



## **Rules of Decorum for Public Comment**

Adopted by Council Jan. 7, 2020

Public input and participation are of the utmost importance to the Raleigh City Council. While North Carolina General Statute § 160A-81.1<sup>1</sup> requires that municipal governing boards provide for public comment only once a month, the City of Raleigh has chosen to provide this opportunity at each bi-monthly regular Council meeting. The Council encourages individuals to use this process to bring issues to its attention and to share information. This will allow the Council to be better informed and, therefore, to more effectively govern the City and serve its constituents.

North Carolina General Statute § 160A-81.1 also allows the City Council to adopt reasonable rules which govern the conduct of the public comment period, including rules to maintain order and decorum. The Rules of Decorum, set forth below, are not intended to limit the content of the speaker's message, but are instead to ensure that this part of the Agenda is conducted in a civil and orderly manner.

1. Each speaker is allocated 3 minutes to speak. The Mayor or presiding officer may, in their discretion, increase or decrease this time allocation.
2. A speaker may not share or relinquish any remaining time they have not used to another speaker.
3. Speakers are only allowed to speak one time during the Public Comment period. Speakers may not use the Public Comment period to speak on a matter scheduled for public hearing during the same meeting.
4. A person may speak only if they have signed up to speak in accordance with the City's procedures. Speaker substitutions at the meeting are not allowed.
5. Speakers shall refrain from personal attacks and/or threats directed towards City staff or members of the public.

<sup>1</sup> **N.C. Gen. Stat. § 160A-81.1 Public comment period during regular meetings.**

The council shall provide at least one period for public comment per month at a regular meeting of the council. The council may adopt reasonable rules governing the conduct of the public comment period, including, but not limited to, rules (i) fixing the maximum time allotted to each speaker, (ii) providing for the designation of spokesmen for groups of persons supporting or opposing the same positions, (iii) providing for the selection of delegates from groups of persons supporting or opposing the same positions when the number of persons wishing to attend the hearing exceeds the capacity of the hall, and (iv) providing for the maintenance of order and decorum in the conduct of the hearing. The council is not required to provide a public comment period under this section if no regular meeting is held during the month.

6. Speakers shall be civil and courteous in their language and presentation. Insults, profanity, use of vulgar language or gestures or other inappropriate behavior are not allowed.
7. Comments, questions, or jeering from the audience are not allowed. Speakers shall likewise not address or respond to members of the audience.
8. Speakers should not expect Council members to comment on or respond to their comments directly during the meeting. The Mayor, or presiding officer may, however, request the City Manager's office to follow up with a speaker after the meeting or provide additional information to the Council at a later date.
9. The Mayor, or presiding officer, has the authority to enforce the Rules of Decorum. Failure to obey these Rules may result in the forfeiture of the remaining speaking time. Individuals who engage in egregious or repeated violations may be asked to leave the meeting. Speakers and members of the audience should also note the following Raleigh City Code provision and North Carolina General Statute:

***Raleigh City Code Sec. 1-1034. – Enforcement of Decorum Requirements.***

*Any person who violates the order and decorum of a Council meeting shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.*

***N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143-318.17. - Disruptions of official meetings.***

*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.*