

Board of County Commissioners

Escambia County, Florida

Title: Orderly Conduct of Meetings – Section I, Part A.15
Date Adopted: October 6, 2011
Effective Date: March 21, 2013, Amended
Reference:
Policy Amended: October 6, 2011, January 19, 2012, and March 21, 2013

A. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to establish rules to ensure the orderly conduct of meetings and to protect the public from potentially injurious conduct.

B. Decorum:

1. Order must be preserved. No person shall, by speech or otherwise, delay or interrupt the proceedings or the peace of the Commission, or disturb any person having the floor. No person shall refuse to obey the orders of the Chairman or the Commission. Any person making irrelevant, impertinent, or slanderous remarks or who becomes boisterous while addressing the Commission shall not be considered orderly or decorous. Any person who becomes disorderly or who fails to confine remarks to the identified subject or business at hand shall be cautioned by the Chairman and given the opportunity to conclude remarks on the subject in a decorous manner and within the designated time limit. Any person failing to comply as cautioned shall be barred from making any additional comments during the meeting by the Chairman, unless permission to continue or again address the Commission is granted by the majority of the Commission members present. To this end, the following actions are prohibited. This list is not exhaustive and other actions may be considered disorderly or not decorous.
 - a. Speakers will refrain from the use of obscene language, “fighting words” likely to incite violence from the individual(s) to whom the words are addressed, or other language which is disruptive to the orderly and fair progress of discussion at the meeting.
 - b. Speakers will refrain from making comments of a personal nature regarding others.
 - c. Name-calling and/or obscenity is forbidden.
 - d. Shouting, yelling or screaming is forbidden.
 - e. Threats made to any person.

2. If the Chairman or the Commission declares an individual out of order, he or she will be requested to relinquish the podium or to cease the conduct if not at the podium. If the person does not do so, he or she is subject to removal from the Commission Chambers or other meeting room and may be arrested by the Sheriff subject to Section 810.08(1), Florida Statutes or other applicable law as warranted under the circumstances.
3. Any person who becomes disruptive or interferes with the orderly business of the Commission may be removed from the Commission Chambers or other meeting room for the remainder of the meeting. In extreme circumstances, a person may be barred from future Commission meetings.

C. Disruption of Meetings

1. No demonstrations of approval or disapproval from the audience shall be permitted; and if, after warning by the Chair, such demonstrations are made and result in a disruption of the meeting, the person(s) creating such disruption may be removed from the meeting; or the Chair may recess the meeting until order is restored. The Chair shall call upon the Sheriff's deputies present during the meeting to enforce directions given by the Chair for any violation of this rule. Additionally, the following actions are considered disruptive:
 - a. Heckling, verbal outbursts or other interruptions in support or in opposition to a speaker or any topic of discussion are considered disruptive to the meeting and if such behavior continues after warning by the Chair, may result in those committing such actions to be removed from the meeting.
 - b. Noisemakers, air horns, whistles and similar noise making items shall not be allowed in the Commission Chambers or other meeting room.
 - c. At the Chairman's discretion, if there is a controversial item in which Escambia County citizens are involved, he may institute a provision against clapping, if he feels that clapping or the noise will deter open speech between the two parties.

D. Signs, Placards, Banners and Other Objects

For public safety purposes and to ensure the visual rights of all, no signs, placards, banners or similar items shall be allowed in the Commission Chambers or other designated meeting room.

E. Speakers: Regular Agenda

Speakers on the regular agenda shall be allotted three (3) minutes unless otherwise determined by the Chair.