

PUBLIC COMMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Revised June, 2018

In accordance with NCGS 153A-52.1, a period reserved for comments from the public on topics not otherwise included on that evening's agenda will be included as an item of business on all agendas of regularly-scheduled Board of Commissioners meetings and shall be deemed the "Public Comment" segment of the agenda. The Public Comment segment of the agenda will be placed at the end of the agenda, following the conclusion of all other open session business. Because subjects of Special and Emergency Meetings are often regulated by General Statutes, there will be no Public Comments segment reserved on agendas of these meetings; however, Special and Emergency Meetings are open for public attendance.

As with public hearings, the Chair (or presiding officer) will determine and announce limits on speakers at the start of the Public Comment period. Each speaker will be allocated no more than five (5) minutes. The Chairman (or presiding officer) may, at their discretion, decrease this time allocation if the number of persons wishing to speak would unduly prolong the meeting. A staff member will be designated as official timekeeper, and the timekeeper will inform the speaker when they have one minute remaining of their allotted time. When the allotted time is exhausted, the speaker will conclude their remarks promptly and leave the lectern. Speakers may not yield their time to another speaker, and they may not sign up to speak more than once during the same Public Comment period.

An individual wishing to address the Board during the Public Comment period shall register with the Clerk/Deputy Clerk to the Board prior to the opening of the meeting by signing his or her name, and providing an address and short description of his or her topic on a sign-up sheet stationed at the entrance of the meeting room. Any related documents, printed comments, or materials the speaker wishes distributed to the Commissioners shall be delivered to the Clerk/Deputy Clerk in sufficient amounts (10 copies) at least fifteen minutes prior to the start of the meeting. Speakers will be acknowledged to speak in the order in which their names appear on the sign-up sheet. Speakers will address the Commissioners from the lectern, not from the audience, and begin their remarks by stating their name and address.

To ensure the safety of board members, staff and meeting attendees, speakers are not allowed to approach the Board on the seating platform, unless invited by the Board to approach.

Speakers who require accommodation for a disabling condition should contact the office of the County Clerk or County Manager not less than twenty-four (24) hours prior to the meeting.

If time allows, those who fail to register before the meeting may be allowed speak during the Public Comment period. These individuals will be offered the opportunity to speak following those who registered in advance. At this time in the agenda, an individual should raise his or her hand and ask to be recognized by the Board Chair (or presiding officer) and then state his or her name, address and introduce the topic to be addressed.

A total of thirty (30) minutes shall be set aside for public comment. At the end of this time, those who signed up to speak but have not yet been recognized may be requested to hold their comments until the next meeting's public comment period, at which time they will be given priority for expression. Alternatively, the Board, in its discretion, may extend the time allotted for public comment.

Items of discussion during the Public Comment segment of the meeting will be only those appropriate to Open Meetings. Closed Meeting topics include, but are not limited to, such subjects as personnel, acquisition of real property, and information protected by the client-attorney privilege. Closed Meeting subjects will not be entertained. Speakers will not discuss matters regarding the candidacy of any person seeking public office, including the candidacy of the person addressing the Board.

Speakers will be courteous in their language and presentation, shall not use profanity or racial slurs and shall not engage in personal attacks that by irrelevance, duration or tone may threaten or perceive to threaten the orderly and fair progress of the discussion. Failure to abide by this requirement may result in forfeiture of the speaker's right to speak.

The Public Comments segment of the agenda is intended to provide a forum for the Board of Community to listen to citizens; there shall be no expectation that the Board will answer impromptu questions. However, Board members, through the presiding officer, may ask the speaker questions for clarification purposes. Any action on items brought up during the Public Comment period will be at the discretion of the Board. When appropriate, items will be referred to the Manager or the proper Department Head for further review.

A copy of the Public Comments Policy will be included in the agenda of each regular meeting agenda and will be made available at the speaker registration table. The policy is also available on the County's website.