

Excerpts for Public Comment at Water Board Meetings

Ensuring Transparency and Public Engagement

Introduction

Water Board meetings are pivotal functions where crucial decisions regarding water management, policy, and infrastructure are discussed and implemented.

The Importance of Public Comment

Public comments at Water Board meetings serve several vital purposes:

- **Advocacy and Representation:** They represent the voice of the community, ensuring that the interests of various groups are heard and considered in decision-making processes.
- **Accountability:** Public comments hold Water Boards accountable by questioning policies, raising concerns.
- **Transparency:** Public engagement fosters transparency, providing insight into the functioning and decision-making processes of Water Boards.

Notable Excerpts from Jurassic Parliament's Guidelines for Public Comment

Public Comment is not a Dialogue

- The public comment period is not a time for dialogue. A meeting of a public board is not a MEETING OF THE PUBLIC, it is a MEETING OF THE BOARD that is held in public. The purpose of the public comment period is for the board to receive input from its community. It is, in fact, a ONE-WAY communication to the board. The public does not participate in making decisions. Instead, it provides input to the

governing body, which will take that input into account in making its decisions.

- Once the public comment period is over, the president **MUST** thank the speakers warmly for their input. Residents can be disappointed when they do not receive an immediate answer to their questions or comments. Acknowledging how valuable their views are is critical.

Consider First Amendment and Free Speech Rights of Members

- A governmental body must craft its requirements with care in order to preserve the free speech rights of its members. State law and regulations, and the Water Departments specific bylaws or rules of procedure, have higher standing than *Robert's Rules of Order*, or other parliamentary authorities.

Maintain Other Channels for Communication with the Public

- Given the limits on the public comment period, it is essential for the governing body to maintain other channels of communication. There is a *Contact Us* on the webpage. There are different departments that can be contacted. Click any of those depending on your needs. They are Meter Reading, Repairs, Billing or Customer Support.

During Public Comment

- All speakers are to address their remarks to the chair not to board members or the public.
- Speakers must use the podium to speak to the chair if there is one present. Otherwise, rise and stand in front of the chair to speak.
- Board members should refrain from speaking during this portion of the meeting unless requested by the chair.
- All speakers are required to keep to the time limits. The chair or a board member may enforce the time limits by a timer.
- If someone speaks beyond their allotted time, the presider must intervene by saying "Thank you, your time is up". It is the presider's duty to prevent any speaker from hijacking the meeting.
- The chair should thank each speaker, whether positive or negative.

- In general, it is best not to respond at all to public comments, however, the chair may provide brief factual information, if appropriate.
- The chair must not under any circumstances enter into back-and-forth exchanges with the public.
- It is helpful to have a staff person preset at the side with whom community members may speak privately to provide their questions and contact information. The staff will get back to them at a later date. Do not call on staff to give public answers on the spot.

These guidelines are based on the principles of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, 12th edition. The board may create their own rules for public comment in addition to these as long as they follow state law. The Water Departments rules have higher authority than *Robert's Rules of Order*.