



Town of Haymarket
15000 Washington Street, #100
Haymarket, VA 20169
703-753-2600

Memorandum

To: Honorable Mayor and Town Council
From: Councilmember Justin Baker
Re: Comments of Policies and Procedures

A few key points from the *Rules of Procedure I reviewed*

1. Meeting Schedule:

- Regular meetings occur on the first Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m. for closed sessions and 7:00 p.m. for regular meetings.
- Work sessions are held on the last Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

2. Council Member Rights:

- Every member has an equal right to participate and vote on matters before the Council.
- The Council must act as a body and ensure the will of the majority is carried out, while respecting the rights of the minority.

3. Agenda and Meeting Structure:

- Council members can request items to be added to the agenda, and public input is allowed through the "Citizens' Time" section, with a five-minute time limit for individuals.
- Public hearings have specific guidelines, with time limits for both individual and group speakers.

4. Rules for Public Participation:

- Public comments must be respectful, and disorderly conduct (such as interrupting or using inappropriate language) can lead to expulsion from the meeting.
- Written comments can also be submitted, and public participation is encouraged but must stay relevant to town matters.

5. Officer Roles:

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- The Mayor presides over meetings, with the Vice Mayor taking over in their absence. If both are absent, the Council selects a temporary presiding officer.

1. Clarify Public Comment and Debate Guidelines

- **Suggestion:** Expand on the guidelines for public comment during *Public Hearings* and *Councilmember Time*. Public participation is vital, but it could be useful to specify if Council members or staff will have a set time limit for responses or clarifications after public comments, especially in controversial or complex matters. It might also be helpful to emphasize that Council members are expected to refrain from engaging in debate during *Public Comment* unless the issue is specifically on the agenda or requires immediate action.
- **Rationale:** This would prevent confusion about when public input turns into debate, preserving the meeting's structure.

2. Include Digital Meeting Provisions

- **Suggestion:** Add a section to cover virtual meetings or hybrid meetings (in-person and virtual participation). This could include rules for public comment and participation through online platforms and how members of the public or Council members can participate remotely.
- **Rationale:** As virtual and hybrid meetings become increasingly common, outlining clear procedures for these formats would enhance accessibility and transparency.

3. Time Management During Public Comments

- **Suggestion:** Introduce more flexibility in time limits for *Public Comments* based on the volume of speakers or the importance of the issue. For example, if there is a significant number of speakers or a particularly complex issue, the Council could vote to extend or reduce speaking times to keep the meeting on track.

- **Rationale:** Flexibility in time management ensures that all voices are heard, while also allowing the meeting to stay efficient.

4. Clarity on Emergency Meetings and Public Notice

- **Suggestion:** Clarify the language around *Emergency Meetings* to ensure that reasonable notice is given to both Council members and the public, per legal requirements, but also to explicitly state what constitutes an "emergency" under these rules.
- **Rationale:** Clearer definitions and expectations around emergency meetings can prevent misunderstandings about when they can be called and how the public is notified.

5. Amendment or Suspension of Rules

- **Suggestion:** Add a provision regarding the ability of the Council to suspend or amend these rules in special circumstances (e.g., during lengthy or sensitive discussions). You could specify whether suspending rules requires a certain number of votes or if a unanimous vote is required.
- **Rationale:** This gives the Council flexibility while maintaining order. It's important to have processes for addressing unforeseen circumstances where suspending a rule might be necessary for a specific meeting.

6. Expanded Roles for Town Staff or Manager

- **Suggestion:** Consider outlining a more detailed role for the *Town Manager* in the process of agenda preparation or facilitating discussions. This could include recommending agenda items for discussion based on the needs of the town or departments, or ensuring the proper logistics and documentation are in place.
- **Rationale:** This can help streamline meetings and give the Town Manager more proactive input in guiding Council actions.

7. Consistency in Agenda Distribution

- **Suggestion:** Specify that *agenda packets* and materials are made available digitally to the public in addition to physical copies, along with a standard timeline for posting them to the website.
- **Rationale:** Increasing accessibility to agenda materials online makes it easier for the public to engage with the Council and stay informed, particularly in the digital age.

8. Feedback Mechanism for Public Engagement

- **Suggestion:** Add a feedback mechanism for public engagement post-meeting, such as a brief survey or dedicated comment period. This would allow citizens to provide input on the meeting process and how they felt about the effectiveness of public participation.
- **Rationale:** This would encourage ongoing improvement in the Council's approach to public engagement, fostering a stronger connection with the community.

9. Public Hearing Clarification

- **Suggestion:** Provide more specific rules for public hearings that are *not* related to land-use or zoning, as the guidelines mainly focus on these. Clarifying the role of staff, Council, and public participation in hearings on other matters (e.g., budget, ordinance changes) would be beneficial.
- **Rationale:** It would ensure that all types of public hearings are covered under the same framework, not just land-use issues.

10. Standard Operating Procedures for Emergency Responses

- **Suggestion:** If applicable, consider adding rules for Council responses to urgent issues that arise between meetings (e.g., natural disasters or public safety

concerns). This could include an expedited review process or designated officers to act on behalf of the Council until a formal meeting is held.

- **Rationale:** Having a clear emergency response protocol can help the Council manage unforeseen situations quickly and effectively.