

Rules for Meetings - Middle Ocmulgee Water Planning Council

Rule 1: Purpose of rules

A. These rules of conduct specify expectations and meeting processes to guide Water Planning Councils and their members in development of recommended Water Development and Conservation Plans (WDCP). These rules are subordinate to the following: (1) regional water planning guidance provided by EPD, (2) the MOA between the Middle Ocmulgee Council, EPD, and DCA, and (3) the Operating Procedures adopted by the Middle Ocmulgee Council.

Rule 2: Meeting Roles

A. The Chair of the Council will preside at Council meetings. The Chair's responsibilities include working with the Regional Planning Contractor to prepare draft agenda, facilitate Council deliberations, and ensure productive discussion at Council meetings. The Chair will also work with the Regional Planning Contractor to guide the Council through consensus decision-making and voting processes.

B. The Vice-Chair of the Council will perform the Chair's duties in the former's absence and will be responsible for reviewing and keeping copies of meeting summaries and decisions recorded by the Regional Planning Contractor.

C. Council members will actively participate in Council deliberations, following guidelines for communications listed below. Any member can offer verbal or written proposals for the group's consideration. Members are responsible for communicating their respective opinions on proposals under discussion and offering revisions to make proposals more acceptable.

D. Regional Planning Contractors will support the Council in development of the WDCP. Contractors will provide technical resources and neutral facilitators to work with the Chair and assist Council members in finding mutually acceptable solutions. As specified in consultation with the Council Chair, planning contractors may facilitate Council meetings, guide consensus decision-making and/or voting processes, and work with members during and outside of meetings to resolve differences. Contractors will also serve as recorders during the meeting and produce meeting summaries for review and approval by the Council.

E. EPD Representative. Each Council will have a designated representative from EPD who will attend Council meetings as an information resource. The EPD representative will be available to answer questions about the planning process and provide feedback on Council progress to date, as requested. The representative is also available to talk with members of the media. Finally, the representative can access other resources within EPD to answer technical questions that may arise during Council deliberations.

Rule 3: Communications

A. In order to have open and productive discussions, Council members agree to the following rules and will follow them in Council meetings and other communications regarding Council business:

1. One person will speak at a time. Members will refrain from interrupting each other and from side conversations that distract others from listening to the person speaking.
2. Each person will speak for themselves rather than attempting to speak for others at the table.
3. Members will strive to listen, be open-minded and maintain a sense of humor.
4. Each person will make every effort to stay on track with the agenda and avoid grandstanding or digressions.
5. Members will seek a better understanding of different interests and perspectives and try to find common ground.
6. Members will refrain from personal attacks, statements blaming others for specific actions or outcomes, and aggressive verbal or nonverbal behavior or sarcasm.
7. Members will seek to resolve differences and disputes within the Council's planning process, with assistance from the Regional Planning Contractor, rather than attempting to use external channels to influence Council deliberations.

Rule 4: Meeting agenda and summaries

A. The Council Chair will work with the Regional Planning Contractor to prepare a draft agenda. Each agenda will state the meeting's purpose and include a checklist of intended results. Meeting agenda will focus on the elements of WDCP development specified in the regional planning guidance.

B. Agenda will include the beginning and tentative end times for the meeting, discussion topics and action items, estimated time limits in minutes for each topic, and the name of the person leading each topic.

C. The agenda and any supporting or background material will be distributed in advance of each meeting (electronically or by regular mail) and posted on the EPD website. Materials will be delivered in sufficient time for review prior to each meeting.

D. Members will be given a chance to read and modify the agenda at the beginning of each meeting. Before proceeding, the group will reach agreement on the agenda, including meeting purpose, intended results, and anticipated decision points.

E. The Planning Contractor will produce written summaries of each meeting, documenting all decisions and highlights of the discussion that led to those decisions. Summaries will be distributed to Council members for review before the next meeting.

F. The summary of the previous meeting shall be subject to approval at each meeting. The summary and any action items that do not require individual consideration may be placed on the agenda at the beginning in a “consent agenda” section. This information will be provided ahead of time or before the start of the meeting.

G. Consent agenda items will not be discussed individually unless any member requests that they be removed from this section and placed on the regular agenda as a separate item for discussion.

Rule 5: Discussion of issues

A. Any item that is on the agenda as approved at the beginning of the meeting may be discussed. A motion or a second is not required. The Chair or Planning Contractor will introduce the item or topic and, when appropriate, lead the Council in open discussion to identify potential actions or solutions.

B. To assist in developing WDCP content, planning contractors will produce background information and may propose alternatives for Council review and consideration.

C. Any Council members may make verbal or written proposals to the Council. Written proposals should state the problem or concern to be addressed and then state the proposed solution.

D. Whenever possible, written proposals should be provided to the Chair and Planning Contractor so they can be distributed for review prior to each meeting.

E. All members will be given an opportunity to speak or ask questions. Any member can suggest changes to a proposal, and the proposal can be modified with group agreement.

F. The Chair or the Planning Contractor’s facilitator will ensure that pros and cons are discussed and that all points of view are encouraged.

Rule 6: Decision making

- A. After a proposal has been presented, the Chair or the Planning Contractor will lead the Council through open discussion of pros and cons. All members will be given an opportunity to speak at least once on each proposal.
- B. After thorough discussion, the Chair or Planning Contractor will re-state the proposal with any modifications made as a result of the discussion. The Chair or Planning Contractor will then test for consensus: *“Who can’t live with this agreement or course of action as modified to meet the all of the interests expressed so far?”*
- C. The Chair or Planning Contractor may ask members to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement.
- D. Members who do not agree with a proposal will be asked to offer modifications that are acceptable to them and include the elements that other members have said are necessary for their concurrence: *“What improvements can you suggest that will make it more acceptable to you while continuing to meet the interests of everyone else with a stake in the issue?”*
- E. The Chair or Planning Contractor may also offer modifications to meet outstanding interests.
- F. Following further discussion, the Chair or Planning Contractor will again test for consensus. If consensus has not been reached after a reasonable discussion period, the Chair or the Planning Contractor may recommend tabling the item to allow the Planning Contractor to work with individual members or a subcommittee to develop an alternate proposal that addresses their concerns.
- G. The Chair may, after a reasonable discussion period and effort to address outstanding concerns, call for a vote on the proposal. A simple majority (50 percent plus one of the members present) can over-rule the Chair’s call for a vote.
- H. If the Chair’s call for a vote is over-ruled, the Chair may appoint a sub-committee to revise the proposal or develop an alternate proposal that meets the outstanding concerns.
- I. When voting on a proposal, approval by a two-thirds majority is required for its acceptance. Votes may be by show of hands or written ballot. Any member may request a written ballot.
- J. All decisions made by consensus and by voting will be recorded in the summary of each meeting.
- K. Minority opinions will be documented in the meeting summary with the council members able to submit a statement for inclusion in the meeting summary.

Rule 7: Public notice and comment

- A. The Regional Planning Contractor will advertise Council meetings as specified in the Public Involvement Plan adopted by the Middle Ocmulgee Water Planning Council.

B. A period for public comment will be provided at each regular Council meeting and will be included in meeting agenda. Written comments will also be accepted at each regular Council meeting. The Council may adopt time limits or other guidelines for public comment as needed.

Rule 8: Ending the meeting

A. There will be time on the agenda at the end of the meeting for the Chair or Planning Contractor to summarize the progress made at the meeting in relation to development of the draft WDCP. The summary will include any follow-up action steps agreed to by the group, clarifying the tasks, responsible parties and time limits.

C. Council members may suggest improvements for future meetings. The Chair or Regional Planning Contractor will implement feasible ideas at the next meeting.

D. Standard procedure will be for the Chair to close the meeting when the agenda is complete or the scheduled ending time is reached. Meetings will only be extended if there is a need that cannot be met through other means (e.g., subcommittee work between meetings) and if there is substantial agreement among the members present to do so.