

Hamilton County Board of Commissioners

Rules and Regulations Governing Public Participation at Meetings and Public Hearings

From time to time, the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners holds Public Hearings in order to receive comments concerning issues of interest to the public. Advance notice of these hearings is provided through publicly available notification channels such as the local newspaper. Members of the public are encouraged to attend and provide input on the issues at hand. In addition, from time to time, members of the public may desire to address the board of commissioners concerning agenda items or other issues. These comments are also welcome and encouraged. Comments on agenda items may be provided only during discussion of that item by the board. Comments on other issues may be made during Public Participation Time, which will be provided at some, but not all, meetings of the Board. The availability of Public Participation Time at any given meeting will be noted on the agenda.

Nebraska Revised Statutes Chapter 84, Section 1412 contains the following provisions pertaining to meetings of public bodies;

(1) Subject to the Open Meetings Act, the public has the right to attend and the right to speak at meetings of public bodies, and all or any part of a meeting of a public body, except for closed sessions called pursuant to section 84-1410, may be videotaped, televised, photographed, broadcast, or recorded by any person in attendance by means of a tape recorder, camera, video equipment, or any other means of pictorial or sonic reproduction or in writing.

(2) It shall not be a violation of subsection (1) of this section for any public body to make and enforce reasonable rules and regulations regarding the conduct of persons attending, speaking at, videotaping, televising, photographing, broadcasting, or recording its meetings. A body may not be required to allow citizens to speak at each meeting, but it may not forbid public participation at all meetings.

(3) No public body shall require members of the public to identify themselves as a condition for admission to the meeting nor shall such body require that the name of any member of the public be placed on the agenda prior to such meeting in order to speak about items on the agenda. The body may require any member of the public desiring to address the body to identify himself or herself.

Pursuant to Section 1412, paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) above, the following rules and regulations concerning participation by the public during meetings and public hearings and videotaping, televising, photographing, broadcasting, or recording meetings and public hearings held by the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners will be enforced:

1. Members of the public wishing to address the board at any time may speak only after being recognized by the presiding officer of the meeting or public hearing.
2. Members of the public wishing to address the board are required to identify themselves and their place of residence.
3. All participants and attendees are required to be courteous and respectful to others in attendance and to members of the board. They are not allowed to interrupt other speakers or board members, to make rude or disrespectful comments, or to behave in a hostile manner. Conversation with others in the room that is disruptive to the meeting or public hearing will not be tolerated.
4. Members of the public who wish to address the board are allowed one period of no more than five minutes per public hearing unless granted additional time by the officer presiding over the hearing.

5. Members of the public who wish to address the board during public participation time are allowed one period of up to five minutes unless granted additional time by the officer presiding over the meeting. Participation in public participation time is limited to one occurrence in any three meeting period.
6. Members of the public who wish to address the board regarding agenda items may do so for a period of no more than five minutes per item unless granted additional time by the officer presiding over the meeting.
7. Upon completion of their address to the board, members of the public may be questioned by members of the board. Others in attendance are not allowed to question presenters unless granted permission to do so by the officer presiding over the meeting or public hearing.
8. Members of the public who wish to address the board shall limit their comments to new information and avoid repeating what others have already said. Information presented shall be factual in nature and devoid of emotional arguments that have no bearing in fact.
9. An agenda item may be addressed by members of the public only when the agenda item is considered by the board. Agenda items may not be discussed during public participation time or at any other time during the meeting.
10. Public participation time will be allowed at a minimum of one meeting per month. Generally, public participation will not be allowed at meetings during which the commissioners will be approving and signing vendor claims or payroll claims.
11. The board reserves the right to limit or prohibit discussion during public participation time on any issue which will be the subject of a public hearing to be held by this board or any other board affiliated with the county within a reasonable period of time after the meeting at which the request to speak is made.
12. Members of the public who wish to videotape, televise, photograph, broadcast, or record meetings or public hearings of the board and who require accommodation such as additional space or electrical connections shall contact the County Clerk no less than one business day beforehand to make arrangement for such accommodation. In order to avoid disruption of the meeting or inconvenience to other attendees, members of the public requiring such accommodations shall arrive at the meeting no less than one-half hour prior to the scheduled starting time to set up.

These rules and regulations are intended to provide a framework for public participation in meetings and public hearings held by the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners in order to aid in maintaining orderly discussion and proper consideration of issues of interest. Failure to adhere to these rules by members of the public will result in removal from the meeting room by members of County Law Enforcement.