

TOWN OF ACWORTH

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION DURING SELECTBOARD MEETINGS POLICY

Reviewed on 6/3/2024 adopted by the Selectboard on 7/15/2024

Jim Jennison



Kathi Bradt


Ryanne Schoonover

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

All persons, whether Town residents or not, have a right under the NH Right-to-Know Law, RSA 91-A, to attend public meetings. They may make notes, tapes, photos or video, as long as they do not disrupt the business of the meeting, or block the view of others. These rights are subject to exceptions including nonpublic sessions under RSA 91-A:3, and consultation with legal counsel under RSA 9-A:2, I(c).

In order to assure that persons who wish to appear before the Board may be heard and concurrently assure that the Board may conduct its business and meetings properly and efficiently, the Board adopts as policy the following guidelines and rules of order to be used when needed when the public wishes to speak to items on the agenda of regular Selectboard meetings:

ORDER OF MEETINGS

All persons attending must remain quiet and comply with directives from the presiding Chair. No one may speak without permission of the Chair. While Selectboard meetings are open to the public, this does not give anyone a right to speak, only a right to be present. **PLEASE NOTE:** Those wishing to speak with an audience member shall quietly leave the room before talking.

Public participation at regular Selectboard meetings is intended to allow individual members of the public the opportunity to address the Board on relevant issues and is not a forum for two-way dialogue with Board members. The Board Chair, or their designee, may respond to questions at the end of each public participation session, or responses may be provided at a later time.

The Chair will remind the public that the Board normally hears information on an item but is not expected to respond immediately and substantively to questions or comments. The Board will defer discussion and action on most matters until after the Board and/or administration have an opportunity to gather the necessary information and perspectives for deliberations at future meetings. Thus, the public should not expect immediate action.

PUBLIC INPUT

Public input on business before the Selectboard shall be allowed:

- On matters for which State law requires a public hearing;
- On agenda items for which the Selectboard, in its discretion, decides to allow public input; and
- Whenever the Selectboard votes to allow a public comment period for items not on the agenda. All public input is subject to the permission from the Chair.

TIME LIMITS

The Chair may impose a time limit on presentations from an individual or organization. The Chair may also limit each speaker to 3-minutes. The Chair is responsible for maintaining a respectful environment during public participation so that public comments can be heard and considered by the Board. The Chair may interrupt or terminate the speaker's privilege of address if the speaker does not follow these rules of order. Speech that is slanderous, defamatory, violent, irrelevant, repetitious, harassing, frivolous, off-topic, disruptive, or antagonistic may be considered out of order. Repeated violations or disruptions may result in the intervention of law enforcement.

Each individual speaker must be recognized by the Chair and should identify themselves by name and town of residence and should state the name of any group for whom they are speaking. Speakers may not relinquish allotted time to another speaker. Speakers may have additional time to answer any clarifying questions, if asked, by the Selectboard or administration. The Selectboard encourages members of the public to speak concisely and to provide new comments or perspectives not already presented to the Board, though a member of the public may agree or disagree with prior comments or positions. For specific meetings or agenda items, the Board may at the outset of the public comment periods increase the individual time limit for all speakers.

AGENDA ITEMS

Persons who wish to add items to the Selectboard's agenda may submit them in writing to the Selectboard at a prior meeting, or to the Town Administrator by 10:00 a.m. on the Thursday prior to the meeting. The request should include the name of the person submitting it, and a brief description. The Selectboard may, at its discretion, alter the order of, or delay consideration of, any item on the agenda.

All of the above is at the Selectboard's discretion.