



CITY CLERK’S OFFICE PROCEDURES

Public Comment

PURPOSE

It is the policy of the City Council to assure that members of the public can speak to any regular or special meeting agenda item before final action. These rules establish the rights and obligations of persons who wish to speak during City Council meetings, as well as the general decorum.

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1. Ways to Submit Public Comment

o **Email and Written Correspondence**

- Public to Council correspondence in any format, including email or post, is acknowledged and published weekly on every Monday for the City Council on the [Public Letters website](#). Any correspondence received before noon on Monday will be published on that Monday afternoon.
- To submit a public letter to City Council, email is recommended for prompt and direct communication. Mail is also accepted.

• **Email:** City.Council@cityofpaloalto.org

• **Mail:**

Office of the City Clerk: City Hall, 7th Floor

250 Hamilton Avenue

Palo Alto, CA 94301

- If submitting for a Board, Commission, or Committee, confirm the proper email address through the Board, Commission, or Committee website. The list of other meeting bodies can be found on the [Regulatory and Advisory Boards, Commissions and Committees webpage](#).
- **During a City Council/Board/Commission Meeting**
 - The public has two different opportunities to speak. All remarks shall be addressed to the meeting body as a whole and not to any individual member.
 - **1) Oral Communications**
 - The public can speak on anything that is within the City’s jurisdiction, and the topic is not listed on the meeting’s agenda.
 - **Note:** Oral communications may not be used to address matters where the receipt of new information would threaten the due process rights of any person.
 - For City Council and Council Committees, Oral Communications for items not on the agenda will be accepted in person for up to three minutes or an amount of time determined by the Chair.
 - For City Council and Council Committees, Oral Communications is limited to 30 minutes. Additional public comments, if any, will be heard at the end of the agenda.
 - **2) Agenda Items**
 - Public comment for each agenda item is generally taken after the item’s presentation. Afterwards, the Presiding Officer (e.g., Mayor or Chair) will open the item to public comment.
 - **Note:** If the agenda item is a continued item that had taken public comment at that time, it is the Presiding Officer’s discretion to allow another round of public comment.
 - Public comment on agenda items will be accepted in-person or virtually via Zoom.
- **How to Public Comment**
 - The City holds its meetings in a hybrid format.
 - **In-Person with Speaker Cards**
 - Speaker cards are available at the Chambers entrance and at the City Clerk’s desk. Speakers are not required to provide a name, but providing one helps

them to be identified and organized in an orderly way.

- Fill out a speaker card and hand it in to the Clerking Staff. The list of speaker names will be shared on the screen, along with the timer.
 - **Note:** Speaker cards can be found next the clerking desk or at the entrance of the meeting room. Identify where in the agenda you would like to speak.
- When your name is called, please step up to the podium and begin speaking immediately. Speak into the microphone so that the City Council or Board/Commission can hear you clearly.
- A green light will be activated at the start of your remarks; a yellow light will be activated as a warning when one minute remains; and a red light will be activated when your time is up. You will then be asked to complete your sentence and retake your seat.
- **Online through Zoom**
 - Zoom information is available on all published agendas at the first page. Zoom can be accessed by computer, mobile device or phone.
 - **If participating by video**, use the link provided on the top front page of the agenda. The regular practice would be using the [Zoom Join Link](#) and inputting the webinar ID found at the top front page of the agenda.
 - You may download the Zoom app or connect to the meeting in-browser. If using your browser, make sure you are using a current, up-to-date browser.
 - You may be asked to enter an email address and name. We request that you identify yourself by name as this will be visible online and will be used to notify you that it is your turn to speak.
 - To speak on an Agenda Item, click on 'Raise Hand.' You will then be called upon to unmute your device and allowed to make public comments. After the allotted time, you will then be re-muted.
 - A timer will be shown on the computer to help keep track of your comments.
 - **If participating by phone call**, dial in US: [+1 \(669\) 900-6833](#). Once connected, enter in the webinar meeting number of your corresponding meeting. This information can be found on the top front page of the agenda.

- To speak on an agenda item, press ***9** to "Raise Hand" when the item is being heard. You will then be called upon to unmute your device by pressing ***6**.
- You will be asked to provide your first and last name before addressing the Council.
- When called please limit your remarks to the agenda item and time limit allotted. The Presiding Officer or Clerk will notify you that your time is ending. After the allotted time for public comment, you will then be re-muted.
- **Note:** For more information about joining a meeting, please visit [Zoom's How to Join a Meeting Guide](#).
- **Broadcasting and Streaming**
 - To view and observe a meeting without using Zoom, Palo Alto broadcasts online and by Cable TV Channel 26 or 29. Our online resources are as follows:
 - [Midpen Media Center](#) broadcasts most Palo Alto meetings. This includes that of City Council, Council Committees, Boards, Commissions, and other special Committees. Only the City/School Liaison Committee Meeting is not streamed on MidPen but through Zoom.
 - [The City of Palo Alto YouTube Channel](#) streams all City Council meetings live.
 - **Note:** Both are for observing only. Public comment cannot be taken through these platforms. If you would like to comment while watching, participate by phone call or online (both through Zoom).

2. Time Allotted

- **Individual Speakers**
 - Per discretion of the Presiding Officer:
 - Oral Communications can be up to 3 minutes per speaker or an amount of time determined by the Chair.
 - Oral Communications is limited to 30 minutes. Additional public comments, if any, will be heard at the end of the agenda.
 - Public comments on agenda items can be up to 3 minutes or an amount of

time determined by the Chair.

- **Note:** The Presiding Officer can allow additional time, but also may reduce the time to less than 2 minutes to accommodate a larger number of speakers.
- **Group of Five or More Speakers**
 - When a group of five or more people (not including the speaker) wishes to address the Council on the same subject matter, they may designate a spokesperson to address the Council.
 - The spokesperson will be allowed 8-10 minutes (may differ per the Presiding Officer) and will be called upon ahead of individual speakers.
 - The Clerk or Staff Liaison must be notified to verify the list of names. (If for the City Council, please email City.Clerk@cityofpaloalto.org at least 24 hours prior to the meeting with the list of names.)
 - **If the group is participating online**, all should be online through Zoom on separate accounts with their names listed. This is to identify and verify the group. Online participation is only accepted for agendized items.
 - **If the group is participating in-person**, all should be in attendance and come up before the Clerk with a completed speaker card.
 - **Note:** If some members are online and some in-person, please notify the Clerk to expediate identification and verification.
 - If **fewer than five members** show up to the meeting, the group cannot speak through a spokesperson. They can speak individually, however.
- **Quasi-Judicial**
 - Single applicants and appellants are given 10 minutes for their opening presentation and 3 minutes for rebuttal before the hearing is closed.
 - For two or more appellants, the time allowed for presentation and rebuttal is divided among all appellants, and the total time allowed for all appellants is a total of 20 minutes for the opening presentation and 6 minutes for rebuttal before the hearing is closed.
 - **Note:** An individual appellant cannot be given less than 5 minutes for presentation and 3 minutes for rebuttal. The Presiding Officer will grant sufficient additional time to the applicant or appellant.
- **After Public Comment**

- After public comment is taken and ended, no person should address the Council without first securing the permission of the Presiding Officer, subject to approval of the City Attorney with respect to any hearing required by law.

3. Presentations and Media

- PowerPoints, videos, or other media to be presented during public comment are accepted only if emailed to the Clerk or Staff Liaison at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. Once received, the Clerk will have them shared at public comment for the specified item.
 - **Note:** If for a City Council meeting, please email to City.Clerk@cityofpaloalto.org.
- The Clerk has the right to refuse any inappropriate, disturbing, or potentially harmful materials.
- To uphold strong cybersecurity management practices, USB's or other physical electronic storage devices are not accepted.

4. Meeting Decorum

- Open government meetings must allow everyone to be heard without fear of cheers or jeers. Disruptive or unruly behavior in violation of the law can result in removal from the meeting and/or arrest and prosecution.
- Signs and symbolic materials less than 2 feet by 3 feet are permitted provided that: (1) sticks, posts, poles or similar/other type of handle objects are strictly prohibited; (2) the items do not create a facility, fire, or safety hazard; and (3) persons with such items remain seated when displaying them and must not raise the items above shoulder level, obstruct the view or passage of other attendees, or otherwise disturb the business of the meeting.
- The Palo Alto Municipal Code (Sections [2.04.120](#), [2.01.130](#), [2.04.150](#)) makes it unlawful for any person to:
 - Disrupt the conduct of a meeting;
 - Make threats against any person or against public order and security while in the Council chamber; or
 - Use the Council Chambers during meetings for any purpose other than participation in or observation of City Council Meetings.
 - **These violations may result in a misdemeanor, which is enforceable by the police to escort such a person off the premises or be placed under arrest.**
- Any Council Member may appeal the Presiding Officer's decision on a decorum violation to the full Council.