

**PINELLAS COUNTY COMMISSION  
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND DECORUM RULES**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (“Board”) values and benefits from the orderly participation of members of the public during public meetings.

Any meeting of the Board constitutes a limited public forum as defined by the United States Supreme Court, and as such all components of speech will be limited to matters of public concern in Pinellas County.

Under Florida law, the public must be afforded a reasonable opportunity to provide input on public matters before the Board for official action. The Board has the authority to reasonably regulate public input by establishing time limit restrictions on public comments, and enforcing orderly, non-disruptive conduct at public meetings. These public participation and decorum rules provide the parameters for such regulation.

In addition to appearing and speaking before the Board, members of the public may submit written comments to the Board for consideration on any item in advance of the meeting on that item in accordance with these rules.

**II. DEFINITIONS**

For the purpose of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

“Board” or “County Commission” means the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners.

“Electronic Aid” means any electronic device or medium (including but not limited to a phone, audio or video player, tablet, or computer) that a Speaker wishes to use as a visual or auditory aid in communicating the Speaker’s message. This does not include devices or aids utilized as an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“Handout” means any written material(s) a Speaker wishes to provide to the Board in connection with their public comment.

“Political Candidate Campaigning” means any statement (verbal, written, graphical, or in any other format) which involves the endorsement of any political candidate that is made for the purpose of campaigning.

“Speaker” means any member of the public who is presenting public comment before the Board in compliance with this policy.

“Visual Aid” is any non-electronic item (including signs, placards, banners, posters, maps, or models) the Speaker wishes to use to aid in communicating the Speaker’s message. This does not include cue cards, Speaker notes, or other materials used to help a Speaker recall information.

- iv. Within the timeframes established in these rules, include a copy of any Handouts or content the Speaker wishes to share with the Board through use of a Visual Aid or Electronic Aid.
  - b. When a Speaker's name is called, the Speaker will approach the public lectern (if in person), or unmute themselves (if virtual), and give the following information in an audible tone of voice for the minutes:
    - i. Their name;
    - ii. The municipality or unincorporated area in which they reside; and
    - iii. If requested by the Chair, information on whether the Speaker speaks for a group of persons or a third party or represents an organization. If the person represents an organization, the Speaker must also state whether the view expressed by the Speaker represents an established policy or position approved by the organization, and whether the person is being compensated by the organization.
4. If a Speaker is no longer present in the meeting room or overflow room or in virtual attendance at the time they are recognized, the Speaker forfeits the opportunity to speak and is prohibited from transferring the time to a different individual.
5. If a Speaker chooses to appear virtually by means of telephone or other technology, it is **the sole responsibility of the Speaker** to ensure that they have the appropriate technology to do so on their end. If at the time they are recognized the Speaker cannot be heard by the Board due to poor telephone or internet reception, technology errors, excessive background noise or interference, issues with unmuting themselves, or other issues, the Speaker forfeits the opportunity to speak and is prohibited from transferring the time to a different individual.
6. Groups of five or more individuals who wish to express their views collectively may select one Speaker to represent the group's views to the board. The group's time is still limited to the applicable time allotment of all members of the group, or 10 minutes, whichever is shorter.

C. Visual or Electronic Aids.

1. For public safety purposes, no signs or placards mounted on sticks, posts, poles, or similar structures will be allowed in County Commission meeting rooms.
2. Visual aids that disrupt meetings or interfere with others' ability to view or participate in the meeting are not authorized.
3. Handouts the Speaker wishes to share with the Board must be presented to County staff at the Agenda Staff Table in the front of the meeting room along with the comment card before the Speaker's allotted time for public comment.

E. Special Circumstances.

1. The Board is not required to take public comment for:
  - a. Emergency situations affecting public health, welfare, or safety if compliance with the requirements would cause an unreasonable delay in the ability of the Board to act;
  - b. Ministerial acts such as approval of minutes or ceremonial proclamations;
  - c. Meetings exempt or excepted from FS 286.011; or
  - d. Workshop meetings at which no votes will be taken.
2. The Board Chair may waive any of these procedures in their discretion.

**IV. CITIZEN DECORUM GUIDELINES**

A. Public participation at board meetings is intended to allow individual members of the public to address the Board on issues of public concern in Pinellas County. The Chair is responsible for maintaining a respectful environment during public participation so that public comments can be heard and considered by the Board. Therefore, the Board Chair may interrupt or terminate any individual's speaking privilege if the Speaker's comments, attire, Visual Aids, or Electronic Aids constitute personal attacks, or are slanderous, defaming, disruptive, obscene, or otherwise in violation of applicable law or this policy. The following guidelines apply to any public comment at Board meetings:

1. Speakers must be respectful of the Board, other members of the public, and others' opinions, and refrain from making personal attacks;
2. No Political Candidate Campaigning, commercial advertising, solicitation, or defamation will be allowed as part of any presentation to the Board;
3. Presentations to the Board must relate to issues which are in the public interest, and which pertain to Pinellas County government activities. These priorities should be considered:
  - a. Statements of matters involving public health or safety;
  - b. Statements relating to Board actions or business;
  - c. Statements involving various County departments under the County Administrator; and
  - d. Statements directly pertaining to relevant Pinellas County government programs, projects, policies, or concerns.
4. Speakers should make their comments concise and to the point, presenting relevant information they wish the Board to consider.

- b. Persons who have been authorized to represent an organization with five (5) or more members or a group of five (5) or more persons may speak for up to ten (10) minutes provided that others in the organization or group will waive their time;
- c. All other persons may speak for up to three (3) minutes each, after completing comment cards and submitting them to the staff at the Agenda Staff Table in the front of the Board Room. The Chair will call each Speaker's name upon their turn to speak.