

Town of Rye, NH Standard Meeting Procedures

Draft

Purpose: The purpose of this procedure is to provide boards, commissions and committees in the Town of Rye a set of standard operating procedures that can be used if decided by a majority vote of the board, commission or committee, in order to conduct meetings that allow for appropriate input and comment by members of the public, and provide a business-like procedure for the conduct of business by the board, commission or committee.

Conduct of Meetings

The Chairman or presiding officer shall be responsible for ensuring that all meetings are conducted in accordance with the requirements of this procedure by ensuring the orderly conduct of town business that comes before the Board.

Board members, members of the general public, and staff, when recognized to speak, shall confine their remarks to the merits of the pending question.

Board members shall not enter into argumentative exchanges with members of the public who speak at public hearings or meetings.

1. Public Hearings

Properly noticed public hearings shall be held when required by law, or otherwise when decided on a specific topic by the board/commission/committee.

The purpose of a public hearing is to hear testimony on the subject matter of the hearing. The purpose is not to argue with or criticize board members or staff.

The agenda may set a time limit for a public hearing.

All meeting attendees shall provide a name and signature on a sign-in sheet. All members of the public wishing to speak shall provide their name and Rye address when beginning to speak.

Non-residents of Rye shall be allowed to speak at the discretion of the chair.

At the beginning of the public hearing, an explanation or presentation shall be made by the board, commission or committee; staff; consultants; or others involved in the topic to explain the purpose of the hearing.

Any member of the public wishing to speak shall be provided an opportunity to do so, on a 5-3-1 basis as follows:

- All members of the public wishing to make an initial statement shall be provided the opportunity to speak for up to 5 minutes each.
- After all who wish to speak a first time have done so, all members of the public wishing to speak in a second round shall have the opportunity to speak for no more than 3 minutes each.
- After all who wish to speak in the second round have done so, all members of the public wishing to speak in a third round shall have the opportunity to speak for no more than 1 minute each.
- All comments from members of the public in all rounds shall be directed to the chair. No back and forth comments among members of the public are permissible.

Board members may ask questions of those who testify. Time spent responding to questions shall not be part of the aforestated time limitations.

- The public hearing shall be closed by the chair when all who wish to speak through the above process have had the opportunity to speak.

If numerous persons want to testify and if testimony is repetitive, the chair may close the public hearing after inquiring as to whether any person who has not testified has anything new to add to the record and allowing such testimony.

2. Work Sessions

Portions of meetings that are noted for individual topics or for the meeting as a whole as a “work session” on the noticed meeting agenda shall not provide opportunities for public input but rather will be for the purpose of board/commission/committee members to discuss the noticed topics among themselves. The public is encouraged to attend. Public comment on the topics discussed at the work session may be provided during a public comment period established on the agenda of a subsequent meeting of the board/commission/committee.

3. Regular Meetings

a. Public Comment Period

At all regular meetings of the board/commission/committee, a “public comment period” agenda item shall be included. At the discretion of the chair, this may be early in the meeting before business items are deliberated as a convenience for members of the public wishing to speak on agenda or non-agenda topics, or at the end of the meeting after all business items are deliberated.

During the public comment period, any member of the public wishing to make comments on any topic, not necessarily limited to the agenda for that meeting, shall be provided the opportunity to address the meeting for a period of no more than 3 minutes each. Members of the public shall provide their name and Rye address as they begin to speak. All comments shall be directed to the chair and back and forth comment among members of the public shall be impermissible.

b. Business Agenda Items

Discussion during the deliberation of items of business on the agenda outside of the public comment period shall be limited to the board/commission/committee members; speakers invited by the chair including staff, consultants and others having a direct stake in the matter at hand; and members of the public who are directly and personally affected by the matter at hand (such as abutters or neighborhood residents) at the discretion of the chair. Such testimony shall follow the rules for public hearings. The deliberation of business items, other than during noticed public hearings, shall not provide opportunity for comment by members of the general public. If the chair wishes to recognize a member of the general public, the chair shall request a motion from the board, commission, or committee to suspend these rules to allow such input.

4. General Conduct

All meeting attendees, including members of the public and of boards, commissions and committees shall, despite inevitable disagreements at times, treat each other with respect and people shall be allowed to express their opinions within the guidelines outlined herein.