

Purpose

The Board of Supervisors (the “Board”) recognizes the value of public input and the importance of designating time for public comment during open Board meetings. The Board also recognizes the importance of diverse viewpoints and commentary.

This policy addresses the right of the public to comment at open Board meetings and the responsibility of the Board to conduct its business in an orderly and efficient manner. An authorized individual’s public comment will be free from interruption, except when the individual’s conduct violates law or Board policy.[\[1\]](#)

Authority

An opportunity for Bethel Township residents and taxpayers to provide comment on matters of concern, official action, or deliberation that are or may be before the Board shall be provided as designated on the Board meeting agenda and in compliance with law and this policy.[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#).

The Chair may expand the opportunity to provide public comment to others when deemed necessary to inform the Board.

Copies of the agenda, which includes a listing of each matter of business that will be or may be the subject of deliberation or official action at the meeting, shall be made available to individuals in attendance at the meeting.[\[2\]](#)

Public Comment Periods

- The Board will accept public comment on agenda items as they arise during the meeting. Held near the conclusion of the meeting, the Board shall provide a general public comment period, after the items for action or deliberation have been completed, to comment on items of concern or other matters involving the Township.
- If the Board determines there is not sufficient time at a meeting for public comments, the comment period may be deferred to the next regular meeting or to a special meeting occurring before the next regular meeting.[\[3\]](#)When items are added to the agenda after the public comment period has ended, the Board shall offer a further public comment opportunity limited to the added items.[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)

Conduct of Public Comment

Individuals shall wait to be recognized by the presiding officer before commenting, must direct all comments to the Board, and must preface their comments with an announcement of their name, and whether they are a Township resident or taxpayer. **If a speaker is appearing as part of a group interested in an agenda topic or a matter of public concern, they are requested to also identify that group.**

Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three (3) minutes' duration and must be confined to the topics the speaker wishes to raise that are pertinent to that period of public comment. **Speakers may not transfer or delegate unused time to another individual.**

No participant may speak more than once during a public comment period.

All statements shall be directed to the Chair; no participant may address or question Supervisors.

No booing, jeering, applause, or other disruptive demonstrations from the public will be permitted when directed at or concerning a participant’s comments, except during the presentations of awards or commendations to community members or Township staff. The Board expects and requires civil discourse.

Public comment during designated Public Comment periods shall be limited to Township residents. At the discretion of the Board, comment from non-residents may be permitted during the general Public Comment period.

If a group of residents wish to comment on the same issue, the group shall designate one individual to speak on its behalf.

No placards or banners will be permitted within the meeting room.

Prohibited Conduct An individual's public comment may be interrupted or terminated only under certain circumstances, such as when the individual's commentary is in clear violation of law or Board policy, including but not limited to the following:

1. Sexual harassment, racial, ethnic, religious, or nationality intimidation towards an individual or individuals in the community.
2. Disclosure of another person's confidential personal information.
3. Speech that traditionally has not been protected under the First Amendment, such as obscenity, defamation, and speech integral to criminal conduct.
4. Speech that is profane.
5. Speech that constitutes true threats, such as inciting imminent lawless action or subjecting individuals to fear of violence.
6. Speech that does not concern matters that may come before the Board for deliberation or official action, for example, sales of commercial products or services.

Enforcement

The Chair and the Township solicitor have the authority to:

1. Interrupt an individual to warn the commenter that the statement is too lengthy or conduct is otherwise in violation of this policy.
2. After warning, terminate the individual's opportunity to comment when the conduct continues and is in violation of this policy.
3. Call a recess or adjourn to another time when an individual's conduct is otherwise in violation of this policy.
4. Request an individual to leave the meeting when that person's conduct is disrupting the operation of the meeting.[\[5\]](#)[\[6\]](#)
5. If the individual refuses to leave the meeting, request the assistance of law enforcement to remove the disorderly person to enable the Board to proceed with the orderly operation of the meeting.[\[7\]](#)
6. Waive the Board's rules regarding public comment with the approval of a majority of those present and voting.

Response to Public Comment

The purpose of public comment at Board meetings is to allow the Board to learn the public's thoughts before Board deliberation and official action.

Although the public comment period of the meeting is not a question-and-answer session between the public and the Board, the Board may direct staff to follow up and address public inquiries in a reasonably prompt manner.

Public Comment Recorded in Board Minutes

The following information regarding public comment is required to appear in the official minutes of each open Board meeting:[\[8\]](#)

1. The names of all citizens who appeared before the Board.
2. The subject of their testimony.

Board Committees

In general, meetings of committees of the Board that include less than a quorum of the entire Board shall not include a public comment period. [\[5\]](#)

Recording Devices and Cameras

Electronic recording devices and cameras, in addition to those used as official recording devices, shall be permitted at open meetings. The Board is authorized to establish reasonable rules for the use of recording devices and cameras during Board meetings.[\[1\]\[9\]](#)

Adoption and Effective Date

This Public Comment Policy shall take effect immediately upon adoption by the Board of Supervisors and shall remain in effect unless amended or repealed by action of the Board.