



## COMPLAINT POLICY

### Introduction

Complaints are inevitable when supplying service to a municipality that is the size and complexity of Chesterfield. When faced with a real or perceived service issue, individuals will express their dissatisfaction or frustration based on a discrepancy between their expectations and their actual experience. Successful municipalities establish a complaint process that helps satisfy complainants, prevents negative publicity, and helps improve town processes and service to the residents. While unhappy complainants can be challenging to manage, the right attitude and town processes can turn a negative situation into a positive outcome. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and by responding positively to complaints and by correcting mistakes.

Through this process, the Town will:

- Treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for immediate action; we will address it confidentially, promptly, and politely.
- Establish a simple feedback mechanism that will make it easy for complainants to lodge complaints by e-mail, mail, fax, phone, in person, and through the Town's website.
- Establish a routine process that will address complaints, including emergency situations, with guidelines and contact information.
- Put "stop procedures" in place. Some complainants may be impossible to please and may routinely lodge complaints merely for their benefit. The Town will establish procedures for when to stop escalations and stop providing out-of-bounds assistance to unreasonable complainants.
- Train all Town employees on proper complaint management.

### Responsibilities

The complainants responsibility is to:

- Bring the complaint, in writing, to the Town Administrator normally within five days of the issue.

- Explain the problem and desire of outcome as clearly and as fully as possible.
- Allow the Town a reasonable time to deal with the matter.
- Recognize that some circumstances may be beyond the Town's control.

The Town's responsibility is to:

- Acknowledge the formal complaint in writing.
- Deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint.
- Act where appropriate.

#### Responsibility of Action: All Town Employees

Confidentiality: Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the resident and the Town maintain confidentiality. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint judged on its own merit). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the resident.

#### The Process

The purpose of this policy is to create a formal complaint process and procedure for the Town. This procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly and consistently. We recognize that many concerns will be raised informally but require a formal complaint to be filed. The formal complaint procedure is as follows:

1. A formal complaint must be submitted in writing on a standard Town complaint form, available on the Town website or in the Board of Selectmen's office at the Town office building. It may be submitted by email, mail, fax, or in person (report taken through Town Administrator). It is important that the complainant be able to provide as much specific information as possible about the situation, including who was involved, what happened, when it happened, how it happened and where it happened.
2. Every effort will be made to keep the complaint confidential; however, in some instances this may not be possible. If confidentiality cannot be kept the complainant will be notified and give the option of canceling the complaint.
3. All complaints will be reviewed immediately by the Town Administrator; however, the time frames and processes for investigation are priority specific.
  - a. Emergency – Immediate action required
  - b. Health and Safety – addressed within 5 working days
  - c. Other – Addressed within 10 working days.
4. The Department Head responsible for the "area of complaint" will be notified and the complaint investigation will begin.
5. The complaint will be managed by the responsible Department Head with the support of the Town Administrator. If the complaint is about a Department Head, the Town Administrator will manage the investigation with support by the Board of Selectmen.
6. Following the investigation, the investigator may substantiate the complaint allegations or find the allegations are unsubstantiated.

7. The complaint investigator will notify the Town Administrator of the investigation outcome and will write a summary of the investigation. The Town Administrator will send a complaint response form to the complainant that will explain the finding(s) of the investigation as well as the summary of the investigation results. In a small percentage of cases, it will be necessary to close a complaint when it is felt that the Town has done everything that can be done to resolve the issue. Recognizing that it is not always possible to satisfy a complainant, having procedures and trained staff to handle these cases is part of an effective complaint handling system. Regardless of the outcome, it is important for a complainant to feel that they have been heard and have been treated fairly.
8. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they may re-submit the complaint report, including the response of the Town Administrator, to the Board of Selectmen for their action.
9. The Town Administrator will maintain a confidential file of all complaints and decisions.

Dismissal of a complaint: A complaint may be dismissed for the following reasons:

1. The complainant requests the withdrawal of the complaint.
2. The complainant fails to respond to repeated requests for additional information needed to process the complaint.
3. The complainant cannot be located after reasonable attempts.