

**GOOD GOVERNANCE GUIDELINES**  
**PUBLIC COUNTY COMMISSION MEETINGS**  
**League of Women Voters of Manatee County**

As a publicly elected official, County Commissioners have an inherent responsibility to all constituents of Manatee County, not just those who voted for them. They are required to conduct their business for the County in the sunshine, meaning in full view of the public. County Commissioners are expected to always act ethically and transparently though such behavior is particularly important when issues are controversial with oppositional points of view. It is critical that the public feel confident their voice and concerns are being not only heard, but considered, prior to any decision being made.

Good governance in public meetings generally fall into 3 categories: Notice of Agenda; Public Comment; and Conduct.

**1. NOTICE of MEETINGS/AGENDA**

Public notices for Regular, Special and Workshops should be prominently posted in advance of each meeting and include a complete agenda with corresponding supportive materials. This advance notice ensures that both Commissioners and the public are fully aware of items to be presented, discussed and/or considered for approval.

Exceptions may be accommodated however should be kept to a minimum.

- If additional items are necessary, they may be added to the agenda in a revised public posting at least one day prior to the day of the meeting.
- Raising unposted agenda items at a meeting should only occur when there is a true emergency, or when initiated by the Public (AG 03-530). On that rare occasion, voting should be delayed until a later scheduled date to give other Commissioners, the county attorney and staff, and the public, an opportunity to carefully consider the item(s), analyze the impact, and prepare a response.
- The public relies on County Commissioners to follow established procedures (R20-065 28 April 2020). As such, waiver of a rule or procedure should be limited to emergency situations, which do NOT include fast tracking an agenda item or trying to avoid public discussion or concerns about opposition to controversial proposals.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

It is imperative to good governance for all, that the public is provided an opportunity to comment on agenda items prior to a vote being taken on any one such item.

- There are multiple ways for the public to communicate with Commissioners. As outlined on the county website, citizens may send email or letters, or comment in person at, or via phone into, meetings of the Board.
- All timely, written public comments should be considered by the Board. If relevant and admissible, those written comments are to be entered into the meeting record.
- The protocol for public comment during meetings is each published agenda.
- The Board shall allot an adequate amount of time for public comment at each Regular, Special or Workshop session as follows:

Near the beginning of regular and special meetings, the Board shall allow individual members of the public to address the Board on any consent item on the published agenda. Each person shall have 3 minutes per item, with a total limit of 10 minutes.

Subject to sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3, near the beginning of regular and special meetings, the Board shall allot 30 minutes to allow individuals from the public to address the Board regarding matters that may be appropriate for the Board's *future consideration* under section 2.1. Each person shall be allowed to speak for 3 minutes regardless of the number of individual matters being addressed. If the overall 30-minute time allotment has been exhausted and there remain any member(s) of the public desiring to address the Board, the Board shall then hear those comments near the end of the meeting, providing the same 3 minute per person time limit.

At any time during workshop meetings, the Board shall allow individuals from the public to address the Board, but only on items on the published agenda. In workshops, each person may speak for up to 3 minutes per item but will be limited to a total of 10 minutes regardless of the number of items being discussed. (Procedure 5.3.1 excerpted.)

### 3. CONDUCT AT MEETINGS

- All regular meetings shall ordinarily commence at 9:00 a.m. (Procedure 4.1.1) in an appropriate setting that is of adequate size, convenient and accessible to the public.
- The Board of County Commissioners are to follow adopted procedures for conducting public meetings that ensure transparency.
- Each Commissioner is given an opportunity to comment on an agenda item, ask questions and receive answers prior to any vote being taken.
- Protocol for Commissioner interaction:
  - a. Commissioners listen attentively to each other, work collaboratively and strive to achieve consensus.
  - b. Commissioners should behave in a *non-partisan* manner, especially when considering items and making decisions. They are to be provided adequate time to consider the broader impacts on the county, be it government, businesses, organizations, or citizens.
  - c. Commissioners apply policies, decisions, and actions consistently, regardless of personal connections. The Board is not a conduit to enact a personal agenda.
  - d. Commissioners voluntarily abstain when their ability to make decisions in the public interest might be reasonably questioned (i.e., conflict of interest).
- Protocol for Public Interaction:
  - a. During the designated time for public comments, Commissioners are to listen attentively and not interrupt the speaker. They are not to partake in side-bar discussions, random comments and/or texting during the time dedicated to the public's input.
  - b. Respectful behavior should always be practiced.

*Meeting minutes taken by the clerk should be promptly recorded in writing and posted on the County's website.*