

Guidelines for Gem Lake Meetings

Public Comment at Council Meetings, Planning Commission and at Public Hearings

City Council Meetings and Planning Commission Meetings are the forum for the city council (or planning commission) to conduct the city's business. While city council meetings and other meetings are open to the public, pursuant to the Minnesota Open Meeting Law, they are not a forum for public expression. As such, members of the public are not allowed to participate in council discussion and debate without a specific invitation and/or formal recognition by the presiding officer. As a courtesy to other members of the public and the council, individuals are asked to refrain from disruptive behavior including shouting, speaking out of order, and other actions that are intended to be disruptive. Common courtesy is expected, and respect to one another is essential for order of business.

Gem Lake allows for a public comment period at the end of each city council agenda for all regularly scheduled meetings. Public comments are subject to these limitations:

1. Speakers must be recognized by the presiding officer (usually the mayor) before speaking and are limited to three minutes each.
2. When multiple speakers appear to speak on the same topic, comments should not be repetitive. The presiding officer may request speakers appoint a spokesperson.
3. The presiding officer may place a time limit on the public comment period if necessary to allow for the conduct of city business. If this does not allow sufficient time to hear all public comments, the comment period may be deferred to the next regular council meeting.
4. Speakers may be required to sign up prior to speaking and are required to state their name and address when approaching the podium.
5. Speakers must direct their remarks to the presiding officer, or to the entire council.
6. Speakers shall not use obscene, profane or threatening language, nor conduct themselves in a threatening, loud or belligerent manner that disrupts the conduct of the meeting.
7. Speakers are required to follow the direction of the presiding officer.
8. Speakers who do not follow the direction of the presiding officer will be warned that further disruptive conduct will result in removal from the meeting. After warning, if the conduct continues the presiding officer may ask the speaker to leave.
9. Council will generally not respond at the same meeting where an issue is initially raised by the public. Generally, the matter will be referred to staff, legal counsel, or others for further research and possible report or action at a future meeting.

Public Hearings are sometimes required by law to allow the public to offer input on city council decisions. When public hearings are required by law, notice shall be provided as required by state statute. Public hearings shall be commenced at the time advertised in any notice required by law.

General Procedures for Public Hearings

The order of business conducted by the council shall generally be as follows:

1. Opening comments by the presiding officer, announcing the purpose of the public hearing.
2. Presiding officer opens the public hearing portion of the meeting
3. Staff presentations, such as engineering reports, and other relevant information
4. Developer presentation/other presentations.
5. Public comments
6. Reading of written comments.
7. Presiding officer formally closes the public portion of the meeting

Other guidelines for public hearings:

1. Speakers who wish to address the council must follow the same rules as stated above in the city council portion of this handout.
2. Speakers may also provide written comments to the council before the meeting. Written comments may be read aloud by the presiding officer. Anonymous, unsigned communications will not be read.
3. The presiding officer may continue the hearing if necessary to allow for more time.

Other Important Guidelines for Public Meetings

1. All remarks should be directed at the presiding officer or to the entire council. Personal attacks on council members are not allowed. It is inappropriate to use the public comment period for purposes of making political speeches, including threats of political action.
2. The council will generally not engage in debate or dialogue with speakers during the public comment period. A list will be made of all questions so they can either be answered at the end of the meeting or referred to others for research and answered at a later time.