

Town of Richfield

Rules of Decorum for Town Council Meetings

Section 1. Purpose

The purpose of these Rules of Decorum is to ensure that meetings of the Town Council are conducted in an orderly, efficient, and respectful manner, consistent with the requirements of North Carolina law, including the Open Meetings Law.

Section 1(A). Content-Neutral Application

These Rules of Decorum are intended to ensure the orderly and efficient conduct of Town Council meetings.

The Rules shall be applied in a content-neutral manner and are not intended to restrict or regulate speech based on viewpoint or opinion, consistent with the requirements of North Carolina General Statutes § 143-318.10 and applicable constitutional protections.

Section 2. Authority

The Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore, or other presiding officer shall have the authority to enforce these Rules of Decorum and maintain order during all meetings of the Town Council.

Section 3. Conduct of the Board

1. Members of the Town Council shall conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner at all times.
 2. During public comment and formal requests, Council members shall give speakers their attention and refrain from unnecessary interruption.
 3. The Council is not required to respond to questions or comments during the public comment period.
 4. The Council may, at its discretion, direct staff to follow up on questions or concerns and provide responses at a later meeting or time, if deemed appropriate.
-

Section 4. Public Participation

A. General Conduct

1. All persons attending Town Council meetings shall conduct themselves in a respectful and orderly manner.
2. Any person who engages in disorderly or disruptive conduct may be ruled out of order by the presiding officer.
3. Failure to comply with these Rules may result in forfeiture of speaking time and/or removal from the meeting.

B. Prohibited Conduct

No person shall engage in conduct that disrupts, disturbs, or delays the meeting, including but not limited to:

- Speaking out of turn or from the audience
- Yelling, shouting, or use of profane or abusive language
- Clapping, stomping, whistling, or other disruptive noises
- Making obscene gestures or engaging in threatening behavior

Any individual who continues such conduct after a warning may be directed to leave the meeting.

Section 5. Public Comment

1. A public comment period shall be provided at regular monthly Council meetings, except during budget, emergency, or special meetings unless otherwise permitted by the Council.
 2. Each speaker shall be limited to three (3) minutes.
 3. A timing device or signal may be used to indicate when a speaker's time has expired.
 4. Speakers shall address the Council from the designated podium to ensure an accurate record.
 5. Comments shall be directed to the Council as a whole and not to members of the audience.
-

Section 6. Public Hearings

1. Public hearings are distinct from general public comment periods and are conducted in accordance with applicable North Carolina law.
 2. During a public hearing, all comments shall be limited to the specific subject of the hearing.
 3. Speakers shall be recognized by the presiding officer and shall follow the same time limits and decorum rules applicable to public comment, unless otherwise modified.
 4. Comments not related to the subject of the public hearing may be ruled out of order.
 5. General comments unrelated to a public hearing item should be made during the designated public comment period.
 6. In quasi-judicial hearings, additional procedures and evidentiary standards may apply as required by law.
-

Section 7. Formal Requests / Presentations

A. Request Required

Any individual or group wishing to appear before the Town Council for a formal request or presentation must submit a request form.

B. Submission Process

Requests must be submitted by either:

- Completing the official form available on the Town's website; or
- Completing the form in person at Town Hall

C. Deadline

All request forms must be submitted no less than five (5) business days prior to the scheduled Council meeting at which the individual wishes to appear.

D. Content of Request

The request form must include a clearly defined topic and sufficient detail to allow the Town Council and staff to understand the purpose of the request and prepare accordingly.

E. Approval and Scheduling

1. Placement on the agenda is subject to review and approval by the Town.
2. The Town reserves the right to defer items to a future meeting if additional information is needed or if time constraints require.

F. Time Limits

Formal requests and presentations shall be limited to five (5) minutes, unless extended by the presiding officer.

G. Materials Submission

Any supporting documents, presentations, or visual materials should be submitted in advance whenever possible to allow for proper review and inclusion in the meeting record.

Section 8. Speaking Procedures

1. All speakers must be recognized by the presiding officer before speaking.
 2. No person shall speak from the audience while another individual has the floor.
 3. Conduct that disrupts, disturbs, or impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting shall not be permitted.
-

Section 9. Enforcement

1. The presiding officer may issue a warning to any individual who violates these Rules.
 2. Continued violations may result in:
 - o Loss of speaking privileges
 - o Removal from the meeting
 3. Law enforcement may be called upon if necessary to maintain order.
-

Section 10. Adoption and Amendment

These Rules of Decorum may be adopted and amended by the Town Council of the Town of Richfield as necessary to ensure compliance with applicable laws and the orderly conduct of meetings.