



Public Participation Policy

The meetings of the Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners are essential for the lawful and transparent transaction of important public business. The Board encourages members of the public to attend its meetings. The Board of Commissioners also welcomes the public to participate in comment periods provided as part of its meetings. This Public Participation Policy is intended to ensure that such meetings are conducted with fairness to all.

I. Maintenance of Order and Decorum

Members of the public must maintain the civility, decorum and respect for the functioning and dignity of the Board of Commissioners. Speakers must be respectful and observe proper decorum in their statements by refraining from vulgarity, obscenities, profanity, speaking in a tone or manner that threatens disruption, or other like breaches of respect.

As part of this requirement, speakers may not utter personal, *ad hominem* attacks towards board members, county employees or members of the public. Directing insults at individuals, rather than discussing substantive concerns of public interest regarding a person's conduct or qualifications, threatens the dignity and good order of meetings. Such comments are likely irrelevant and almost inevitably lead to a responsive defense or counterattack and thus to argumentation that has the real potential to disrupt the orderly conduct of the meeting.

II. Relevance

Speakers may not make clearly irrelevant comments because they threaten to disrupt the order and fair progress of public meetings. Comments offered during public hearings conducted for a specific purpose must be reasonably related to the subject-matter of the hearing. Speakers may not use comment periods for commercial advertisements, solicitations, or supporting or opposing a candidate for public office.

III. Comments About Minors

Speakers may not disclose personally identifiable information about minors, such as names, birthdays, addresses, or pictures, without permission from a minor's parent or legal guardian.

IV. Time Allotment

In general, public comments are limited to three minutes per speaker. However, the Presiding Officer may establish another time limit prior to the public comment period based on the number of speakers and the agenda. The Presiding Officer may provide individuals with minor time extensions to allow them to finish their thought. Speakers may not yield their time to another person.

V. Registration and Prioritization of Speakers

Persons seeking to speak must identify themselves by filling out and returning an information card provided by the Clerk. If the time allotted for public comments is insufficient for the number of speakers, the Presiding Officer may prioritize speakers that reside, work, or pay taxes in Cabarrus County. Additionally, the Presiding Officer may ask members of organizations supporting or opposing a position to appoint a spokesperson.

VI. Viewpoint Neutrality

This Policy is intended to establish reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions in accordance with state and federal law. It shall not be construed or applied so as to discriminate against a speaker based on the substantive content of their speech.

VII. Enforcement

The Presiding Officer is responsible for enforcement of this policy. The Presiding Officer may do so, where appropriate, by warning a person that they are violating this policy, temporarily prohibiting the person from presenting to the Board, or directing the person to leave a meeting. The Presiding Officer may request the assistance of law enforcement officers to enforce this policy.

Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.17, a person who willfully interrupts, disturbs, or disrupts an official meeting and who, upon being directed to leave the meeting by the presiding officer, willfully refuses to leave the meeting is guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor.

VIII. Authority

This policy is authorized under N.C.G.S. 153A-52 and 153A-52.1, which authorize the Board of Commissioners to adopt reasonable rules governing the conduct of public comment periods and public hearings.

ADOPTED this 2nd day of May, 2022.

Stephen M. Morris, Chairman
Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners

Attest:

Clerk to the Board