

Rules of Conduct and Decorum  
Shelter Island Town Board Meetings

WHEREAS, Article 7 of the New York State Public Officers Law (also known as the Open Meetings Law) gives members of the public the right to attend and observe Town Board Meetings and Work Sessions (Town Meetings), however it does not give the public the right to speak, or otherwise participate at those meetings, except if there is a public hearing scheduled;

WHEREAS, notwithstanding the absence of a statutory right to speak and participate at Town Meetings, the Board believes that such a right is fundamental and grounded in historical public participation on the Island;

WHEREAS, due to recent events the Board does not feel that public participation is, nor should be unfettered;

WHEREAS, Section 63 of New York State Town Law authorizes the Board to determine its own rules of procedure for conducting Town Meetings;

WHEREAS, in order to prevent verbal interruptions, shouting or other outbursts, and other behavior that interferes with the deliberative process;

WHEREAS, to ensure that the public has an opportunity to participate without fear and with clear expectations;

WHEREAS, the New York State Committee on Open Government (the New York State Committee charged with overseeing and advising on the Open Meetings Law) has agreed that reasonable rules may be adopted to limit the length, general nature, and time when public comments may be heard, in order for the Board to consider various points of view and run an efficient meeting; and

NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED THAT, the Town Board of Shelter Island hereby formally adopts the following rules for public participation at Town Meetings:

1. The Town Supervisor shall preside over Town Meetings and recognize Town Board members upon request.
2. At Town Board Work Sessions, public comment shall be limited to the end of said Work Session, unless the Supervisor recognizes a specific member of the public prior thereto. A work session is the only opportunity for a quorum of the Board to gather for the purpose of discussion and deliberation on agenda items, so a focused approach is necessary, therefore public comment is provided for thereafter.
3. At Town Board Meetings, public comment on agenda items shall be limited to the beginning of said Meeting, prior to adopting resolutions, and any general comments may be made at the end of said meeting.
4. During a public hearing, public comment regarding the subject matter of said hearing is permitted and welcome.
5. A member of the public may speak only upon recognition by the Town Supervisor.

6. Any member of the public wishing to speak at a Town Meeting must sign in upon entering the Town Board Meeting Room and provide their name and topic they wish to be heard on, which information shall be used by the Supervisor to recognize speakers.
7. If there is no sign-in sheet or you are appearing virtually, a member of the public may raise their hand until recognized by the Supervisor and then state their name, and if applicable group affiliation, and the subject they are addressing.
8. If recognized, one may only speak for a total of three (3) minutes-said time may not be reserved, nor transferred to another member of the public.
9. The administrative assistant to the Town Board, or designee, shall serve as the timekeeper and provide an expiration warning.
10. Any comments made by the public must be directed to the Board and not made to anyone in the audience.
11. During a Town Meeting, members of the public shall not speak to each other while in the the Town Board Meeting Room, but may do so outside thereof.
12. Town Meeting participants, including both town officials and members of the public, must observe proper decorum.
13. Personal, impertinent, or slanderous attacks on any member of the public, or town officials is prohibited.
14. The use of profane, vulgar, inflammatory, threatening, disparaging language or racial, ethnic, or sexual slurs, at any time, toward any person, is prohibited.
15. Political speeches or calls for political action are prohibited.
16. Banners, flyers, and signs are not permitted in the Meeting Room.
17. Any person who fails to abide by the Rules of Conduct, or otherwise acts in a boisterous or inappropriate manner, shall be barred from any further participation in the Meeting.
18. Any person who violates the Rules of Conduct and refuses to cease upon directives from the Supervisor shall be removed from the meeting room.