



# TOWN of PORTOLA VALLEY

Town Hall: 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley, CA 94028 - Tel: (650) 851-1700 Fax: (650) 851-4677

## Public Comments During Town Council Meetings

Public comment at open meetings of the Town Council meetings are a cherished element of local government, and a critical component to the decision-making process. Feedback, opinion, and information from the public is a vital part of the Town's inclusive process. This guide provides information to potential speakers on how to prepare and provide comments at public meetings.

### 1. Components of a Public Meeting Agenda

All Town agendas follow the same basic structure:

1. Call to Order/Roll Call – the official beginning of the meeting and the determination of the body's attendance
2. Oral Communications – the portion of the meeting dedicated to hearing from the public on matters that are not otherwise on the body's agenda. The body cannot take action on items not on the agenda, or brought up in oral communications
3. Consent Agenda – these items are voted on at once by the body, unless a member of the body or the public requests that an item be considered separately
4. Regular Agenda – these items are called in sequential order (unless changed by vote of the body), and members of the public may speak to any item during its public comment period, as called by the presiding officer (typically the Mayor)
5. Member reports – these are summaries provided by each member of the body on items of note
6. Adjournment

Members of the public may speak during items 2, 3, 4, or 5.

### 2. General Rules to Public Comment

Participation in the public decision-making process is a privilege all members of the public are afforded. Ensuring that such participation is a positive experience is the responsibility of all those who attend a public meeting. All attendees, including members of the Council, shall follow these general rules.

1. All speakers must be treated with respect. Public speaking on a potentially controversial item is not an easy task for many, and participation should be appreciated. Members of the public should not fear jeers or cheers that can

discourage public participation. For this reason, all who attend a meeting should respect these rules, and the Mayor or Presiding Officer may ask a speaker to leave the meeting should unruly or disruptive behavior take place.

2. Any person while addressing a governing body who
  - Makes slanderous, impertinent and profane remarks
  - Interrupts another speaker
  - whistles, yells, disturbs or displays disruptive behavior that impedes the orderly conduct of meeting

shall, at the discretion of the Mayor or Presiding Officer, or a majority of the governing body, be barred from further audience during that meeting.

3. While it may seem appropriate, if not valued, to applaud a speaker when you agree with them, it can have the effect of silencing those who have a different opinion. In all cases, please refrain from applause after a speaker concludes if you concur with their comments.
4. If you wish to speak to an item on the agenda, you are invited to submit a speaker card to the Town Clerk. Any person wishing to address the Council is requested to announce his/her name and address (name/address disclosure is not a requirement).
5. Members of the public are invited and encouraged to speak at the podium microphone to ensure that all attendees can hear and so comments may be captured in the public record recording.
6. Unless otherwise specified by the Mayor or Presiding Officer, all members of the public are allotted three minutes for each item. A timer is available so a speaker to monitor their remaining time. The Mayor or Presiding Officer may use the timer to more closely manage speaking times if there are many speakers present.
7. Should a group of people wish to address the body on the same item, a spokesperson may address the body and can use each group member's three minutes, up to a total of a half hour. Members of the public allotting their time must be in attendance at the meeting.
8. If you are an applicant for a project, you may address a body for a total of 20 minutes as part of a formal presentation; you may also speak for a total of five minutes in closing remarks, should you wish to do so.
9. All remarks should be addressed to the body and not to any individual member of the body, staff, or any other member of the public.
10. The Mayor or Presiding Officer may direct a staff member to answer any questions from a speaker.
11. Council members shall not enter into debate or discussion with speakers during oral communications.
12. The Mayor or Presiding Officer may request, by unanimous consent of the Council, shortening speaking time to two minutes or ask speakers to limit themselves to new information and points of view not already covered by previous speakers should there be a large number of speakers. This may be necessary, not to limit public

- input, but to ensure that all speakers are able to participate in the full meeting, including the decision-making portion.
13. The Mayor or Presiding Officer may also allow for a speaker to extend beyond three minutes should it be necessary to complete a statement or for other extenuating circumstances.

### **3. Presentation Materials**

Organized groups with a spokesperson may use presentation materials to support their public comments. These can include power points or other computer-projected materials, or short videos. Such materials should be submitted in advance of the meeting by sending before 3 pm of the day of the meeting to:

Town Council –

Sharon Hanlon, Town Clerk  
[shanlon@portolavalley.net](mailto:shanlon@portolavalley.net)