

Rules of Decorum

Council meetings on important community issues may become contentious very quickly. Establishing rules of decorum before a controversy arises can prevent meetings from becoming unproductive due to conflict. On occasion, however, members of the council, public and/or staff may not follow the rules. On these occasions, the mayor's role as the meeting's presiding officer is particularly important. All councilmembers shall assist the presiding officer in preserving order and decorum and in providing for the efficient operation of the meeting. The rules of decorum apply to all persons participating in a meeting unless expressly noted.

1. City council meetings shall be conducted in a courteous manner that recognizes the validity of differing points of view and promotes the ideal of democratic discussion and debate free of insult, slander, and personal attacks and threats.
2. Participants shall conduct themselves at council meetings in a manner consistent with the following:
 - a. No person shall engage in conduct which delays or interrupts the proceedings.
 - b. No person shall hinder honest, respectful discussion and debate.
 - c. No councilmember shall engage in private conversation or pass private messages while in the chamber in a manner so as to interrupt the proceedings of the council.
 - d. No person shall leave his or her seat or make any noise of disturbance while a vote is being taken and until the result of the vote is announced.
 - e. No person shall use profane or obscene words or unparliamentary language or use language that threatens harm or violence toward another person during a council meeting.
 - f. No person shall use dismissive body language (i.e. eye rolling, gestures, turning back to speaker, etc.)
 - g. No person shall speak on any subject other than the subject in debate.
 - h. No person shall ask rhetorical or leading questions during Council question period. Questions of clarification should be succinct.
 - i. No person shall speak without being recognized by the chair; nor shall any person interrupt the speech of another person.
 - j. No person shall disobey the City Council Rules of Order and Procedure or a decision of the presiding officer on questions of order or practice or upon the interpretation of the rules of council.
 - k. No person shall engage in disorderly conduct that disturbs or disrupts the orderly conduct of any meeting.

- l. All cell phones and other electronic devices shall be silenced during meetings.
- m. Persons should be addressed by use of title and/or last name.

Enforcing decorum:

When participants violate rules of order and decorum, the presiding officer is authorized to:

- Not recognize a breaching participant's request to speak, limiting their role in debate or comment until decorum is observed.
- Declare the participant's actions out of order.
- Order removal from the council chambers by law enforcement until the participant agrees to abide by council rules of decorum.

Members of the council may request action by the presiding officer to curb another member's conduct through a motion for a point of order. The motion may request a specific response to conduct by the presiding officer. For example, "I make a motion for the presiding officer to call Councilmember ____ to order and to desist from making personal attacks." Any member of the Council may appeal to the full council a ruling on order or procedure made by the presiding officer. The procedure is noted in Rule 7 of the Council Rules of Order.

Members may make a motion for adjournment or for a brief recess, if a participant's actions are so offensive as to disrupt the orderly process of the meeting.

Generally any councilmember (including the mayor), may make a motion to censure a councilmember for conduct that breaches decorum. A censure often takes the form of a resolution adopted by council vote noting the councilmember's conduct and expressing disapproval of such conduct.

State law also prohibits persons, including councilmembers, from disturbing public meetings, through fighting or threatening words and conduct. Councilmembers who engage in this unlawful conduct may be charged with a misdemeanor.