# POLICY: GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

## BACKGROUND

The City of New Richmond welcomes communication from the community. There are multiple opportunities for citizens to address elected officials, including but not limited to: public comment period during regular monthly meetings, letters, emails, phone calls, and scheduled in-person appointments. The contact information for elected officials (and City staff) can be found on the City of New Richmond website, and can also be obtained by contacting or visiting the Civic Center during normal business hours.

Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law grants citizens the right to attend and observe public meetings, but does not require a governmental body to allow members of the public to speak or actively participate in an open session meeting. While the public is encouraged to attend or watch recordings of City Council meetings to observe deliberations, the meetings are held for the express purpose of conducting the business of the City of New Richmond, and the public is not entitled to speak during the meeting outside of a noticed public comment time or public hearing.

The City Council chooses to provide a public comment period as a limited public forum. The guidelines that follow are content-neutral, narrowly tailored, and leave open ample alternative channels of communication.

## GUIDELINES

- Public comment shall be held at regular monthly meetings of the City Council held on the second Monday of each month, not to exceed twenty (20) minutes total, unless additional time is otherwise made available at the discretion of the chairperson, or if the comments are during a noticed public hearing. The public shall not speak during other items of business unless invited to do so by the chairperson.

- Members of the public who attend meetings of the City Council should be mindful of the official nature of the proceedings and demonstrate professionalism and respect to others. Loud outbursts, demonstrations, or activities determined by the chairperson to be disruptive to the proceedings are prohibited. Members of the public are asked to silence their phones and refrain from having conversations in the Council Chambers while a meeting is in session.

- Public comment shall be limited to three (3) minutes per person. Priority shall be given to City of New Richmond residents and taxpayers. Individuals may speak once per meeting, and may not "donate" time to someone else who wishes to speak longer than three minutes.

- Public comment shall be limited to topics included on the current meeting agenda. Citizens who wish to provide comment on other topics not on the agenda are encouraged to contact the Mayor, City Council, and/or the appropriate City staff via phone, email, letter, or a scheduled in-person appointment.

- City of New Richmond employees may speak during the public comment period and must follow the same guidelines as the general public. City of New Richmond employees who wish to discuss personnel matters or grievances shall adhere to the processes contained in the Employee Handbook.

- The City Council will not accept public comments that reference, in whole or in part, the following topics: employment status of any specific individual; statements concerning the private activities, lifestyles, or beliefs of any specific individual employed by or associated with the City of New Richmond; or grievances relating to any employee. The City Council will also not accept public comments from a party to any pending or threatened litigation or any administrative or other proceeding to which the City of New Richmond is a party, or by legal counsel for such party.

- Citizens who wish to speak during the public comment period shall sign in and provide their name, address, contact information, and the agenda topic on which they wish to comment, on the registration form provided prior to the start of the meeting.

- Citizens shall speak into the microphone at the designated podium when invited to speak by the chairperson. Citizens shall begin their comments by stating their name, address, and the agenda topic(s) on which they wish to comment.

- In general, there will not be back-and-froth exchanges or any response to public comments from the City Council or staff. However, the chairperson or appropriate City staff may provide brief factual information for clarification purposes.

- Obscene, profane, and threatening language or behavior which is disruptive to the meeting is prohibited.

- Willfully disruptive individuals who fail to adhere to the established rules of decorum may be removed from the Council Chambers at the discretion of the chairperson if they do not promptly cease their behavior, or if the disruptive individual is using force or makes a true threat of force.

- Citizens who wish to provide comment who are unable to attend the meeting in-person are encouraged to submit their comments in writing to the City Clerk prior to the meeting, so they can be summarized and read into the record during the public comment period and/or otherwise distributed to the City Council.