



Town of German Flatts

Meeting Decorum and Public Comment Policy

Overview

Town Board meetings are required to be held in public for the purpose of allowing the public to **OBSERVE** meetings of the Town Board. The law does not require that a Town Board set aside time at regular meetings for public comment, except for the case in which the meeting is a public hearing. Public participation is the purpose of a public hearing, which is required prior to the adoption of a local law or ordinance and in other cases, as specified by law.

The German Flatts Town Board recognizes the importance of receiving comments from the public and believes time should be provided at each meeting for the public to comment on business of the Town. However, the Town Board also believes that it is important that all periods of public comment, whether they be during a public hearing or a meeting of the Town Board, should abide by a set of rules that are designed to ensure that good order and civility is maintained at meetings.

The purpose of a public comment period is to allow the public time to discuss Town business only. Individual complaints, concerns or questions of the public shall first be addressed to the Town Supervisor's office, rather than be brought up at a Town Board meeting. This will allow the Supervisor to gather the necessary information and/or personnel to address those concerns. Questions for individual Town Board members may also be addressed to that Town Board member outside of the Town Board meeting first.

Rules of Meeting Decorum

1. All members of the public shall sign in when entering the meeting room.
2. After signing in, all members of the public shall take their seats.
3. Unless addressing the Town Board during the public comment session or entering or leaving the meeting room, all persons in the audience shall remain seated in the seats provided.
 - a. If a member of the public must stand due to space limitations, they shall not block any doorway and shall not stand in any position as to interrupt or disturb the Town Board Meeting.



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4. All members of the public shall place their cell phones and other electronic devices on silent mode before the meeting is called to order.
5. No member of the public shall have side conversations at anytime during the board meeting.
 - a. The only time a member of the public is allowed to speak is during the public comment period provided by the Town Board.
 - i. A member of the public is defined as any individual other than a member of the Town Board, Town Supervisor, Town Clerk, Town Highway Superintendent or anyone acting on the Town Supervisor's behalf when he is absent.
 - ii. Department heads will be called upon if there is a question from the Town Board that pertains to the duties that they are responsible for.
6. All demonstrations including cheering, yelling, whistling, handclapping, foot stomping, or any other noise which disrupts, disturbs or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the Town Board meeting are prohibited.
 - a. Placards, banners, or other signs are not allowed in the meeting room, nor are the distribution of flyers or other media.

Public Comment Session

1. In order for a member of the public to be allowed to speak during the public comment session, they must have printed and signed their name on the public comment sheet provided before the meeting is called to order.
2. The Town Clerk or the Deputy Town Clerk acting on the Town Clerk's behalf will obtain the public comment sign in sheet prior to the meeting being called to order.
3. The public comment session shall take place after the department reports have been presented and before business of the Town is conducted at regular scheduled board meetings.
 - a. The public comment session will take place immediately in the event of a public hearing.
4. When the public comment session has commenced, the Town Clerk or the Deputy Town Clerk acting on the Town Clerk's behalf will call on each member of the public wishing to speak one at a time.
5. Only one person at a time is allowed to speak.
 - a. In the event a group of individuals supporting or opposing a topic of discussion desires to be heard, a spokesperson is requested to be chosen to speak on behalf of the group.

Town Supervisor

L. Peter Rovazzi



Town Board

Samuel Geloso
Dennis Mowers
Cynthia Bennett
John Brewer

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6. When a member of the public who wishes to speak is called upon by the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk, they will state the following:
 - a. Name
 - b. Address
 - c. Topic of comment
 - d. State the name of the group or organization if applicable
7. Questions to the Town Board will not be allowed during the public comment session. All questions to the Town Board or Town Supervisor should be addressed accordingly outside of the public meeting.
8. If the member of the public wishing to speak is going to use any documentation to support their position, they will have distributed 6 copies of the document to the Town Clerk who will then distribute the copies to the Town Board.
9. After the member states their topic of comment, they will then have (3) three minutes to comment.
 - a. The Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk will keep the time of the speakers.
 - b. After (3) three minutes have elapsed, the individual speaking will be stopped by the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk and will then take their seat.
10. All comments shall be addressed to the Town Board as a whole and to the Town Board Only. No comments will be directed to any individual Town Board member or to any employee of the Town.
11. Individuals addressing the Town Board should understand the rules of common courtesy.
 - a. The public comment session of the meeting is not provided to present an opportunity to make personal attacks against the Town Supervisor, Town Board members or employees of the Town.
12. When the individual has completed their comments or the (3) three minute time limit has been reached, the speaker will take their seat and will not be permitted to speak for the remainder of the board meeting.
13. The Town Supervisor and the Town Board members will not respond to any comment made by the individual speaking. This provision is included on the advice of the Town Attorney.
14. No member of the public will speak or make any disruptive noises or comments of gratitude or disgust during the called speaker's time.
15. In order to ensure that as many people as possible have an opportunity to address the Town Board, speakers may address the Town Board only once per meeting.
16. The public comment session will last no longer than (45) forty-five minutes in length.
 - a. In cases where there are more speakers that the (45) forty-five minute time limit allows, the Town Board may reduce the time limit allowed for each speaker.

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Enforcement of the Rules of Meeting Decorum

1. Any member of the public who disregards the rules for meeting decorum and public comment will be warned by a member of the Town Board.
 - a. If the member of public is warned due to not staying on the topic of Town business during the public comment, the presiding officer will redirect the speaker to speak on Town business
 - b. If the speaker persists to violate these Rules, he or she will be asked to stop speaking and to take their seat.
2. If the member of the public does not comply or repeatedly disregards the rules for meeting decorum or the rules for public comment, they shall then be asked by a member of the Town Board to leave the meeting.
 - a. Because the member of the public was warned and refused to comply with the rules of meeting decorum or public comment after they were warned, they will have demonstrated their inability to follow the rules and policy of the Town Board and will forfeit their right to speak during the public comment session of the current Town Board meeting, Public hearing and all future public comment sessions of such meetings.
3. If at this time the member of the public does not leave the meeting as directed, the Town Board will by motion or resolution request that a Police Officer remove the individual from the meeting room pursuant to section 240.20 of the New York State Penal Law.
 - a. If the Town Board wishes, the member of the public may also be charged with Disorderly Conduct pursuant to section 240.20 of the New York State Penal Law.

Distribution of these Rules

1. The rules for meeting decorum and public comment shall be posted on the following:
 - a. Town website
 - b. Town Office information board
 - c. The wall above the Town Board meeting and public comment sign in sheet
 - d. A copy provided to any individual who wishes to retain a copy for their reference or use