

ITEM#: 30  
DATE: 08-08-23  
DEPT: ADMIN

**COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT:** PUBLIC MEETING DECORUM STANDARDS

**BACKGROUND:**

On March 22, 2022, the City Council requested that a memo from staff be placed on a future Council agenda regarding standards for decorum at public meetings. Having clear rules in place for meetings ensures: 1) that participant expectations have been made clearly known, and 2) that follow-up actions can be taken to address behaviors that violate these expectations, if necessary.

Municipal Code Section 2.25, in discussing meetings of the City Council, states that “The mayor, mayor pro tempore or other presiding officer shall preserve decorum [...]” Section 2.18 of Municipal Code provides that “the council shall determine the rules of its own proceedings consistent with the laws of the State of Iowa.”

The City Council has identified certain existing expectations for participants in public meetings (e.g., adhering to a speaking time limit, silencing mobile phones, etc.), which are listed on meeting agendas. However, these expectations are not comprehensive and are not all listed in one location. Therefore, staff has prepared a draft “Standards for Decorum,” which describes a comprehensive set of expectations for public meetings. This recommended list was presented to the City Council at the March 22, 2022 meeting, and it is attached to this report (with some modifications).

The rules included in the proposed list have been borrowed from those adopted in other communities and formal settings of governmental bodies. Staff has attempted to strike a balance with these proposed standards. The standards should not cause public meetings to be inaccessible to the average resident by requiring an unreasonable degree of formal dress, speech, and procedures. They should, however, also ensure that each individual attending the meeting is able to be heard and respected.

Where possible, staff has included within this list the explanation of why these standards are in place. If adopted by the City Council, staff will post the list in meeting rooms and incorporate them into published materials where appropriate.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Adopt the attached Standards for Decorum for public meetings.
2. Modify the attached Standards for Decorum.
3. Do not approve Standards for Decorum for public meetings.

**CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Public participation in decision-making is an important aspect of government in Ames. The proposed Standards for Decorum emphasize the need to respect other participants in public meetings. In maintaining a respectful and constructive discussion, the goal is that community members with interest in City business will be welcome to participate in the process. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.

## City of Ames Public Meeting Standards for Decorum

The Ames City Council is committed to respectful, participatory dialogue regarding issues facing the community. In City Council meetings and other City proceedings, it is expected that members of the public respect one another by following these standards for decorum:

1. The time for each speaker may be limited at the discretion of the Chairperson to ensure an opportunity for each person to be heard. Please conclude your remarks before the time limit has been reached. Unless permitted by the Chairperson, it is only allowed for each speaker to offer remarks once per agenda item.
2. Remarks are to be focused on matters of City policy and City business. At no time is it appropriate to use profane, obscene, or slanderous language, or to engage in personal attacks against City officials or members of the public.
3. To ensure an orderly discussion, comments are to be delivered from the podium and addressed to the City Council dais, not the gallery (audience). It is not appropriate to speak from the gallery or to applaud or make other gestures that interfere with the proceedings, unless invited by the meeting chair to do so.
4. The public is not permitted to approach the dais beyond the podium. If a person desires to distribute information around the dais, they may pass it to City staff for distribution.
5. Audience members must remain seated during discussions, unless it is necessary to move from one part of the room to another. At no time is it appropriate to stand on tables or chairs.
6. To ensure other attendees and broadcast viewers are able to see the proceedings, signs and posters are not permitted in the Council Chambers without advance permission. If a speaker wishes to refer to a drawing or text, they may request that a staff person place the document on the projector during the discussion.
7. Attendees are not required to wear formal attire. However, it is expected that clothing and footwear are worn, and that they are worn in a manner that is respectful of the proceedings and of others. Attire must be worn so as to not distract from, interfere with, obstruct, degrade, or insult the dignity of the proceedings or other attendees.
8. Out of respect to all, mobile phones and other devices must be silenced. Side conversations during meetings should be avoided. If you have to engage in a conversation or answer a call, please step into the hallway.
9. The Chairperson has discretion to interpret and enforce these standards and may announce modifications to them as necessary to ensure orderly proceedings.