take

PROCESS

- Internal team reviewed conduct policies adopted by the Planning Board and School Committee, researched policies from peer communities, reviewed legal precedent, and drafted policy
- Review team of Chairs of Planning Board, School Committee, and Committee of Precinct Chairs met to discuss and provide feedback
- Select board members met with Town Moderator to review and get feedback
- All members of the review team and the Town Moderator support the policy presented tonight

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

- Clarifies expected conduct for elected and appointed officials in relation to:
 - The Community
 - Other Elected and Appointed Officials
- Clarifies expected conduct for individuals speaking at public meeting
- Provides guidelines for filing a complaint with the appropriate board, committee or commission
- Describes disciplinary options including public censure of an elected or appointed official and declining to reappoint the individual to his/her seat

NEXT STEPS

- Meet with staff to develop a roll out plan that will include identifying:
 - Appropriate audiences
 - Distribution channels
 - Acknowledgement forms
 - Other forms/process information
- Communicate to the public



TOWN OF PLYMOUTH

26 Court Street
Plymouth, Massachusetts 02360

Title	Civil Conduct Policy
Date Approved	August 11, 2026

I. MISSION OF THE TOWN OF PLYMOUTH

The Town of Plymouth values respect, integrity and civil behavior, and expects all employees, appointed members of all boards and committees, elected officials, and members of the public in attendance at Town-sponsored events/meetings, to act with such respect, integrity and civil behavior. The Town recognizes that all individuals elected and/or appointed by the Town must maintain and enforce respectful discourse with their fellow elected and/or appointed members, with those who work for the Town, with those who volunteer their time and services on behalf of the Town, and members of the public, by striving at every meeting, forum or other official interaction, to treat every person fairly and with respect regardless of any differences of opinion.

II. APPLICABILITY OF THIS CIVIL CONDUCT POLICY

This policy provides a centralized standard of civil conduct for all elected and appointed officials in the Town. It shall apply to all elected and appointed officials acting on behalf of the Town, and covers all of their actions and communications, whether spoken or written, including, but not limited to, all electronic communications and social media.

This policy serves as the standard for achieving and maintaining a high level of public confidence, trust, and professional respect with regard to how the Town of Plymouth's elected and appointed officials and employees conduct business. This policy is intended to define and create a centralized understanding with regard to standards of civil conduct.

III. CIVIL CONDUCT POLICY

All Town elected and appointed officials must commit to acting honestly, conscientiously, reasonably, and in good faith at all times in all matters related to their responsibilities, the interests of the Town, and the welfare of its residents and businesses. They must strive to maintain a tone of collegiality and professionalism, and acknowledge that there may sometimes be good-faith disagreements concerning the best interests of the Town.

All Town elected and appointed officials must refrain from communicating or acting in a disrespectful, abusive and/or threatening manner towards members of the community, other elected or appointed officials, the Town Administrator, or Town staff. Further, all elected and appointed officials of the Town must assume the following responsibilities:

A. Conduct Generally and in Relation to the Community

1. Be well informed concerning the local and state duties of an elected or appointed official, or commission/committee/board member.
2. Never purport to represent the opinion of their commission/committee/board except when specifically authorized by a recorded vote to do so.
3. Accept their position as a means of unselfish public service – not to benefit personally, professionally or financially from their position.
4. Demonstrate respect for the public.
5. Refrain from demeaning, discriminatory, or harassing behavior and speech directed toward others.
6. Safeguard confidential information.
7. Conduct themselves so as to maintain public confidence in our local government.
8. Conduct official business in such a manner that they cannot be improperly influenced in the performance of official duties.
9. Unless specifically exempted, conduct the business of the public in a manner that promotes open and transparent government.
10. Comply as fully as possible with all Town policies/applicable laws.

B. Conduct in Relation to Other Elected and Appointed Officials

1. Value a diversity of views and opinions.
2. Critique ideas, rather than individuals.
3. Refrain from demeaning, discriminatory, or harassing behavior and speech directed toward others.
4. Refrain from disruptive or disrespectful conduct during others' presentations.
5. Respect the process for meeting participation, including the appropriate manner to make a public comment.

6. Disclose all potential conflicts of interest when first speaking.
7. Treat all members of the commission/committee/board to which they belong with kindness and respect despite differences of opinion.
8. Participate and interact in official meetings with dignity and decorum.
9. Attend all meetings to assure a quorum and promptly notify the chairperson should they for any reason be unable or unwilling to continue to serve. Formal notice to resign from a commission/committee/board requires written notification to the Town Clerk.
10. Recognize that action at official legal meetings is binding, and that they alone cannot bind the commission/committee/board outside of such meetings.
11. Refrain from making statements or promises as to how they will vote on quasi-judicial matters that will come before the commission/committee/board.
12. Make decisions only after all facts and opinions on a question have been presented and discussed.

C. Guidelines for Individuals Speaking at Public Meetings

1. The chairperson of the commission/committee/board is responsible for conducting all public meetings in an orderly and peaceable manner.
2. Members of the commission/committee/board may speak only with the permission of the chairperson. To maintain an orderly and peaceable meeting, all speakers must identify themselves by name and address prior to speaking.
3. All remarks shall be addressed to or through the chairperson or to the commission/committee/board as a whole.
4. All persons addressing the commission/committee/board must conduct themselves in a peaceable and orderly manner. Such persons may not make true threats of violence or incite imminent lawless conduct by others.
5. Speakers are encouraged to refrain from making any personal, impertinent, unduly repetitive, slanderous, or profane remarks. Speakers are further encouraged to respect the views and opinions of others.
6. Individuals in attendance at a public meeting may not interrupt recognized speakers or members of the commission/committee/board. Further, such individuals are encouraged to refrain from engaging in disorderly or boisterous conduct, including the utterance of loud, threatening, or abusive language; whistling; stamping of feet; or other acts which disrupt or otherwise impede the orderly conduct of any meeting.

7. If any person disrupts the proceedings of a public meeting, the chairperson shall give the person a clear warning to cease such disruption. If, after a clear warning, the person continues to be disruptive, the chairperson may order the person to withdraw. If the person so ordered fails to withdraw, the chairperson may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person from the meeting.
8. Whenever the public is allowed to participate in remote public meetings, the same rules and guidelines that apply to in-person meetings apply to their remote counterparts.
9. Comments made during public comment sessions do not reflect the views or the positions of the commission/committee/board before which the member of the public is speaking. Because of constitutional free speech principles, commissions/committee/boards do not have the authority to prevent or limit all speech that may be upsetting or offensive during such sessions.

IV. ENFORCEMENT

This Civil Conduct Policy is intended to be self-enforcing, with elected and appointed officials, and members of commissions/committees/boards, being familiar with its provisions. Elected and appointed officials, and commission/committee/board members themselves, have primary responsibility to ensure standards are met. In addition to any other remedies or enforcement options available under the law, each commission/board/committee may vote to censure any elected or appointed member, and the appointing authority may decline to reappoint an individual who violates any provision of this Civil Conduct Policy.

To file a complaint for a violation of the Civil Conduct Policy, contact the chair of the commission/committee/board to which the member belongs. If the complaint is against the chair of a commission/committee/board, contact the Select Board at selectmen@plymouth-ma.gov. If the complaint is against the Chair of the Select Board, the matter will be reviewed and discussed by the entire Select Board in Executive Session, if warranted.

If an elected or appointed official is accused of violating any provision of this Civil Conduct Policy, the commission/committee/board that the official represents or, if applicable, the appointing authority, may take such action as is authorized by law as it deems fit, or it may vote upon request of the Town Manager or on its own to refer the matter to a neutral third party qualified to investigate the alleged conduct. The neutral third party shall promptly investigate the matter and report back findings of fact and recommendations to the Town Manager. The Town Manager shall share the reported findings and recommendations with the commission/committee/board, which shall then take such action as is authorized by law and as it deems fit in response to the reported findings. These remedies shall be in addition to, and not in substitution for, any other remedies that may be available by law.

Signed By:

Chair, Select Board

Town Manager

Date

Date