

## **Town of Manlius**

### **Rules of Decorum at Public Meetings**

#### **Last Adopted 1-5-22**

This document establishes the procedural rules and decorum guidelines for Town of Manlius public Board meetings. The purpose of these rules is to allow for the orderly conduct of Town business that is convenient for the public, fair to all Board Members and, above all else, essential for open, transparent and effective local governance.

Town Board meetings are required to be held in public for the purpose of allowing the public to observe the meetings. New York State 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 are 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.

Personal attacks, personal accusations, irrelevant or unduly repetitious communications or other disruptive behaviors that actively disrupt, disturb or impede the orderly conduct of the business of the Board may, at the discretion of the Town Supervisor, incur a warning, recess of the meeting, or other appropriate actions, to allow the Board to resume the orderly conduct of Town business.

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.

## **OPEN PODIUM /PUBLIC HEARING/PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING**

The Town Supervisor, or in their absence, the Deputy Town Supervisor, is the Chair 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 their judgment, inure to the benefit of all those attending.

Except for the case of Public Hearings or special Public Information Meetings, the Open Podium 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.

Open Podium is an opportunity for the public to address Town business. Examples of Town business, include, but are 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 are not limited to: private property matters; Village, County, State or Federal issues that do not affect the Town and litigated matters that have been settled to the Town's satisfaction. The Town Supervisor, as Chair of the meeting, shall determine if the matter being discussed is Town business.

Each regular business meeting of the Board will include an Open Podium period, in which any citizen may make a statement regarding an item on a past, present or future Board open-session agenda, or a matter of general policy over which the Board has jurisdiction.

1. To the extent practical, 15 minutes will be set aside for Open Podium.
2. A speaker must complete a speaker slip if intending to speak.
3. Comments shall be limited to three minutes per person. Total time allotted to public comment shall not exceed 15 minutes without the consent of the Town Supervisor.
4. Comments shall be directed to the Board as a whole, and not to individual members.
5. Comments shall be presented in a courteous manner, and not in a threatening or abusive manner.
6. It shall be the decision of the Town Supervisor if it is appropriate to respond to a question.
7. In the interest of allowing all viewpoints to be heard the Town Supervisor may ask speakers expressing similar viewpoints to elect one person from the group to speak on their behalf.
8. As time is limited, not all speakers may have a chance to speak, but they are welcomed to leave comments in writing at the meeting, attend a future meeting, or contact the Town, Town Supervisor, or Board Members via phone, meeting, or email beyond the meeting.
9. Discussion between speakers and attendees should be respectful. A speaker may disagree with or support prior speakers in comments directed to the Town Board.
10. In the case of a Public Hearing, 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.
11. If, in the opinion of the Town Supervisor, comments by a member of the public during the Open Podium, 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 their comments to Town business or otherwise follow the Rules. If the individual persists to violate these Rules, they will be asked to stop speaking. 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 by the Friday before the next regularly scheduled Town Board Meeting and should be provided and posted for the public by the close of business on the day prior to the Town Board Meeting.

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 refrain from personal attacks, personal accusations, irrelevant or unduly repetitious communications or other disruptive behaviors that actually disrupt, disturb or impede the orderly conduct of the business of the Board.

Nothing contained herein shall be construed to limit the rights and responsibilities of a Town Board to conduct meeting under the Laws of the State of New York and the United States of America. Through these rules, it is the intent of the Town Board to offer general guidelines that may make attending Town Board meetings convenient for the public, fair to all Board Members and, above all else, essential for open, transparent and effective local governance.