

## **ROUGH DRAFT (2), 7/16/22**

### **New Fairfield Board of Finance Public Comment Policy**

Under Connecticut state law, municipal boards and commissions are public agencies under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and therefore must comply with FOIA requirements. Along with other factors, this means that local board and commission meetings must be open to the public, except for closed sessions, as allowed by law, for specified purposes.

FOIA does not explicitly require meetings to allow for public participation. The state Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC) has consistently held that this decision is within the discretion of each agency, (see Advisory Opinion #35 (1978) and Final Decision, Docket #FIC 2009-254 (2010)).

However, it is a core democratic value that everyone has a right to express their opinions and views, and for these views to be heard. The purpose of the public comment period is to inform the board and committees of the views of the public. Public comment is encouraged. Elected officials want to hear these views and to consider them, as well as, other factors during board deliberations.

Public comment does not deem a reply, since it is to provide information to the board or committee. However, if the Chairperson deems an immediate reply is in order the Chairperson will select an appropriate board member or personnel, who is present, to reply.

In order for the entire meeting agenda to proceed on schedule and to accomplish the purpose of the meeting, the board reserves the right to limit public comment. Members of the public who wish to speak are allotted three (3) minutes time or less, depending on the number of requests and the time available. This should allow time for other persons to speak, who wish to do so.

The board requests that the public refrain from repeating their own same comments at a given meeting or at multiple meetings. All comments will be duly noted at the time they are expressed to the board or committee members.

If your views have already been expressed during the public comment period, you may simply indicate that you agree with the previous speaker. If appropriate, a spokesperson may present the views of a given group.

### **Public Conduct Policy**

The key to all public conduct is to focus on the strength and weakness of proposed solutions to community problems. The board strives to create a culture of tolerance for differing points of view that credits everyone with having the best interests of the community in mind.

All participants shall be treated with respect and courtesy. It is important that the public feel that the board meetings will be conducted in an orderly way, and that the public's views can be expressed to the board and committees, without fear of recrimination, criticism, intimidation or comment by the board or other participants.

The manner of speech in meetings is important. Participants shall refrain from personal attacks and ridicule against the integrity and motives of board members, employees, presenters, and other public participants.

The board shall not permit uncivility such as the drowning out of other's perspectives in an aggressive, derogatory, and/or intimidating manner. This includes expressions such as foul, profane, abusive language, jeering, or clapping or cheering of the audience, in order to express agreement or disagreement of expressed points of view.

The Chairperson may, or on the motion of any board member, rule any public speaker out of order, such as his/her comments being inappropriate, uncivil, derogatory, or unreasonably repetitious of previous comments made.

### **Public Comment Procedures**

- **Requesting to speak at in-person meetings:** Persons requesting to speak in an in-person meeting are requested to give their name or organization before speaking.

The Board of Finance currently meets regularly, once a month, on Wednesdays at 7:30 PM. The schedule and agendas for all of these meetings can be found on the town website at [newfairfield.org](http://newfairfield.org).

- **Requesting to speak at Zoom meetings:** The procedures will be announced at the beginning of the meeting.

The zoom link is listed on the agenda for each meeting, which can be found at the town website at [newfairfield.org](http://newfairfield.org).

- **Submitting written comments:** Members of the public may submit comments and questions in writing to the board by email at [BOF@newfairfield.org](mailto:BOF@newfairfield.org).

These emails are forwarded to every member of the Board of Finance and are acknowledged at the next scheduled board meeting.