

CONSERVATION DISTRICT MINUTES

Minutes are more than a summary of actions; they are a permanent historical document describing all conservation district business and events. They record decisions made, projects accomplished, policies set, and the people involved or affected. Minutes also provide documentation that a conservation district conducted business according to the laws and rules they are required to follow. Are you documenting your actions properly? Are you including too much information? Too Little?

The public participation in governmental operations section of the law (2-3-212) states those minutes shall be kept and shall be available for inspection by the public. According to the law, minutes shall include, without limitation, the following:

1. The date, time, and place of the meeting.
2. A list of individual members of the public body, agency, or organization in attendance.
3. The substance of all matters proposed, discussed, or decided.
4. A record by individual members of votes taken (only if requested by a member).

Below are some guidelines that are not necessarily spelled out in the law, but may be helpful to you in writing your minutes.

1. Conservation districts should discuss no official business without a quorum. Minutes should reflect whether a quorum was present. List names of those present (first and last names) and whom they represent, the presiding officer, etc.
2. Minutes should be on letterhead, if available, and should include the date and type or purpose of meeting.
3. Each page should be numbered and the date of the meeting should be included on each page, preferably at the top. This is useful if the pages ever become separated and is useful in retrieving documents from microfiche. (See note on page 2).
4. Approval of previous month's minutes should be documented.
5. Document approval of the financial report, including income and disbursements. And document approval to pay bills. (76-15-726 states that "the treasurer shall report in writing at each regular meeting and as often at other times as the supervisors may request the amount of money on hand and the receipts and disbursements since his last report. Such report shall be verified.")
6. There is no need to record discussions verbatim, but don't waste ink on too general statements like "discussion held," "board discussed the issue at length". Generally describe the essence of the discussion and include the outcome of the discussion or leave it out.

7. Record all old business – follow up on all old or unfinished business. If at the last meeting, Mr. X was to check on something, follow up and document the results.
8. Record reports of group. It is important to at least generally describe the discussion. Don't merely state that "Ms. Y gave a report." Include any board action as a result of the report.
9. Record all motions or action with special attention stating exactly what motions were made and their disposition (carried, defeated, tabled, etc.). It is conventional to include the names of persons making motions and seconds, but it is not necessarily required. Official action (items voted requiring a vote) must be cleared.
10. Don't editorialize. Statements such as "a lengthy discussion" or "lively discussion" or "we listened to an excellent presentation on" should be omitted. Minutes should not include the writer's opinion – just the facts.
11. The minutes don't necessarily have to be written in chronological order. If using subheads or rearranging the order makes the minutes clearer, do it.
12. Note the time and date of the next scheduled meeting.
13. Since minutes are open to the public, keep confidential information out of the minutes. CD employee's wages are open to the public. Reasons for personnel actions are not necessarily open to the public.
14. Public comments. Document the names of those making comments and a brief summary of what was said.
15. A signature of the writer and the chair can be used if desired.
16. Send copies of your minutes to interested individuals. The list should include, at minimum, the Montana Association of Conservation District (MACD) area directors, president, and Helena office and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Conservation District Bureau.

Note: The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation houses permanent conservation district records. CD minutes are microfilmed every ten years. Microfiche is kept in the Helena DNRC office and hard copies are forwarded to the Montana Historical Society.