



Town of Carthage

OFFICIAL POLICY

Public Comments and Public Hearings

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to provide for public comments in a fair, consistent, and informative manner in accordance with the requirements of Sections 160A-81 and 160A-81.1 of the North Carolina General Statutes, which authorize the Board of Commissioners (the "Board") to adopt rules governing the conduct of public hearings and public comment periods. The Town of Carthage recognizes the importance of receiving comments from the public and conducts a public comment period at least once per month at the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, typically held the third Monday of every month unless otherwise noted in the meeting schedule posted on the Town of Carthage website (www.townofcarthage.org). Meeting schedules may also be requested from the Town Clerk at Town Hall located 4396 Hwy. 15-501.

The purpose of public hearings and public comment periods is to give the public an opportunity to express their views, comments, or opinions to the Board of Commissioners and it is a time for the Board of Commissioners to listen to the public. The following rules have been established to maintain order and decorum during public hearings and public comment periods. Furthermore, these rules are designed to ensure fairness to each speaker by establishing rules in advance that will be applied equally to each speaker.

PROCEDURE

- a. Persons desiring to address the Board during a public comment period, or a public hearing, shall list their full name, address, telephone number, and select which topic(s) they wish to speak to on the Speaker Sign-Up Sheet as provided by the Town Clerk prior to the beginning of the meeting. Yielding of unused time to other speakers is not permitted. Once the meeting has begun, a person may not sign up to speak.
- b. Speakers shall be required to stand at the lectern/podium and must state their full name and address prior to speaking. Speaking from a seat in the audience or any other area of the room is not permitted.
- c. For public comment periods and public hearings other than public zoning hearings, persons who have signed up to speak shall be allowed to speak for up to three (3) minutes. Speakers shall only speak once during the public comment period.
- d. For groups, a spokesperson may be designated and shall be allowed to speak for a maximum of nine (9) minutes. The Mayor, or the Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, shall have the discretion to shorten the allotted speaking time depending on the number of persons registered to speak and in consideration of the length of the agenda.
- e. Public zoning hearings. At hearings involving amendments to the zoning ordinance or zoning map, the procedure for speakers is set forth below:
 - i. The Petitioner, or their designated representative, shall be allowed 15 minutes to present. Any questions by the Board members shall not be counted against the time limit for the Petitioner.
 - ii. Following the Petitioner's presentation, Town staff shall present their findings to the Board with no limitations on time.

- iii. After staff presentation, the Mayor, or Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, shall call for a motion to open the public hearing comment period. Any other person who has signed up to speak, whether as a proponent or opponent of the Petitioner, shall have 3 minutes each. For groups, designated spokespersons may speak for a maximum of nine (9) minutes.
 - iv. At the discretion of the Mayor, or the Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, the Petitioner shall be allowed up to 3 minutes for closing statements.
 - v. At the end of the public hearing comment period, the Mayor, or the Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, shall call for a motion to close the public hearing comment period and enter into deliberations. Once deliberation has begun, the Petitioner, nor any member of the public, may speak unless expressly called upon to do so by a member of the Board.
- f. In order to conduct public business in an efficient and productive manner, speakers are encouraged to avoid duplicative and repetitive comments.
 - g. The provisions of this Policy shall not apply to speakers addressing the Board on awards and recognitions or for staff or other individuals expressly invited to address the Board on a matter.
 - h. For any matter, the time allotted to any speaker in this Policy may be extended by the Mayor, or the Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, in his or her sole discretion.
 - i. Speakers shall be civil and courteous in their language and presentation. Insults, personal attacks, accusations, profanity, vulgar language, inappropriate gestures, or other inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated.
 - j. Speakers shall address the Board as a whole and shall not make comments or ask questions directly to an individual member of the Board, Town staff, or other members of the public. The Board is not obligated to address comments or questions made of them.
 - k. In order to provide for the maintenance of order and decorum in the conduct of the meeting, the Mayor may declare “out-of-order” any person who fails to comply with this policy. The Mayor, or the Mayor Pro Tem in the absence of the Mayor, shall caution any such person to abide by the provisions of this policy. Refusal to do so shall be grounds for removal of the speaker from the meeting.

Original: 12/19/2022

Reviewed:

Revised: