**ARTICLE VIII REMOTE MEETINGS**

**Sec. 4-801 Purpose**

The Houlton Town Council adopts the following ordinance to govern the participation, via remote methods, of members of the Town Council, members of the Board of Budget Review and any board, committee, or commission whose membership has been appointed by the Town Council, without regard to whether it is a standing or an *ad hoc* board, committee, or commission, including any subcommittee of the board, committee, or commission.

In non-emergency times, the default rule for the Town Council and all boards, committee, or commissions; is that all board meetings shall be conducted in person. Members of the Town Council and Boards are expected to be physically present for meetings. Except; when not practicable, such as in the case of an emergency or urgent issue that requires the Board to meet via remote methods, or an illness or temporary absence of a member that causes significant difficulty traveling to the meeting location or in the event of bad weather. The chair or presiding officer of the Board, in consultation with other members if appropriate and possible, will make a determination that remote methods of participation are necessary in as timely a manner as possible under the circumstances. A member who is unable to attend a meeting in person will notify the chair or presiding officer of the Board as far in advance as possible. The Chair or presiding officer’s decision on remote participation shall be final.

**Sec. 4-802 Remote methods of participation**

Remote methods of participation may include telephonic or video technology allowing simultaneous reception of information and may include other means necessary to accommodate disabled persons. Remote participation will not be by text-only means such as e-mail, text messages, or chat functions.

Notice of all meetings will be provided in accordance with 1 M.R.S.A. § 406 and any applicable charter, ordinance, policy, or bylaw. When the public may attend via remote methods, notice will include the means by which the public may access the meeting remotely and will provide a method for disabled persons to request necessary accommodation to access the meeting.

Notice will also identify a location where the public may attend the meeting in person. The Board will not restrict public attendance to remote methods except in the case of an emergency or urgent issue that requires the Board to meet using remote methods of attendance.

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Ordinance to the contrary, if a meeting noticed as an in person meeting becomes impractical due to inclement weather or other emergency, the Chair, in consultation with the Town Clerk’s Office, may change the in person meeting format to a remote meeting format, provided that an amended agenda containing the information set forth above is posted on the Town’s website and is distributed to all board members, relevant Town staff, and local representatives of the media by the same or faster means used to notify board members at least four (4) hours prior to the originally noticed meeting start time

The Board will make all documents and materials to be considered by the Board available, electronically or otherwise, to the public who attend remotely to the same extent customarily available to the public who attend in person, provided no additional costs are incurred by the Board.

**Sec. 4-803 Disruptions and adjournment**.

If during the conduct of a remote meeting, the meeting is interrupted through disruptions or glitches in the technology, the meeting shall be automatically recessed for up to 15 minutes to restore communication when audio-visual communication cannot be maintained with a quorum of members or with the public location identified in the board’s notice. If the interruption cannot be resolved within 15 minutes, and the board has not provided reasonable notice to the public as to how the meeting will be continued at an alternative date and time, then the meeting shall be automatically adjourned.

**Sec. 4-804 Voting**

All votes taken during a meeting using remote methods will be by roll call vote that can be seen and heard if using video technology, or heard if using audio technology only, by other members of the Board and the public. A member of the Board who participates remotely will be considered present for purposes of a quorum and voting.

**Sec. 4-805 Summary**

This policy is intended to be self-enforcing and is an expression of the standards of conduct for members of boards/committees expected by the Town. It therefore becomes most effective when members are thoroughly familiar with it and embrace its provisions. The Council does not waive the right to address any violations in the manner it deems appropriate under the specific circumstances.

This ordinance will remain in force indefinitely unless amended or rescinded.