

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AT PUBLIC MEETINGS AND BEYOND

Presented by:

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Clerk of the Commission

OUR GOALS:

To Find Consistent and Clear:

- (1) Ways for the public to engage the Commission, and**
- (2) Workflows to manage this communication and ensure that it is properly routed.**

Jurisdictions Studied and Evaluated

Asheville, NC	Lakeland, FL
Austin, TX	Lawrence, KS
Bellingham, WA	Madison, WI
Cambridge, MA	Miami, FL
Cape Coral, FL	Miami Gardens, FL
Cedar Rapids, IA	Miramar, FL
Charlottesville, VA	Ocala, FL
Clearwater, FL	Orlando, FL
Colorado Springs, CO	Palm Bay, FL
Coral Springs, FL	Pembroke Pines, FL
Durham, NC	Pompano Beach, FL
Fort Lauderdale, FL	Port St. Lucie, FL
Gainesville, FL	St. Petersburg, FL
Hialeah, FL	Tallahassee, FL
Hollywood, FL	Tampa, FL
Ithaca, NY	West Palm Beach, FL
Jacksonville, FL	Winston-Salem, FL

OUR ROADMAP:

1. Methods to Engage the Commission

- a) By Telephone**
- b) Write a Letter**
- c) Email**
- d) Speak at Public Meetings**

2. Additional Recommendations

- a) Online Contact Form/Webform**
 - b) Times Certain**
 - c) Town Hall Meetings**
 - d) Improved Agenda Language**
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- ▶ **Members of the public may always call the Commission offices to speak with a Commissioner or leave a message with their opinions.**

TELEPHONE



- ▶ Now: Letters addressed to an individual Commissioner are delivered directly. Letters addressed to the body are copied and distributed. Copies are also kept in a correspondence file by the Clerk's office.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ Make no Changes, or
 - ▶ Incorporate letters regarding agenda items into the record as public comment.

WRITE A LETTER



Email Sent to Individual Commissioners

- ▶ Now: Commissioners control their individual email boxes to their own preferences.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No changes, or
 - ▶ Commissioners activate the “auto-response” setting on their in-boxes.

EMAIL



Email Sent to the Full Commission

- ▶ Now: The public may email one email address (citycomm@cityofgainesville.org) to reach all Commissioners.
- ▶ Recommended Options:
 - ▶ No changes, or
 - ▶ Replace citycomm@cityofgainesville.org with an online contact form which will allow staff to assist with routing and responses and/or
 - ▶ Incorporate messages on business agenda items into the record as written public comment.

EMAIL



Automatic Public Viewing of all Commissioner Emails

- ▶ Now: Emails read and sent by City Commissioners are published on the internet every evening.
- ▶ Other Practices: Of the 34 cities studied in this research, only Gainesville engages in this practice, as does the Alachua County Commission. The city of Jacksonville publishes only email messages transmitted to the full Commission body every day. Otherwise, in all jurisdictions, emails are available via public records request.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Make Commission email available via Public Records Request, and/or
 - ▶ Publish daily messages received by the full Commission.

EMAIL



General Public Comment

- ▶ Now: Each Commission meeting agenda includes three public comment periods.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes to Current Practice, or
 - ▶ Remove General Public Comment from the meeting agenda and ask the public to contact the Commission by other means with these concerns, or
 - ▶ Revisit the number of General Public Comment opportunities available at each meeting or how many speaking opportunities each community member may have, and/or
 - ▶ Revisit the number of consecutive meetings at which a member of the public might speak, and/or
 - ▶ Accept General Public Comment via other mechanisms (i.e email, online form, etc).

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS



Public Comment on Agenda Items

- ▶ Now: Members of the public may speak to an agenda item only when that item is before the Commission.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Create an “Early Public Comment” period to accommodate members of the public who are unable to stay for their business item to be called by the Commission.

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS



Sign-Up/Registration

- ▶ **Now:** There is no system for speakers to register for public comment.
- ▶ **Recommendation Options:**
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Members of the public must sign up to speak and may do so at any time until the comment period has closed, and/or
 - ▶ Speakers must re-register if their item is continued or rescheduled.

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS





PUBLIC COMMENT CARD

Date: _____

☐ GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

☐ COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA ITEM#: _____

NAME: _____

ZIP CODE: _____ CITY RESIDENT: YES ☐ NO ☐

EMAIL: _____ BEST PHONE #: _____

Issue I want to speak on: _____

I will be speaking as a Proponent ☐ an Opponent ☐ for information ☐

Are you a LOBBYIST? YES ☐ NO ☐ REPRESENTING: _____

I do not wish to speak, but please incorporate my comment below into the record:

* PLEASE READ RULES OF PROCEDURE ON BACK OF CARD*



PUBLIC COMMENT CARD

Date: _____

☐ GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

☐ COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEM

AGENDA ITEM#: _____

NAME: _____

ZIP CODE: _____ CITY RESIDENT: YES ☐ NO ☐

EMAIL: _____ BEST PHONE #: _____

Issue I want to speak on: _____

I will be speaking as a Proponent ☐ an Opponent ☐ for information ☐

Are you a LOBBYIST? YES ☐ NO ☐ REPRESENTING: _____

I do not wish to speak, but please incorporate my comment below into the record:

* PLEASE READ RULES OF PROCEDURE ON BACK OF CARD*

ADDRESSING THE COMMISSION OR BOARD: When your name is called, please step up to the podium and state, for the record, your name, whether you are a city resident, and, if so, in which part of the city you reside. All comments shall be directed to the Commission as a whole and not directed to a member or to the general public or specific official. Persons addressing the Commission may speak for up to three minutes.

DECORUM STATEMENT: Any person making personal, impertinent or slanderous remarks or who becomes boisterous while addressing the Commission, or while attending the Commission meeting, shall be removed from the meeting room and/or property if the sergeant-at-arms is so directed by the presiding officer, and such person shall be barred from further audience before the Commission.

COURTESY: All electronics devices, including cell phones and pagers, shall be either turned off or otherwise silenced. Loud and/or prolonged conversations shall be conducted outside the Commission Chambers.

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Speaking to the Commission (generally)

- ▶ Now: The current Commission rules require that, once recognized, speakers should provide their name, limit their remarks to the established time limitation, and address all remarks to the Commission as a body and no member thereof.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Establish a rule, which could be voluntary, asking speakers to providing orienting information, and/or
 - ▶ Establish a rule requiring speakers representing a group or acting as a lobbyist to identify themselves accordingly, and/or
 - ▶ Speakers will be called to the podium by name.

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS



Civility and Decorum

- ▶ Now: “Members of the public are not permitted to possess food, drink, props, signs, posters, or other similar material in the meeting room. Speakers at the podium addressing the Commission may use the City’s overhead projection system as part of his/her comment as long as they are not obscene and do not otherwise disrupt, delay, or interrupt the proceeding. Outbursts of approval or disapproval, jeers, or heckling are not permitted.”
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Modify existing rules to allow the Commission to manage disruptions without infringing upon the content of speakers’ speech, and/or
 - ▶ Create an exception for applause after the presentation of an award or proclamation.

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS



Civility and Decorum

- ▶ Now: If an individual violates the civility clause, the presiding officer shall ask them to cease the disruptive activity. If the disruption continues, the presiding officer may revoke the individual's participation in the meeting and direct them to leave. If the individual refuses to leave, the presiding officer may direct the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort individual and, if necessary, arrest them for trespass.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Clarify and standardize when a person can be ordered from the auditorium, and/or
 - ▶ Clarify and standardize when a person ordered from the auditorium may return.

IN PERSON AT PUBLIC MEETINGS



ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS



- ▶ Replace citycomm@cityofgainesville.org to provide a way for members of the public to message the full Commission at once.
- ▶ Allow an online opportunity to provide public comment on upcoming meeting agenda items.
- ▶ Provide an online method for signing up to speak at public meetings.
- ▶ Recommendation Options:
 - ▶ No Changes, or
 - ▶ Create an Online Contact Form

ONLINE CONTACT FORM



▶ Recommendation Options:

▶ No Changes, or

▶ The Commission and Clerk's Office will remain alert to agenda items of particular public interest and, when possible, schedule them for "times certain" so that members of the public will have a better sense of when their item will actually be heard.

TIMES CERTAIN



▶ Recommendation Options:

- ▶ No Changes, or
- ▶ The Commission host “Town Halls” in the community. Envisioned as extended General Public Comment periods, the Commission could organize them as often as quarterly with an event in each district each year or as needed on particular items/issues of public interest.

TOWN HALLS



▶ Recommendation Options:

- ▶ No Changes,
- ▶ Update standard agenda language to reflect any changes made as a result of this research and include better explanations of the categories of business scheduled for the meeting.

AGENDA LANGUAGE



Areas for Recommended Discussion:

1. **Whether to Incorporate Written Public Comment into the Record**
2. **Whether to Create a System to Acknowledge Incoming Email Messages**
3. **Whether to Continue Publishing Constituent and Commission Emails**
4. **Whether to Make Changes to General Public Comment**
5. **Whether to Create “Early Public Comment”**
6. **Whether to Create a Speaker Registration System**
7. **Whether to ask Speakers to Provide More Identifying Information**
8. **Whether to Modify the Civility and Decorum Standards**
9. **Whether to Create an Online Contact Form**
10. **Whether to Remain Alert for “Times Certain” Opportunities**
11. **Whether to Host Town Halls**
12. **Whether to Update Agenda Language**