

Town of Manlius
Rules for Decorum at Public Meetings
LAST ADOPTED 1-25-12

Town Board meetings are required to be held in public for the purpose of allowing the public to *observe* the meetings. The law does not require that a Town Board set aside time at regular meetings for public comment, except for the case of public hearings. Public participation is the purpose of a public hearing, which is required prior to the adoption of a local law or ordinance and in other cases, as specified by law.

The Town Board believes that a public comment period should be scheduled for each meeting. However, it believes that it is important that all periods of public input - whether they be public hearings or a public comment period – should abide by a set of rules that are designed to ensure that good order and civility is maintained at meetings. The purpose of the public comment period is to discuss Town business only.

Individual problems, concerns or questions of the public should initially be addressed to the Town Supervisor's office, rather than be brought up at Town Board meetings. This will allow the Supervisor to gather the necessary information and/or personnel to address those concerns. If those concerns are not addressed to the satisfaction of the individual, then redress by the entire Town Board may be the next option.

In an effort to help the Town conduct efficient and productive meetings, the Town of Manlius, which were last adopted on January 25, 2012:

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD/PUBLIC HEARING/PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

1. The Town Supervisor, or in his absence, the Deputy Town Supervisor, is the Chairman of every Town Board meeting. As such, it is the Town Supervisor's right and responsibility to direct meetings and make decisions that will, in his/her judgment, inure to the benefit of all those attending;
2. The Town will provide, to the extent practical, a Community Comment period that will be governed by a Community Comment Agenda;
3. Except for the case of Public Hearings or special Public Information Meetings, the Community Comment portion of the meeting is the only time when comments will be permitted by the public, unless a person is otherwise recognized by the Town Supervisor;
4. The Community Comment Agenda is an opportunity for the public to address Town business.

Examples of Town business, include, but is not limited to: action items before the Town Board; information related to Town Business and issues or concerns related to Town operations; and issues or concerns related to Town property or infrastructure.

Examples of things that are NOT Town business, include, but is not limited to: private property matters; neighbor disputes; Village, County, State or Federal issues that do not affect the Town and litigated or disputed matters that have been settled to the Town's satisfaction.

The Town Supervisor, as Chairman of the meeting, shall determine if the matter being discussed is Town business.

5. If a person desires to be placed on the Community Comment Agenda they should notify the Clerk's Office in writing of the subject to be discussed. As a courtesy, such request should be provided by the close of business the day prior to the meeting. The Town Supervisor will determine if the subject reflects Town business as set forth in 4 above.

6. The Community Comment Agenda, Public Hearing or Special Public Information meetings are designed for comments only. At the appropriate time any questions, comments and/or opinions will be taken by the Town Supervisor. Where appropriate, the Town Supervisor may respond directly or direct the question, comment or opinion to the appropriate person to respond.

7. Each speaker on the Community Comment Agenda Public Hearing or Special Public Information Meeting must state his or her name and the subject he or she will be addressing.

8. Each speaker during the Community Comment Agenda period Public Hearing or Special Information Meeting is limited to speak once, three minutes in length, which rule will be enforced by the Town Supervisor. Any request of extension of this time limitation must be made to the Town Supervisor who has the discretion to extend the time to speak. In the case of Public Hearings, and at the discretion of the Town Supervisor, speakers may be allowed to speak a second time, once everyone has been allowed to speak once.

9. Comments by speakers must be addressed to the Town Supervisor. Attendees should not address the Town Board until recognized by the Town Supervisor.

10. Any audio/visual or similar equipment to be used to support the comments or issues of a speaker must be approved by the Town Supervisor at least 24 hours before the regularly scheduled Town Board meeting.

11. Discussion between speakers and attendees of the Community Comment Agenda is prohibited, unless directed by the Town Supervisor. A speaker may disagree with or support prior speakers in comments directed to the Town Board.

12. Speakers should present their remarks in a courteous manner.

13. Placards, banners, or other signs are not permitted in meeting rooms, nor are the distribution of flyers.

14. If, in the opinion of the Town Supervisor, comments by a member of the public during the Community Comment Agenda, Public Hearing or Special Public Information Meeting are not related to Town business or in any other way violates these Rules, the Town Supervisor will notify the speaker to either re-direct his/her comments to Town business or otherwise follow the Rules. If the individual persists to violate these Rules, he/she will be asked to stop speaking.

15. A person who has been asked to stop speaking because he/she has violated these Rules more than twice has demonstrated his/her inability to speak on the Community Comment Agenda, Public Hearing or Special Public Information Meeting and may forfeit that privilege for all future meetings.

16. If after a final warning, the speaker refuses to step down, the Town Supervisor may have the person removed from the Town Board meeting room.

REGULAR TOWN BOARD AGENDA

While an agenda is not required, the Town Board believes to the extent possible, an agenda should be prepared before a regularly scheduled meeting. The agenda is prepared by the Town Clerk. Items for the agenda shall be given to the Town Clerk by the Friday before the next regularly scheduled Town Board Meeting and should be provided by the close of business on the day prior to the Town Board Meeting.

TOWN BOARD

1. Town Board members must be recognized by the Town Supervisor before making motions and speaking.

2. A member, once recognized, shall not be interrupted when speaking unless to call the member to order. If a member, while speaking, is called to order, such member shall cease speaking until the question of order is determined, and, if in order, such member shall be permitted to proceed.

3. There is no limit on the number of times a member may speak on a question.

4. A member may, with permission of the Town Supervisor, interrupt a speaker during their remarks, but only for the purpose of clarification and information.

5. All members shall observe the commonly accepted rules of courtesy, decorum, dignity and good taste.

Nothing contained herein shall be construed to limit the rights and responsibilities of a Town Board to conduct meetings under the Laws of the State of New York and the United State of America. Through these rules, it is the intent of the Town Board to offer general guidelines that it believes will make attending Town Board meetings more effective, efficient and enjoyable to the Members of the Town Board and the public in general.