

## **Town Council Meetings: Decorum, Public Participation, and Civil Discourse**

Town Council meetings are an example of democracy in action. Public officials and Town staff meet to discuss issues and take actions in a setting in which members of the public are present and are able to make comments. Important matters that touch people directly and deeply are routinely considered.

It is very important that all persons at Council meetings conduct themselves in a manner that allows for clear presentation, discussion, and decision-making. Maintaining *civil discourse* – a serious exchange of ideas that focuses on the issues and not on individuals, thoughtfully listening to what others have to say, and treating the ideas of others with respect – is essential. When *uncivil discourse* - in forms such as name-calling, accusations, inflammatory and threatening language, and disrespectful behavior – occurs by anyone, it creates a hostile environment that makes it more difficult for thoughtful discussion.

**Mayor and Town Council:** The Mayor and Town Council members should observe the following guidelines:

1. Each Council member should address the Chair to be recognized.
2. Each Council member gets a chance to speak on a subject before any member gets to speak a second time on that subject. Comments should appreciate the fact that very long comments impede good discussion. Members should not interrupt any other member who is speaking.
3. Council members should avoid using any form of *uncivil discourse*.
4. With the exception of the Public Comment Periods, meeting participation is limited to Council members and recognized individuals (for example, staff, hired contractors/consultants, and specific members of the public asked to speak on a topic for the good of the Council).

**Members of the Public:** Members of the public may share comments with Council during two Public Comment Periods listed on every regular meeting agenda. They should observe the following guidelines during these comments and in their conduct during meetings:

1. The first comment period is only for comments that address a scheduled agenda topic. The second comment period is for comments that address any topic.
2. Members of the public should clearly state their name and address at the beginning of their comments. Each individual is allocated up to three minutes to speak. An individual may speak only once during a comment period but may participate in both comment periods in a given meeting as long as comments are not repeated.
3. Comments are to be directed to the Chair and full Council and never to an individual Council member. Speakers must not engage in any form of *uncivil discourse*.

4. The comment periods are not intended to be 'question and answer' periods, and Council and staff are not authorized to respond to questions during this period. However, the Chair may allow staff or a Council member to address a question for the good of the community at the end of the comment period once all speakers are finished.

The Chair is responsible for enforcing these rules and may call any individual to order who violates them. Individuals violating the rules may be prohibited from continuing their comments, and in extreme cases, the Chair may call for individuals to be removed from the meeting room.