

City of Watertown

Policy Regarding Council Meeting Public Comment Decorum

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish rules of decorum for public comments at City Council meetings.

2.0 General

In accordance with SDCL 1-25-1, the City of Watertown shall reserve at every regularly scheduled official City Council meeting a period for public comment.

3.0 Procedure

The following rules apply to the public comment period:

- Individuals wishing to speak must sign in prior to the scheduled start of the meeting.
- No person shall address the City Council until the presiding officer has recognized and given him or her leave to speak.
- Each person shall state their name and their city of residence for the record before making their comment. The speaker shall also state the topic they wish to discuss, and what, if any, action is desired for the City Council to take upon this subject.
- Whenever a group wishes to address the City Council on the same subject, the presiding officer may request that a spokesperson be chosen by the group.
- Speakers must refrain from using: profanity; language likely to incite violence or outbursts from the audience; language that is disruptive to the orderly process of the meeting; engaging in conversations with individual council members; making comments of a personal nature regarding others; shouting, yelling or screaming.
- Speakers must not continue to address the City Council once they have left the podium and must not engage in conversation with Council members from their seat.
- All demonstrations, including cheering, yelling, whistling, handclapping and foot stomping which disrupts, disturbs or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the Council meeting are prohibited.
- Each person speaking shall be limited to five (5) minutes. If more than one person speaks upon the same subject, the total time allowed for discussion on a single topic will be no longer than fifteen (15) minutes. The maximum time allowed for oral communication shall be thirty (30) minutes. For good cause, the Mayor may extend or shorten the time for individual speakers or the maximum time for oral communications.
- Subject to the approval of the Mayor, persons who did not sign in may be allowed to speak provided maximum time limits are not exceeded.

4.0 Responsibilities

- a. The Mayor shall act as presiding officer. The Council President shall act as presiding officer in the absence of the Mayor.
- b. Other than asking a question to clarify a statement, Council members should refrain from entering into a dialogue with the speaker.
- c. The presiding officer is responsible for maintaining decorum and will not allow the speaker to make personal attacks or inflammatory comments. The presiding officer can ask the speaker to be quiet and sit down. If the individual does not comply with the presiding officer's request, they may be asked to leave, or if necessary, be escorted from the meeting.