

Town of Atkinson Complaint Policy

1. Introduction

Complaints are inevitable when supplying service to a municipality that is the size and complexity of Atkinson. When faced with a real or perceived service issue, residents will express their dissatisfaction or frustration based on a discrepancy between their expectations and their actual experience. Successful municipalities establish a customer complaint process that helps satisfy Town residents, prevents negative publicity and helps improve town processes and service to the residents. While unhappy residents 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 responding to the views of our residents and, in particular, by responding positively to complaints and by putting mistakes right.

Through this process, the Town will:

- Treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response; we will deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially.
- Establish a simple feedback mechanism that will make it as easy as possible for residents to lodge complaints by e-mail, mail, fax, phone, through the Town's website and in person.
- Establish a routine escalation process. This process should encompass all types of resident complaints, including emergency situations, with guidelines and contact information.
- Devise a tracking mechanism. Successful management of resident complaints requires directing and managing complaints efficiently and effectively.
- Put "stop procedures" in place. Some residents 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 residents.
- Monitor resident complaints for trends or patterns. Similar complaints from multiple customers can be an early indicator of a wider issue that needs to be addressed.
- Train all Town employees on proper resident complaint management.

Definition: A complaint is a statement expressing discontent or unhappiness about a situation; something that makes somebody discontented or unhappy. It is not a comment made in passing or idle conversation

2. Responsibilities

The resident's responsibility is to:

- Bring their complaint, in writing, to The Town's attention normally within one month of the issue arising
- Raise concerns promptly and directly with a Town employee
- Explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- 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
- Respond within a stated period of time
- Deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint
- Take action where appropriate

Responsibility for 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.

Monitoring and Reporting: The Town Administrator will track all complaints and submit a quarterly report to the Board of Selectmen. The report will be created and presented by department and where appropriate, categorized by issue.

3. 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, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction. We recognize that many concerns will be raised informally, dealt with quickly and not require a formal complaint to be filed. An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

- I. A formal complaint may be submitted by a Town resident, employee or vendor. It must be completed in writing on a standard Town complaint form, available on the web site or at Town Hall. It may be submitted by e-mail, letter, FAX, phone (report taken through Town Administrator's office) or in person. It is important that the complainant be able to provide as much specific information as possible about the situation, including who is involved, what happened, when it happened, how it happened and where it happened.
- II. Every effort will be made to keep the complaint confidential; however in all instances this may not be possible. If confidentiality cannot be kept the complainant will be notified. and given the option of canceling the complaint
- III. All complaints will be reviewed and prioritized; however, the time frames and the 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
- IV. The Department Head responsible for the "area of complaint" will be notified and the complaint investigation will begin.

- V. 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
- VI. Following the investigation, the investigator may substantiate the complaint allegations or find the allegations are unsubstantiated.
- VII. 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 customer, 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 he or she has been heard and has been treated fairly.
- VIII. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response he or she may re-submit the Complaint Report, including the response of the Town Administrator, to the Board of Selectmen for their action.
- IX. The T/A will maintain a log of all complaints, tracking their receipt, investigation and resolution and shall prepare a quarterly summary report for the Board of Selectmen. Copies of complaints and the Complaint Log will be maintained in accordance with the Town's document retention policy.
- X. 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:

- a. The Complainant requests the withdrawal of the complaint.
- b. The Complainant fails to respond to repeated requests for additional information needed to process the complaint.
- c. The Complainant cannot be located after reasonable attempts.

Addenda:

1. Town of Atkinson Complaint Form
2. Town of Atkinson Complaint Response Form
3. Complaint Tracking Form

Town of Atkinson NH

CONFIDENTIAL COMPLAINT INTAKE FORM

Complainant: _____

Address: _____ -Telephone: (H) _____ (W) _____

Date, Time, Location of Incident: _____

Description of Incident (CONDUCT CODE):

Name of Employee(s) against whom complaint is being filed:

Dept.: _____ Name: _____ Vehicle #: _____

Dept.: _____ Name: _____ Vehicle #: _____

Witness: Name/Address/Telephone:

Witness: Name/Address/Telephone:

Brief summary of Complaint:

I understand that this statement of complaint will be submitted to the Atkinson Town Administrator and may be the basis for an investigation. Further, I sincerely and truly declare and affirm that the facts contained herein are complete, accurate and true to the best of my knowledge and belief. I declare and affirm that my statement has been made by me voluntarily without persuasion, coercion or promise of any kind. I have been so advised that any false or misleading statements made during the resultant investigation may lead to criminal or civil prosecution.

Signature of Complainant

Date

Witness

Town of Atkinson NH

CONFIDENTIAL COMPLAINT RESPONSE FORM

Complainant:
Address:
Date of complaint:
Description of Complaint:

Response to the Complaint:

Date

Atkinson Town Administrator

