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TARRANT COUNTY, TX (/en.html)

Language



COMMISSIONERS COURT RULES OF DECORUM

The Tarrant County Commissioners Court (“Court”) adopts the following rules of decorum to govern regular and special meetings of the Court. The intent of these rules is to ensure the safety of the public, the staff, and members of the Court, and to maximize citizen participation, efficiently receive public input, and maintain respectful decorum during each meeting.

I. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

During the regularly called meetings of the Commissioners Court, members of the public shall have two opportunities to address the Court. One public comment period shall be exclusively for Proclamations, Resolutions, and Presentations and shall take place before said items. The second section for public comments shall be held prior to the Commissioners Court consideration of remaining agenda items. During the second public comment section, members of the public may address any remaining matter on the Commissioners Court agenda and may also deliver general public comments unrelated to topics on the agenda. Members of the public may address the Court once they are verbally recognized by the County Judge or, in the absence of the County Judge¹, the presiding officer. The County Judge will recognize a potential speaker during the designated “Public Comments” agenda item.

TIME LIMITS

i. The speaking time limit is up to three (3) minutes per speaker during a regular or special called meeting regardless of the number of agenda items which the speaker seeks to address. At the discretion of the County Judge, this time limit can be reduced for the purpose of efficiency based on the total number of public commenters registered to speak during the public comment periods. If there are thirty (30) to forty-nine (49) speakers signed up to speak during the public comment periods, the time limit will be reduced to two (2) minutes per speaker. If fifty (50) speakers or more are signed up to speak during the public comment periods, the time limit will be reduced to one (1) minute per speaker. In making such adjustments to speaker time limits, the County Judge shall act in a reasonable and non-discriminatory manner. If an adjustment is made to speaker time limits, such adjustment shall be applied equally to all speakers. The Deputy County Clerk, serving as Clerk of the Court, or another person designated by the County Judge shall keep the time for all speakers.

ii. If a person is addressing the Commissioners Court through a translator, the speaking time limit is up to six (6) minutes. In the event the time limit has been reduced, a person addressing the Commissioners Court through a translator shall be given twice the amount of time as a member of the public who does not require the assistance of a translator.

¹ As used in these rules, the term "County Judge" refers to the County Judge when acting as the presiding officer of the Court, or to the member of the Court who serves as the presiding officer in the absence of the County Judge.

iii. During public hearings, the Commissioners Court will listen to public comments after the County Judge has opened the public hearing and prior to taking any vote, if needed. Each speaker can use their full allotted time to discuss the matter before the Court at the public hearing, within any time limits set by Section I(a)(i). Public comments can be made while the Court is considering the public hearing item rather than during the designated comment periods. Registration to address the Commissioners Court during a public hearing is not required.

iv. At the conclusion of the speaker's time, the Deputy County Clerk or other person designated by the County Judge shall sound a buzzer, alarm, or other audible device to signal the conclusion of the speaker's time.

B. ONLINE PUBLIC COMMENT FORMS

For each Commissioners Court meeting, members of the public may submit public comment forms online at [Commissioners Court Agendas and Videos](https://www.tarrantcountytx.gov/en/commissioners-court/commissioners-court-agenda-videos.html)

(<https://www.tarrantcountytx.gov/en/commissioners-court/commissioners-court-agenda-videos.html>?

[linklocation=Commissioners%20Court%20Meetings&linkname=Court%20Agendas,%20Videos%20a](https://www.tarrantcountytx.gov/en/commissioners-court/commissioners-court-agenda-videos.html?linklocation=Commissioners%20Court%20Meetings&linkname=Court%20Agendas,%20Videos%20a)

after the posting of the agenda. Alternatively, members of the public who need assistance submitting a form, may come to the County Administrator's Office located on the fourth (4th) floor of the Tarrant County Administration Building during normal business hours. Public comment forms are due no later than 5:00 p.m. the business day before the commencement of the regular or special Commissioners Court meeting. The County Administrator's Office is located at the following address:

Tarrant County Administrator's Office

100 E. Weatherford, Suite 404 Fort Worth, Texas 76196 Phone (817) 884-1267

Tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov (<mailto:Tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov>)

Written public comments are available to Commissioners Court upon submission.

C. GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKERS

i. Speaker order may be on a first-come, first-served basis (using the date and time the public comment form is received). However, speaker order is wholly up to the discretion of the County Judge. The County Judge may allow public commentators who are residents of Tarrant County to speak prior to commentators who are not Tarrant County residents.

ii. Speakers will be called to speak by the County Judge or presiding officer.

- iii. A member of the public addressing the Court during regular and special meetings shall do so only from the podium.
- iv. Before addressing the Court, speakers may be asked their name, address or Commissioner precinct number, and the agenda item that they will be addressing, if any.
- v. Speakers shall stop speaking when the allocated time to speak has expired.
- vi. The County Judge maintains the right to interrupt and/or excuse a speaker when the allocated time has expired, if the speaker otherwise violates these guidelines, or for any other matter at the discretion of the County Judge.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT DURING THE AGENDIZED “PUBLIC COMMENTS” ITEM

During the specifically agendized “Public Comments” item on the agendas, public comments may not be addressed to staff or other members of the public; however, the Court may ask staff to review an issue. Members of the Court cannot respond to public comments on a non-agendized item except as permitted by

Texas Government Code Section 551.042.

II. GENERAL RULES OF DECORUM

Everyone attending a regular or special meeting of Commissioners Court must adhere to these general rules of decorum, so each meeting is conducted in a timely and orderly manner.

A. PROHIBITED BEHAVIOR

- i. Personal attacks, impertinent, profane, obscene, or slanderous remarks.
- ii. Threatening, disruptive, or unruly behavior.
- iii. Disruptive remarks or actions of approval or disapproval from the audience, such as feet stomping, snapping, whistling, yelling, clapping, verbal affirmation or rejection, or similar distractions, except that orderly clapping during the Proclamations, Resolutions, and Presentations section of the agenda is permissible.
- iv. Approaching the dais on which the members of the Commissioners Court sit beyond the speaker's podium or to the immediate left or right of the podium, unless by the invitation of a member of the Commissioners Court.
- v. Wearing or displaying signs, flags, banners, props, placards, or similar items larger than 8 ½ by 11 inches. This includes items that can be illuminated or be attached to any pole, stick, or other device. This does not include words or symbols on personal apparel, such as shirts, hats, and other standard items of clothing.

B. CELL PHONES AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES

All cellular phones, electronic devices, or other communication devices are to be on “silent” mode at all

times while Commissioners Court is in session.

III. FAILURE TO COMPLY

Failure to comply with any part of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court Rules of Decorum may result in sanctions, including but not limited to, the following:

- i. removal from the Court by the County Judge or presiding officer;
- ii. temporary prohibition from commenting in person during Court;
- iii. cancellation of a speaker's remaining time;
- iv. a finding of contempt of Commissioners Court pursuant to Texas Local Government Code Section

81.023 which is punishable by a fine of not more than twenty-five (25) dollars or by confinement of not more than twenty-four (24) hours;

v. referral of matter for other civil sanctions and/or criminal charges as may be authorized under the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas.

IV. BAILIFF

The Tarrant County Sheriff or designee shall provide Bailiffs at all meetings of the Court. Bailiffs are charged with maintaining order in the courtroom and will remove any person from the courtroom who has violated the decorum of the Court at the request of the County Judge.

The Bailiff is permitted to issue criminal trespass warnings barring entrance to the premises of the G.K. Maenius Administration Building during meetings of the Court to members of the public who have: 1) caused a continuing series of disruptions over a single or multiple meetings of the Commissioners Court and have failed to comply with less restrictive means of correcting the disruptions; or 2) caused a substantial and serious disruption of a Commissioners Court meeting such that less restrictive means of correcting the

disruption would be futile. Any criminal trespass warning notice issued shall prevent entrance to the Commissioners Courtroom for a period determined by the Bailiff to be proportionate to the necessity to stop and remediate any misconduct, but shall be for no longer of a period than one hundred and eighty (180) days per incident that results in a criminal trespass warning. A member of the public who has been issued a criminal trespass warning by the Bailiff shall have the right to appeal the warning to the Tarrant County Civil Service Commission. Through the appeal, the Tarrant County Civil Service Commission may rescind the criminal trespass warning, reduce the amount of time for which it is in effect, or leave the warning in place.

V. COURTROOM CAPACITY

Members of the public are welcome to attend all public portions of Court meetings. In the event the courtroom is unable to accommodate seating for all members of the public or the fire safety capacity of the courtroom is reached, the Bailiff or Tarrant County Fire Marshal may close admission to the courtroom. If admission to the courtroom is closed, an overflow room shall be made available where members of the public can view a live video feed of the meeting as space permits. In addition, meetings of the Court are publicly streamed online.

VI. REQUESTS FOR ACCOMMODATIONS

Persons with disabilities who plan to attend Court and need accommodations, auxiliary aids, or services such as interpreters, readers, or large font size are requested to contact the Tarrant County Administrator's Office at (817) 884-1267. The request needs to be made at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the Commissioners Court meeting. If the County receives a request less than forty-eight (48) hours before the Commissioners Court meeting, the County will make reasonable attempts to provide accommodations.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For any questions or clarifications, please contact us at:

Tarrant County Administrator's Office

100 E. Weatherford, Suite 404

Fort Worth, Texas 76196

Phone: (817)884-1267

tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov (<mailto:tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov>)

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