

## **Understanding Town Council Meetings**

This document is an effort to briefly explain the various types of meetings that Town Council may have and to explain the procedures that are followed at meetings. Much of the information in this document is prescribed by North Carolina General Statutes and cannot be altered by Town Council.

Based on provisions of the North Carolina city council meeting procedure statutes, North Carolina General Statutes, and the North Carolina open meetings law, all Town Councils in North Carolina are required to follow six basic principles:

1. The council must act as a body.
2. The council should proceed in the most efficient manner possible.
3. The council must act by at least a majority.
4. Every member must have an equal opportunity to participate in decision making.
5. The council's rules of procedure must be followed consistently.
6. The council's actions should be the result of a decision on the merits and not a manipulation of the procedural rules.

### **Types of Meetings**

#### **Regular Meetings**

Councils are required to establish a fixed schedule and set a fixed meeting place for meetings to conduct town business. Sunset Beach has two (2) Regular Meetings per month. The first Meeting is held on the first Monday of the month beginning with a Closed Session at 6:00 p.m., followed by a Work Session at 6:45 p.m. and the Regular Meeting at 7:00 p.m. The second Meeting is held on the third Tuesday of each month at 9:00 a.m. Both Meetings are held in the Town Hall Council Chamber.

#### **Special Meetings**

The Mayor, the Mayor Pro Tempore, any two members of the council, or the Council in an open session at another meeting may schedule a Special Council Meeting by signing a written notice stating the time and place of the meeting, the purpose of the meeting, and the subjects to be considered. Only that purpose and those subjects can be considered (unless all members are present or have signed a written waiver of notice). Various rules exist regarding notice of the meeting.

#### **Emergency Meetings**

Emergency meetings of the Town Council may be called by the Mayor, the Mayor Pro Tempore, or any two members of the council for generally unexpected circumstances that require immediate consideration by the Council. Only business connected with the emergency may be considered at an emergency meeting. Various rules exist regarding notice of the meeting.

#### **Recessed or Adjourned Meetings**

A properly called Regular, Special, or Emergency meeting may be recessed or adjourned to a later time and place as offered in a procedural motion and adopted during the meeting. The motion shall state the time and place when the meeting will reconvene. No additional notice need be given.

## Organizational Meetings

At the first Regular Meeting in December following a general election in which Council members are elected, or at an earlier date, if any, set by the incumbent Council, the newly elected members shall take and subscribe the oath of office as the first order of new business. This organizational meeting cannot be held before the municipal election results are officially determined.

## The Meeting Agenda

The agenda for Council meetings will generally follow the same order:

1. **Closed session (if any):** The policy of North Carolina is that closed sessions shall be held only when required to permit a Council to act in the public interest as permitted in this section. The Council may hold a closed session and exclude the public only when a closed session is required. The motion to go into a closed session must be made and adopted at an open meeting and must cite the permissible reason. Permissible reasons include things such as: preserving confidential or privileged information, avoiding premature disclosure of awards, preserving the attorney-client privilege, discussion of economic development incentives, discussion of certain personnel matters, and hearing reports of alleged criminal misconduct.
2. **Council Work Session**
  - The Council prepares a proposed agenda for each meeting at the end of its prior meeting. Any Council member can have an item placed on the proposed agenda, up to the point in time that the draft agenda is accepted at the meeting. An agenda package that includes background information on agenda items is prepared and made available online prior to meetings and at each meeting.
  - In the Council Work Session, held during the first meeting of the month, the proposed agenda is reviewed, additions and subtractions may be made, and it is adopted for the meeting.
3. **Council Meeting**
  - Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance, Identification of Conflicts. The opening to meetings includes the Call to Order, the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Mayor asking if any Council member has a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest with regard to any item on the agenda.
  - Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting(s).
  - Public Comments on Agenda Items Only. An opportunity for public comments is offered at this point in the agenda. Members of the audience are allotted up to three minutes to provide comments on any agenda item. Sunset Beach Town Council Meeting Rules of Decorum must be maintained.

- Recognition (if any). The Council may formally recognize one or more individuals for especially meritorious service to the community.
- Public Hearings. Public hearings that are required by law or considered advisable by Council must be adopted by a majority vote that identifies logistical matters (for example, length of time allotted for each speaker). All requirements of open meeting laws pertain to public hearings.
- Presentations. Presentations may be given by the Mayor, any Council member, a consultant, or anyone who has been invited to provide an informative talk to the Council and general public.
- Town Administrator and Department Reports. These reports summarize recent activity by the Town Administrator and within each of the Town's major departments: Administration, Finance, Fire, Planning and Inspections, Police, Public Works, and Stormwater Management.
- Old Business. The term *old business* is sometimes used interchangeably with unfinished business, which is more accurate. This refers to particular items from previous meetings that were not concluded.
- New Business. The term *new business* refers to issues that have not been previously discussed or acted upon by the Council. They could consist of announcements, proposals or plans for future endeavors.
- Public Comments on any Town Matter. A second Public Comment Period is offered at this point in the agenda. Members of the audience are allotted up to three minutes to provide comments on any topic. Sunset Beach Town Council Meeting Rules of Decorum must be maintained.
- Adjournment.

### **Council Meeting Presiding Officer**

The Mayor (or in her or his absence, the Mayor Pro Tempore) is the presiding officer at all Council meetings and shall have the following powers:

1. To rule motions in or out of order, including any motion patently offered for obstructive or delaying purposes.
2. To determine whether a speaker has gone beyond reasonable standards of courtesy in his or her remarks and to entertain and rule on objections from other members on this ground.
3. To entertain and answer questions of parliamentary law or procedure.
4. To call a brief recess at any time.
5. To adjourn in an emergency.

Any Council member may appeal to the Council any decision by the presiding officer under (1), (2), or (3).

### **Actions by Council**

Actions by Council occur via set requirements.

- A majority (3) of the actual membership of the Council (5) plus the Mayor, excluding vacant seats, constitutes a quorum. The Mayor is counted for quorum purposes even though the Mayor does not have voting power.
- The Council proceeds by motions. Any member may make a motion.
- Motions require a second.
- A member may make only one motion at a time.
- A main motion is out of order while another main motion is pending.
- A motion shall be adopted by a majority of the votes cast as long as a quorum is present unless otherwise required by the laws of North Carolina or specific Sunset Beach meeting rules.
- Typically, votes are conducted by voice votes or the raising of hands. However, Council may choose by majority vote to use written ballots in voting on a motion.
- Full and accurate minutes of Council meetings are kept. Minutes are open to inspection by the public and are published online. Each motion and the results of each vote are recorded in the minutes.