

Snohomish County Council Public Meeting Conduct Rules

These rules outline the roles and responsibilities of participants in Snohomish County Council Public Meetings. While open to the public, these meetings are public meetings of the Council where the input of the public is welcome and especially desired on matters under deliberation to help inform Council actions.

Section 1 – Authority – Pursuant to Snohomish County Code 2.48.165, Council may pass motions to these rules of procedure to organize and administer the legislative branch and perform other administrative acts.

Section 2 – Presiding Officer. As specified in SCC 2.48.080, the chairperson presides over all council meetings. In the absence of the chairperson, the vice chairperson shall serve as the chairperson. If both the chairperson and the vice chairperson are physically absent and a quorum is present, the presiding officer will be the most senior physically present councilmember.

Section 3 – Presiding Officer Duties.

The presiding officer shall:

1. Preserve order and decorum in the Council Chambers;
2. Observe and enforce all rules adopted by the Council for its governance;
3. Decide all questions on order, in accordance with these rules, subject to appeal by any member of the Council;
4. Recognize members of the Council in the order in which they request the floor. No member shall be recognized and given the floor to speak on the same matter more than once until after all other members of the Council have had an opportunity to be recognized and be heard;
5. Recognize County Staff who have identified a procedural situation they believe needs addressing or who have been invited by Council to speak;
6. During Public Comment, determine whether a speaker or members of the audience fail to comply with these Rules or exceed the scope of the limited forum provided for Public Comment, and the presiding officer shall have the authority to suspend such person's right to speak and require that non-conforming audience behavior to cease, subject to the Council's right to overrule such decision.

If such conduct continues and prevents the Council from accomplishing its business in a reasonably efficient manner, the presiding officer may take the following actions in any order as appropriate for the conduct:

- (a) Remind the individual providing Public Comment to conclude their comment;
- (b) Remind the individual to cease the disruptive speech or behavior;
- (c) End the individuals allotted time early by muting the Public Comment microphone and requesting the individual sit down if physically present;
- (d) Terminate the public comment period;
- (e) Call a recess;
- (f) Request the removal of such person(s) from the Council Chambers;
- (g) Remove all persons from the Council Chambers;
- (h) Move the meeting to a different location;
- (i) Adjourn the meeting;
- (j) Or take such other appropriate action as permitted by the law, subject to Council's right to overrule such decision.

If an individual fails to comply with these Rules over the course of several meetings, the presiding officer may exclude that individual from providing future public comment for a period to be defined and no longer than a month.

- 7. The presiding officer may limit public comment to items on the agenda, re-open public comment or move public comment to a different place on the agenda, subject to the Council's right to overrule such decision.
- 8. In the event of an emergency occurring during a public meeting, such as a fire or other natural or catastrophic disaster, threatened violence or inability to regain or retain good order, the presiding officer shall forthwith declare a recess, adjourn or continue the meeting and the County Council as well as everyone in the room shall immediately leave the meeting room. The presiding officer may reconvene the meeting consistent with Chapter 2.48 SCC or when it has been determined by the appropriate safety officials that it is safe to do so.
- 9. The presiding officer may enforce time limits for agenda items, including a limit on the time allotted to public comment, subject to the Council's right to overrule such decision.

The presiding officer shall have only these rights and shall be governed in all matters and issues by the same rules and restrictions, as other Councilmembers.

Section 4 – Councilmember participation.

- 1. Prior to discussion of an action item, a Councilmember should make a motion;
- 2. No Councilmember shall address the Council without first securing the permission of the presiding officer. Once recognized, a Councilmember should not be

interrupted while speaking, except for a point of order or personal privilege. If a Councilmember is called to order while speaking, the individual shall cease speaking until the question of order is determined. Upon being recognized by the presiding officer, Councilmembers shall hold the floor until completion of their questions or remarks or until recognition is withdrawn by the president officer;

3. Each Councilmember shall vote on all questions put to the County Council, unless a Councilmember recuses themselves;
4. If a member of the Council who is eligible to vote does not vote, his or her silence shall be recorded as an affirmative vote;
5. No vote may be cast by proxy;
6. Councilmembers shall notify the presiding officer and/or the Chief of Staff in advance if they will be either absent or attending virtually for any public meeting; notice shall be provided, where reasonable, at least one week prior to the meeting where the absence or remote attendance is anticipated.

Section 5 – Respect and Decorum.

Neither Councilmembers, county staff, nor the public shall disrupt the proceedings of the Council or refuse to obey the orders of the presiding officer or the rules of protocol. Any person disrupting the business of the Council, either while addressing the Council or attending its meetings, shall be asked to cease such disruption. A disruption of a County Council meeting is any behavior that renders the orderly conduct of the Council meeting unfeasible or prevents the Council from accomplishing its business in a reasonably efficient manner. Disruption does not require behavior that constitutes a breach of the peace, although a breach of the peace would constitute a disruption of the Council Meeting.

For purposes of illustration only, such disruption may include, but is not limited to:

- a) Continuing to speak after the allotted time has expired;
- b) Use of allotted time for purposeful delay;
- c) Audience demonstrations such as booing, holding or display of signs that endanger others, obstructing the free flow of others or their view of the dais, or any other conduct that disrupts the Council proceedings;
- d) Continuing to speak after being ruled out of order by the presiding officer;
- e) Threats or personal attacks or abusive language that intentionally disrupts, disturbs or impedes the orderly conduct of the Council proceedings;
- f) Other speech or behavior that disrupts the orderly conduct of the Council meeting;
- g) Outbursts from Councilmembers or the public without recognition;

Section 6 – Presentations to Council

1. With approval from the Council or Committee Chair, presentations may occur at Council meetings.
2. Scheduling a presentation on an agenda, including any cancellation and/or rescheduling, and any limits on presentation length are at the discretion of the Council or Committee Chair.
3. Presentation materials and the speaker names shall be sent to the Council the Friday before the presentation date for inclusion in the agenda.
4. Unless otherwise arranged with the Council, when presenting, the speaker should join the zoom meeting in progress from their own device and share their screen for display of presentation materials.

Section 7 – Public Comment

1. The County Council desires to allow the opportunity for Public Comment. However, the business of the County must proceed in an orderly, timely manner. At any time, the presiding officer, in their sole discretion, may set such reasonable limits as are necessary to prevent disruption of other necessary business.
2. Members of the public may address the County Council under Public Comment as listed on the agenda. During a Public Hearing when the Council is receiving testimony pursuant to its function as a hearing body, individuals may speak to agenda items only.
3. At its most restrictive, Public Comment may be limited to a total of 15 minutes. Individuals may speak for three (3) minutes or less, depending on the number of people wishing to speak and may not cede any remaining time to another speaker. If more than 20 people are signed up to speak, each speaker may be allocated two (2) minutes.
4. Persons speaking shall state their name and their city or town of residence and are requested to include any organization they may be representing. All comments shall be addressed to the Council as a whole and not to individual members thereof. Any physical documents shall be left with the Council Clerks for distribution.
5. County council meetings are not public forums for addressing the audience. All speakers must address the Council, not staff or the audience.
6. No person shall use audio recordings, sing, dance or display visual information during their public comment, including but not limited to presentations, videos or other media; however, members of the public may share this information with the Council by emailing them at County.Council@snoco.org or providing a copy to the Council Clerk for distribution.

Section 8 – Suspension of Rules.

These rules may be temporarily suspended for a particular matter or meeting by the affirmative vote of a majority of quorum present. Motions to suspend the rules must specify both the general purpose of the suspension and be temporary and specific in duration.