

# Seattle Tennis Club

## Advice to Committee Chairs about Minutes

### Minutes are Important!

Your committee's minutes are the only reliable method by which it communicates with the Board and staff, as well as the membership ... and your own selves in future months. Unless you are just having monthly chats for your own entertainment, you want the Board and staff to know what you recommend, what you're doing and what you think about things. If sometimes it seems nobody is listening to your committee, it might be because you're not saying anything. If you depend on your Board liaison, you'll likely be disappointed: the time available for verbal reports at Board meetings is limited, but Board members will read your minutes; the liaison is unlikely to remember everything accurately without minutes to aid him or her; and the liaison isn't *you*.

The chair of each committee is responsible for ensuring minutes are taken and submitted. This is a duty you should delegate, either meeting-by-meeting or for all meetings generally. It's almost impossible to run a meeting *and* keep accurate notes. Either a staff member or a committee member can produce the initial draft of minutes, depending on who you think is best and who you can convince to do it. Follow whatever process you like as far as reviewing and editing them (see practical suggestions below), but in any event ...

### Do Them Timely (and Submit Them)

You want your minutes in the next board packet. That means you (or whoever you delegate the duty to) needs to send them:

*To Kora Larson by noon six days before the next Board meeting<sup>1</sup>  
that is (typically) the Friday before the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month.*

Use whatever file format you prefer (perhaps avoid WordPerfect 5.0 and Visicalc). A good practice is to create a pdf file, so you (i) don't get any surprise formatting changes and (ii) can include the minutes and any attachments in a single file, so nothing gets left out. You can also submit them on paper, I suppose, if you want to be amusingly 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### Key Elements

- Date and time
- Committee members present
- Others present: staff, board liaison, hangers-on, roadies
- Committee members *not* present
- Narrative (not just notes)
- MSPs (boldface and underlined)
- Informal decisions or recommendations (boldface is a **good idea**)

### Practical Suggestions

#### Initial Draft

Whoever you get to do the first draft can either write it into final form, or put it in some looser form, like notes or an outline (for revision into a better final form). It is a very good idea to do this quickly, as in

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<sup>1</sup> Exception: Finance meets too late to get into the Board packet, but should get minutes to Kora as soon as possible before the next Board meeting.

the next day. On one committee, the standard practice was to have a member take notes on a computer during the meeting, then email them out right when the meeting adjourned.

### Review Before Submission

Generally, you (the chairman) will probably want to review the draft, particularly (but not only) if the initial draft is just notes. You might delegate this to a particular committee member. You may have all the committee members review the initial draft, or the version with your revisions. Whatever works.

### Approval

Minutes should be approved by an MSP at the committee's next meeting. If there are any significant changes, note what they are in the minutes of the meeting when you approve them: otherwise the Board will probably never know that the changes were.

## **Narrative**

Best practice is to write an actual narrative, with complete sentences and paragraph breaks, rather than rough notes. Remember that this needs to be comprehensible to someone who wasn't at the meeting and doesn't know what you do.

You don't need to include everything everyone said (it's not a play), but include any information that was or may be relevant to a reader asking, "So what do we do now?" Summarize reasoning for conclusions, and at least allude to counter-arguments. Keep it tight (it's also not a novel). Two pages is a good length, but go longer or shorter as appropriate.

Keep it clear and organized. It's okay if the narrative is more organized than the discussion was (indeed, that's recommended) but avoid adding things people thought of after the meeting, or at least identify that's what they are.

Remember that the minutes will be read by the Board *and* posted on the website. If there's sensitive information, or something that would be embarrassing to a member or employee, either leave it out or at least omit names.

## **MSPs and Informal Decisions or Recommendations**

As some may or may not know, "MSP" is an STC-ism for what everyone else in the civilized world calls a "resolution." If a committee wants to take some action (generally in the form of a recommendation to the Board), the way it does it is by adopting an MSP.

Make it clear what the MSP is supposed to do, and make it complete. A Don't: "The committee discussed the problem with the north lawn and reviewed some suggestions. MSP all the suggestions are pretty good except for three of them that people didn't like."

Ideally – if, before a meeting, most likely while preparing the agenda – you sense an MSP coming, you (or whoever's pushing for it) should write up a draft of the wording for the MSP in advance and include it in the agenda or hand it out at the meeting. If details are TBA, just leave blanks. You can prepare alternative versions for different possibilities. Then you can just pop the wording into the minutes, with whatever changes are made at the meeting.

In a perfectly-run meeting, every conclusion the committee reaches would (probably) take the form of an MSP. Or maybe not. In any event, the way meetings flow, sometimes everyone will agree on something and nobody will think to make a motion. In that case, a clever minute taker might want to make special mention of the conclusion, introduce it with "The consensus of the committee was that ..." and put it in boldface so it gets a reaction (perhaps even the reaction sought, *e.g.* "good idea!")