



Meeting Participation Guide

What to Expect during City of Palo Alto Public Meetings

Understanding the Agenda Sections:

Special Orders of the Day:

- Council may acknowledge special appreciation for events, organizations, or individuals. There may be brief comments from Council and/or the recipient.
- No public comment is taken for this section.

Closed Session:

- Council hears specific items, such as labor and real estate negotiations, litigation, or employment issues, in private as authorized by State law.
- Public comment is taken once at the start of the section for all closed session items. Speakers will have one allotment of public comment time to discuss all closed session items.

Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions:

- By majority vote, agenda item order may be changed or deleted. Additions may not occur, except in an emergency.
- No public comment is taken for this section.

Public Comment:

- General public comment pertaining to any items NOT on the agenda. This public comment is accepted in-person only.
- Speakers will have up to three minutes each or an amount of time determined by the presiding officer. General public comment will be heard for 30 minutes. Additional public comments, if any, will be heard at the end of the agenda.

Councilmember Questions, Comments and Announcements:

- Council can briefly ask staff questions and make general comments or brief announcements in a manner consistent with the Brown Act.
- No public comment is taken for this section.

Study Session:

- Agenda items during which the Council receives information about City business. No action will be taken by Council.
- Public comment is taken separately for each item.

Consent Calendar:

- Agenda items which are not anticipated to require discussion are voted in one motion, unless an item is pulled by three Councilmembers.
- Public comment is taken at the start of the section for all consent calendar items. Speakers will have one allotment of public comment time for the entire consent calendar.

Action Items:

- These items will be discussed by Council one at a time. The Council may take action if it chooses to do so.
- Public comment is taken for each item.

Informational Reports:

- Items provided for informational purposes only to the Council and public, no discussion or action will be taken.
- Public comment is not taken for these items.

Note: The above list contains the most common sections. Other sections may be agendized as appropriate for the meeting.

Common FAQs:

Q: How do I sign up to give public comment?

A: For **written public comments**, email City.Council@PaloAlto.gov. For **in person public comments**, complete a speaker request card and deliver it to the Clerk before discussion of the item. For **remote public comments**, use the “raise hand” feature in Zoom or press *9 if using a phone before discussion of the item.

Q: What time will item # ____ be at?

A: For City Council meetings, time estimates for each section will be listed on the agenda. **Please note that these are only estimates and item order/timing may be subject to change.**

Q: How can I speak about an item NOT on the agenda?

A: Please sign up to speak for general public comment. Please note, general public comment is accepted **in-person only**.

Q: Can I go first/last/in a certain order for public comment?

A: Individual speaker requests are added to the queue in the order in which they are received. Presentations and group speakers are typically heard first, though order may be subject to change.

Q: Can I display an image or presentation during my public comment?

A: Yes. PowerPoints, videos, or other media to be presented during public comment are accepted only by email to city.clerk@PaloAlto.gov at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. The Clerk will share them at public comment for the specified item.

Q: How many times can I speak per meeting?

A: You may speak once during general public comment and once for each agenda item in sections that allow public comment. Note, some sections such as consent calendar and closed session will have one public comment period for the section in whole.

Q: How can I gain additional time as a spokesperson for a group?

A: A spokesperson must be representing at least 5 others (not including themselves). Those ceding their time must be present in the meeting, either in person or on Zoom. Please note, spokespersons for general public comment must attend the meeting in person. You will receive additional time as determined by the presiding officer, typically between 5-10 minutes. If you plan to represent a group, please email the Clerk’s Office at city.clerk@PaloAlto.gov 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

Q: I’m not able to attend the meeting. How can I share my comments with Council?

A: Please view our [Public Letters to City Council page](#) for instructions on contacting the City Council.

Q: Where can I view the full City Council Procedures and Protocols Handbook?

A: The handbook can be viewed at this [link](#). Most policies pertaining to public participation are in Sections 3 and 5.

Further questions? Please reach out to the City Clerk’s Office at City.Clerk@PaloAlto.gov or (650) 329-2571.
