



Policy: City of Bridgeport Public Meeting/Public Hearing Policy
Date Effective: November 13, 2013

I. INTRODUCTION & CONTENTS

The mission of the City of Bridgeport is to provide municipal services that enhance the quality of life of our residential and business community while efficiently managing all community resources; and to protect all persons within the jurisdiction of the City of Bridgeport. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that there is a clear awareness of how the City conducts its business, therefore fostering full community participation. These are guidelines to help people understand what to expect and the best way to promote good communication between City Council, Board and Commission members, City Staff and those wishing to speak during any and/or all public meetings. The Presiding Officers have the discretion to modify the application of these guidelines during meetings, such as the amount of time provided for public comment, as needed to assure that Council, City Staff, Board, Commission and Committee members are able to conduct business and to hear from speakers wishing to participate in meetings. All City of Bridgeport meetings comply with West Virginia Open Meeting Laws.

II. GENERAL MATTERS

- A. Procedural Rules-The City of Bridgeport's Codified Ordinances shall serve as a general guide to procedural matters. (See www.bridgeportwv.com/pdfs/CityCode/I-Zoning.pdf)
- B. Public Participation-
 - 1. The City welcomes participation and comment on any subject that falls within its subject matter jurisdiction. We recognize that citizen engagement is an important element of the democratic process and that an open, transparent public process helps create better policies and higher quality decisions made by elected officials. It is the City's intent to create and maintain an environment where people feel comfortable participating in the public process and an atmosphere of respect for all who participate in the City's public meetings/public hearings. To maintain civility and respect, and in order to allow Council, City Staff, Board, Commission and Committee members to complete their work in a timely manner, the City requests that all attendees and participants show respect for every speaker regardless of their viewpoint, and that they refrain from conduct that may inhibit others from addressing board members. Disrespectful conduct, such as hissing, booing, whistling, cheering, chanting, and judgmental hand

gestures, are all inappropriate. The City also will not tolerate the use of profanity, verbal or physical threats or any behavior that may be considered dangerous, create health or safety concerns, create a hostile environment or disrupt the meeting proceedings. Accordingly, the City requests the cooperation of all attendees in maintaining a meeting environment where persons can feel comfortable participating in the public process and where they can express their views and opinions, and an atmosphere of respect for all.

2. **Maintaining Order**-The following behaviors, when they actually cause disruption of a meeting are prohibited, and provide grounds for the Presiding Officer to declare a speaker out of order. The Presiding Officer may also limit speaking time or topics, expel a person from the meeting if they refuse to cease their disruptive behavior and may call for security to physically remove or arrest any persons who persist in actual disruption. These types of disruptions may include but are not limited to creating or participating in a physical disturbance, speaking out of turn or in violation of applicable rules (including time limits), preventing or attempting to prevent others who have the floor from speaking, preventing or impeding others from observing the meeting and entering into or remaining in an area of the meeting room that is not open to the public.
 3. **Enforcement**-Disruptive behavior, as described more fully above, may result in removal from a meeting and/or arrest and prosecution. Any law enforcement officers on duty may serve as the Sergeant-at-Arms of meetings. The Sergeant-at-Arms shall carry out all orders and instructions given by the Presiding Officer for the purpose of maintaining order at meetings.
- C. **Accessibility**-The City makes every reasonable effort to accommodate the needs of the disabled. Persons needing assistance should contact the City Clerk.
- D. **Use of City Equipment**-City equipment such as video/DVD player and projector is not available for public use during public comment for items not on the agenda, or that are not authorized by the administrative staff or City Council with advance notice (minimum 24 hours) due to the limited time for such items and the need for advance coordination with the City Clerk to assure compatibility with City equipment. Such equipment is generally available on a limited basis for use during presentations on agenda items. The speaker must make prior arrangements with the City Clerk in order to assure compatibility with the City's system, allow testing for viruses or other issues that might harm the City's equipment, and so that the materials do not require more than a few minutes' preparation and set-up.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT: SPEAKING AT CITY OF BRIDGEPORT MEETINGS

- A. These Guidelines are intended to assure that members of the public have the opportunity to speak during the Public Comment portion of the agenda and that Council, City Staff, Board, Commission and Committee members have adequate time to complete their work as set forth on an agenda. The time frames set forth herein are meant to give people an idea of what to expect. While the total time for public comment on an agenda item or the time for individual comment may be reasonably limited to allow the board time to complete its work, the Presiding Officer may adjust these time frames as appropriate for any particular item or agenda to ensure that the intent of the law and of these guidelines is met.
- B. Public Comment: General Rules-
1. Public comment will only be made under the Public Comment portion of the agenda.
 2. The Presiding Officer has the authority to refer speakers to the City Manager or to appropriate department heads, as necessary, for answers to questions asked during meetings. Discussion with city staff may occur after the meeting or during normal work hours but not during the public meeting itself.
 3. The public will not be permitted to ask questions or make comments during any other portion of the meeting, unless approved otherwise by the Presiding Officer.
 4. Any person desiring to address Council, City Staff, Board, Commission and Committee members must first sign-in prior to the start of the meeting as outlined below.
 5. Speakers shall use the microphone provided for the public and speak in a recordable tone, either personally or with assistance, if necessary.
 6. Sign-in Sheet - Anyone wishing to speak during the public comment portion of a meeting must sign in. The Sign-in Sheet will be located at the podium prior to the start of the meeting. When the meeting begins, the administrative assistant will remove the Sign-in Sheet from the podium and give it to the Presiding Officer. Once the Sign-in Sheet is removed from the podium, the public is no longer able to sign-up.
 7. The time for public comment will not exceed three (3) minutes per speaker if more than five (5) individuals have signed up to speak. The time limit will not exceed five (5) minutes per speaker if there are less than five (5) individuals signed up to speak.
 8. The Presiding Officer will call each speaker who has signed in to the podium and the speakers will state their name and addresses. The Presiding Officer will then begin the timer.
 9. The City of Bridgeport complies with the *Open Governmental Proceedings Act* (WV Code §6.9A.1 through 12) as set forth by the WV Ethics Commission.

10. It is not reasonable to expect staff to respond on a moment's notice to any issue on which they may or may not be prepared to respond. The City Manager may direct staff to respond at a later time.