

## Governing Bodies: General FAQ 2

### **Does the public have the right to speak at a meeting of a governmental body?**

No. Although Wisconsin's open meetings law requires that the public be allowed to attend an open meeting of a governmental body, the public does not have the right to address a governmental body unless the meeting is a public hearing specifically designed to give the public input on a particular matter. However, it is not uncommon for governing bodies to designate a public comment period on the agenda so they can hear constituent concerns. Some governing bodies establish rules governing public comment (e.g., time limit for each speaker), to balance the need to listen to the public's concerns with the need to run meetings in an efficient and orderly manner.



## **On what subjects and at what point during the meeting should citizens address the body?**

The public body has three options when considering what subjects are permissible for citizens to address. (1) Allow for public comment on any issue of concern to the citizen. (2) Allow for public comment on any issue on the agenda for that meeting. (3) Allow for public comment only on selected items on the agenda. The body must also decide at what point during the meeting that the citizen comments will be heard.

If the body wishes to allow input on any matter of concern to the citizen, opportunities to address the body should come early in the meeting agenda so that comments on agenda items can be heard before the item is taken up. Possibilities would include scheduling citizen participation at some point after the meeting is called to order and before substantive agenda items such as reports are begun, or scheduling it for a time specific as in 8:00 for a meeting that started at 7:30. If the input session is set for a time specific, then any business being conducted at the scheduled time for input would be interrupted and would be resumed when citizen participation is concluded.

If the body wishes to restrict public comment to those items on the agenda, then it may also schedule the time for input early in the meeting or just after the item has been introduced. In any case, it should be made clear on the agenda that citizens are to address only those items on the agenda.

In the third circumstance, when the body is accepting public input only on selected agenda items, the body may choose to schedule public comment on those items early in the meeting or shortly after the item is introduced. In this case, it probably makes most sense to schedule citizen input after the item has been introduced.

## **Should citizens be limited by the number of times they can address the body and should the length of each comment be limited?**

To prevent over-long presentations and domination by individual citizens, it may be desirable to limit by rule the number of times a citizen can speak on an issue and the length of time each of his/her comments can consume. Probably the length of each comment could be limited to three, four, or five minutes and the citizen should be limited to addressing the body no more than twice on the same issue. Such time limits should apply to question-answer exchanges as well as to expressions of opinion. To promote equality of opportunity to speak to the body, no citizen who has already addressed the board should be permitted to do so a second time if another who has not spoken wishes to do so.

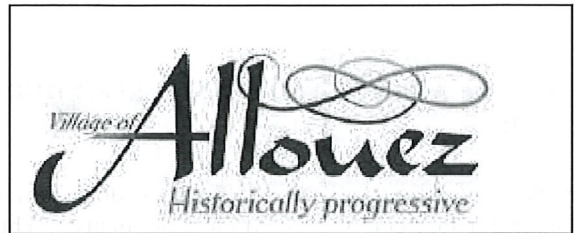
## **Rules can be relaxed as the situation warrants**

Rules governing public participation in local government body meetings can seem arbitrary as to the number of times a citizen may speak, the length of each comment, the subjects s/he can address, etc. Fortunately, although established, such rules can be relaxed by group action. If there is good reason to allow a citizen to speak at a time other than that set aside for his/her input, or to speak longer or more frequently than the rules permit, the body can agree to “suspend the rules.” In the tradition of parliamentary procedure, suspending the rules is to be done for good reason and for very limited purposes. For example, the body would agree to suspend the rules allowing “citizen Jones to comment a third time on the drainage issue.” Suspending the rules is often done by unanimous consent. That is, the chairperson might inquire of the body if there is any objection to allowing Ms. Jones to speak a third time on the drainage issue. If there is no objection the chair so announces and the permission to speak again is granted. If there is disagreement among the body about suspending the rules, the body can still do so by formal motion and, unless the body’s own rules provides otherwise, a two-thirds vote is required to allow for passage of a motion to suspend the rules. In small, traditionally informal bodies such as three-person town boards or in committees and commissions, the chairperson might introduce the public participation session by reminding all present that the rules are in place and they will be enforced if they are needed.

## **Sign-in can be a useful tool**

The elected body may wish to require citizens to sign in on a roster of speakers prior to the beginning of the meeting of the body. Requiring citizen’s to sign in prior to addressing the governing body serves a number of purposes. First, it allows the body to control the number of speakers and their impact on the length of the meeting. The number of speakers may be arbitrarily limited. The sign-in requirement itself acts as a limiting factor as it precludes spur of the moment commentary from the audience from disrupting the meeting. Second, by requiring a sign-in with the issue on which the citizen wishes to address the body to be noted, it provides the governing body and its staff time to prepare for questions on the issue being addressed. Citizens may be allowed to sign in for a short period just prior to the meeting, such as during a time frame between 30 and 15 minutes prior to the meeting’s call to order or a longer period, such as by noon on the day of an evening meeting. Either prevents the elected body from being surprised by an issue brought up by a citizen and often allows the diffusion of an issue before it has a chance to become a larger concern.

**Village of Allouez Village Board  
 Attending Citizens Comments  
 Registration Form**



We welcome your comments; please keep your comments brief and professional. Each pre-registered guest has up to 3 minutes per board meeting to speak. See reverse side for rules and procedures

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you like to speak during the Village Board Meeting? (Circle one) Y / N**

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(Speaking guests and/or citizens will be called upon at the appropriate time to speak)

You can register your opinion or comments on a specific agenda item if you don't want to personally speak during the formal board meeting by completing the below information. These acknowledgements will read at the appropriate time during the meeting.

Board Agenda Item: # \_\_\_\_\_  for /  against Brief written statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Board Agenda Item: # \_\_\_\_\_  for /  against Brief written statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Board Agenda Item: # \_\_\_\_\_  for /  against Brief written statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Board Agenda Item: # \_\_\_\_\_  for /  against Brief written statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Board Agenda Item: # \_\_\_\_\_  for /  against Brief written statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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Other general written comments:

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***Completed forms must be returned to the Village Clerk before the meeting is called to order to be considered.  
 Thank you for your concern and participation in our municipal government.***

## VILLAGE OF ALLOUEZ MEETING PROCEDURES FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

Introduced: \_\_\_\_\_, 2018

Adopted by the Village Board: \_\_\_\_\_, 2018

The Village of Allouez Board of Trustees does hereby adopt and affirm the below civil and orderly set of rules and procedures for the handling of Public Comments. These procedures are adopted to facilitate an open, courteous, orderly and professional public meeting while handling the affairs of the Village of Allouez. The purpose of board meetings is to handle the business of the Village in a professional orderly manner. Citizens are welcome and encouraged to witness village board meetings and to address the village board in a professional and courteous manner when, and if, recognized by the Village President.

In order to insure all Allouez Village Board meetings are conducted in an orderly and businesslike manner, all attendees and participants will adhere to the following adopted procedures related to the acceptance of public comments.

**Unless called upon by the Village President, citizens and/or guests are permitted to address the board only during the agenda item appropriately titled “Public Comments from Pre-Registered Citizens”.**

Rules pertaining to the acceptance of Public Comments:

- Citizen Comment Registration forms will be made available to attendees in advance of board meetings.
- If attendees wish to address the Board during the Public Comment period, they must complete a registration form and turn it in to the Village Clerk-Treasurer before the meeting is called to order.
- **Persons who fail to register will not be allowed to comment during the formal meeting of the board.**
- During the Public Comment period, the Village President will announce registered citizens by name.
- Upon hearing a pre-registered citizen’s name, they are asked to stand, approach the podium and make their comments in a professional and businesslike manner. Each registered citizen will be allowed to address the Board once and will be limited to three minutes unless an extension is granted by consent of all board members.
- Comments must address the board as a governing body. Questions specifically to a particular board member or directed to a specific employee of the village are not permitted during the board meeting.
- While questions may be asked for clarification purposes, Board members will not engage in debate with citizens at any time during the meeting. The purpose of the public comment period is to accept comments for board members to take into consideration when deliberations of the elected body begin. During Board meetings, the privilege of debate is limited to and between elected representatives only.
- As an alternative to speaking during the public comment period, citizens and/or guests may utilize the Citizen Comment Registration form to submit a support or opposition statement that is related to a specific item on the agenda with the Village Clerk-Treasurer. These forms must be completely filled out prior to the beginning of the formal board meeting. The Village Clerk-Treasurer will report the quantity of statements filed- in support and in opposition- and comments received on these forms immediately after the Village President announces the agenda item.

**Rules pertaining to the conduct of attending citizens and/or guests:**

1. Citizens and/or guests must remain silent from individual conversation and/or meeting distraction/disruptions in the audience. Distractions and disruptions include, but are not limited to, clapping of the hands, hissing, or booing.
2. Cellular phones or other electronic devices that by design or use make noise are prohibited from use during the board meeting. The exception to this rule is if the device is being used during an authorized presentation to the board during the meeting.

Violations of established procedures will be addressed with a courteous warning from the Village President. A second violation will result in removal from the meeting and other legal actions based on the seriousness of the violation and disruption of the public meeting. If citizens and/or guests do not comply with the warnings issued by the Village President, enforcement of these rules will be assisted by the Brown County Sheriff’s Department.

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**VILLAGE OF ALLOUEZ**  
**Resolution 2018-\_\_\_\_\_**  
**Village Board, Committee and Commission Meeting Discussion Policy**

**WHEREAS**, the Allouez Village Board, Brown County, Wisconsin wishes to amend its policy for discussing agenda items at Village Board, Committee and Commission meetings;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Village Board of the Village of Allouez, Wisconsin hereby sets forth the following procedures to be followed at Village Board, Committee and Commission meetings:

1. Citizen comments will be allowed on an item, whether on the agenda or not, at the beginning of the meeting for a maximum of five minutes. The Village Board or Committee or Commission Members should not comment on or respond to items addressed in citizen comments except to correct a comment or refer it to an upcoming meeting agenda;
2. The Village President or Committee or Commission Chair will introduce each agenda item for consideration and discussion;
3. The applicant for each agenda item, or any other person directly involved in that agenda item, subject to a positive majority vote of the Village Board, Committee or Commission, will be given an opportunity to make a presentation;
4. The Village Board, Committee or Commission will discuss the agenda item and may ask questions of the applicant;
5. Unless specifically designated on the agenda as a public hearing, public comment on an agenda item will not be permitted once citizen comments are closed;
6. All individuals addressing a Village Board, Committee or Commission shall approach and use the microphone when called by the Village President or Chair and state their name and address for the record.

Enacted this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2018.

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James F. Rafter, Village President

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Debra M. Baenen, Village Clerk-Treasurer





## **PUBLIC COMMENT RULES**

**The following rules shall apply during Village of Allouez Board, Committee and Commission Meetings:**

- 1. Citizens may speak during the Public Comment Period.**
- 2. If any member of the audience would like to speak outside the Public Comment Period, please raise your hand and wait for the presiding officer to recognize you. Audience members may speak outside of the Public Comment Period only by approval of a majority of the Village Board, Committee or Commission.**
- 3. Citizens will be allowed to speak for 3 minutes.**
- 4. Speakers will refrain from profanity and use of derogatory, accusing or inflammatory remarks.**
- 5. All citizens are entitled to advance notice of topics that will be discussed at Board, Committee and Commission meetings. Therefore, Board, Committee, Commission and staff members will not respond to citizen comments during the meeting. They will only listen. The Board, Committee or Commission, as allowed by the presiding officer may address the matter by putting it on a future agenda for discussion or by providing for some other kind of follow-up.**
- 6. The Board, Committee and Commission may not take action on any matter not on the agenda.**

