

Town Rules of Decorum at Public Meetings

These Rules of Decorum set expectations for conduct at all Town meetings and public functions, whether held in person or virtually. They are intended to ensure orderly proceedings, promote civility and fairness, and support open and effective local governance.

The Town values respect, professionalism, accountability, and civil discourse. While disagreement is a normal part of democratic decision-making, it must be expressed respectfully, without disruption, and focused on issues rather than individuals. All participants, especially those in leadership roles, are expected to model these values. These Rules apply equally to Town Board members, appointed officials, committee members, staff, consultants, and members of the public.

General Standards of Conduct (Applicable to All)

All persons attending or participating in Town meetings or public functions shall:

1. Treat others with courtesy, dignity, and respect.
2. Refrain from yelling, shouting, interrupting, or speaking over others.
3. Address remarks to the Board or body as a whole, not to individual members.
4. Avoid personal attacks, insults, name-calling, threats, or abusive language.
5. Avoid conduct that disrupts, delays, or impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting.
6. Comply promptly with lawful rulings of the Chair.

Disruptive conduct includes but is not limited to: repeated interruptions; refusal to yield the floor; speaking out of turn; hostile gestures; or behavior that interferes with the ability of others to participate or be heard.

Conduct of Town Board Members and Officials

Town Board members, appointed officials, and committee members are held to a heightened standard of conduct in recognition of their leadership roles. Members wishing to speak shall be acknowledged by the body and shall not be interrupted once recognized, except if a member needs clarification. Debate must remain focused on issues rather than individuals, and members shall refrain from yelling, interrupting, speaking over others, or engaging in confrontational or intimidating behavior. Personal attacks, accusations, or demeaning sarcasm are prohibited. All members are expected to model respectful listening, a professional tone, and full adherence to these Rules at all times.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are governed by law and provide the primary forum for public participation on specific matters.

Open Podium/Public Comment

Public comment periods and public hearings are intended to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on Town business only. Town business includes but is not limited to: Matters on the Town Board agenda, Town operations, services, or policies, Town-owned property or infrastructure. Matters

that are not Town business include but are not limited to: private disputes; issues under the sole jurisdiction of other levels of government.

Open Podium / Public Comment Rules

1. Each regular Town Board meeting shall include an Open Podium period.
2. Speakers shall present remarks in a calm, courteous, and non-threatening manner.
3. Individual speakers shall be limited to five (5) minutes.
4. Speakers who are unable to speak due to time limitations are encouraged to submit written comments.
5. Speakers must complete a speaker form (in person) or use the designated virtual function to request to speak prior to the meeting.
6. Comments shall be directed to the Board as a whole.
7. Repetitive or substantially similar comments may be consolidated at the Chair's discretion, including requesting that a group select a single spokesperson.
8. The Chair may invite Board responses as appropriate at the conclusion of Open Podium

If a speaker violates these Rules, the Chair shall: 1. Request that the speaker redirect remarks or comply with the Rules; 2. Issue a warning if the behavior continues; 3. Direct the speaker to stop speaking after a final warning; and 4. If necessary, direct removal or muting of the speaker to restore order.

Virtual Meeting Participation

1. All Rules of Decorum apply equally to virtual meetings.
2. Participants must use their real names when registering to speak.
3. Activities that disrupt virtual meetings are prohibited.
4. The Chair may mute, disable video, restrict chat functions, or remove a participant after warning if these Rules are violated.
5. Town Board members participating virtually must comply with the Town's Videoconferencing Policy, including maintaining audio and video connectivity for voting.

Legal Context

Town Board meetings are required by New York State law to be open to the public so residents may observe the conduct of Town business. While public comment is required only in limited circumstances, such as public hearings, the Town Board affirms its commitment to public participation by providing a public comment period at regular meetings, subject to reasonable rules that ensure order, civility, and fairness.

Effective Date and Amendments

These Rules of Decorum supersede prior versions adopted on January 25, 2012; January 2, 2020; and June 23, 2021, and shall remain in effect unless amended by resolution of the Town Board.

Adopted by the Town Board on: _____