

Governance Manual – Chapter 3: Council Meetings, Agendas, and Directives

SECTION 3.1 — DEFINITIONS, GOVERNING AUTHORITY, RIGHTS, AND INTERPRETIVE RULES

3.1.1 Governing hierarchy (order of authority)

In the event of any conflict, the following hierarchy applies:

1. Federal law and Texas Constitution
2. Texas statutes and controlling state law (including the Texas Open Meetings Act)
3. City of Laredo Home Rule Charter
4. City of Laredo Code of Ordinances (including agenda and meeting ordinances)
5. Council-adopted rules, policies, manuals, and resolutions
6. Administrative procedures (calendars, forms, templates)
7. Parliamentary authority (Robert's Rules of Order as adopted)

3.1.2 Preservation of Council authority and member rights

Nothing in this Manual is intended to diminish Council authority, the Mayor's Charter-defined rights, each Councilmember's agenda placement rights as provided by ordinance or policy, or public access rights required by law.

3.1.3 Definitions (for consistent use)

- Council-initiated item: An agenda item placed on the City Council agenda by an individual Councilmember or the Mayor pursuant to the City Charter, Code of Ordinances, or adopted Council rules.
- Council action: Any motion, resolution, ordinance, directive, referral, or other decision adopted by a vote of the City Council in open session.
- Council directive: A form of Council action that instructs the City Manager to perform analysis, prepare options, return with a recommendation, or place a future item on a Council agenda, without itself authorizing expenditures, contracts, or binding commitments.

- Administrative matter: Operational, managerial, or day-to-day activities carried out under the authority of the City Manager that do not require Council action unless otherwise required by law, Charter, or adopted policy.

3.1.4 Conversion rule: Councilmember item → Council action

When Council adopts any motion, referral, directive, or other action on a Council-initiated item, the matter becomes a Council action. It is no longer treated as a single item for a Councilmember. Subsequent work product, tracking, and reporting shall be handled as Council-directed action through the City Manager.

SECTION 3.2 — REGULAR AND CALLED MEETINGS; QUORUM, REMOTE PARTICIPATION, RECESS/ADJOURNMENT

3.2.1 Regular meeting schedule (current practice)

Regular meetings are held on the first and third Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at Council Chambers in the Laredo City Hall, unless otherwise posted.

A. Exceptions are January and July, when the regular meetings will be on the third Monday of the month; and December, when it will be on the first Monday due to holidays.

B. When a regular meeting falls on a City holiday, the meeting shall be held on the following day, Tuesday, at the same time and place.

C. The Mayor and City Council may schedule regular meetings at a different location within City limits, but on the same day and time, by majority vote of Council Members present, subject to posting requirements.

D. Ceremonial/recognition session. As standard practice, the Council may begin with a ceremonial or recognition session at 5:00 p.m., followed by the regular business meeting at 5:30 p.m., as reflected in the posted notice and agenda.

3.2.2 Additional Called Meetings

A. Special Meetings: The Mayor or at least four Council Members may request special meetings of the Council.

- i. Such requests must be submitted in writing to the City Secretary
- ii. The Mayor shall determine the order of business for special meetings.
- iii. Special meetings shall end by 10:30 p.m.
- iv. Special meetings are subject to the exact requirements of regular meetings of the Council, including posting notice requirements.

B. Emergency Meetings: As generally reflected in the Texas Attorney General's Open Meetings Act guidance, special rules allow for posting notice of emergency meetings and for supplementing a posted notice with emergency items. An emergency of urgent public necessity exists only if immediate action is required of a governmental body because of:

- i. An imminent threat to public health and safety

ii. A reasonably unforeseeable situation, including:

- fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane, tornado, or wind, rain, or snow storm;
- power failure, transportation failure, or interruption of communication facilities;
- epidemic, or
- riot, civil disturbance, enemy attack, or other actual or threatened act of lawlessness or violence.

C. Workshops: Council workshops can be called by the Mayor or City Manager. Workshops will focus on key policy or project briefings.

3.2.3 Charter baseline requirement

The City Charter requires that the Council meet at least once each month.

3.2.4 Adjournment expectations

Regular meetings are expected to adjourn by 10:30 p.m., unless extended no more than twice for 15 minutes by majority vote of Council Members present.

3.2.5 Abstention and recusal

Councilmembers shall abstain from participation and voting, and shall recuse themselves from deliberation when required by applicable law, including conflict-of-interest requirements. Nothing in this Chapter alters legal recusal obligations. Refer to applicable City ethics policies and state law for detailed standards and procedures.

3.2.6 Remote and hybrid participation; technology and public access standards

For purposes of this Chapter, a "City-approved platform" means a meeting technology platform authorized by the City Manager (or designee) in coordination with the City's Information Technology Department to support lawful public observation and reliable Council participation.

A. Physical quorum requirement

City Council meetings require the establishment of a physical quorum at the meeting location as noticed. Once a physical quorum is present, Councilmembers may participate remotely, subject to applicable law and adopted Council rules.

B. Remote participation by presenters

Subject-matter experts, consultants, or other invited presenters may be permitted to participate remotely at the discretion of the Mayor or presiding officer when such participation supports the efficient conduct of the meeting. Remote presentations by invited participants do not create or imply a right of public participation.

C. Public access standards

- i. The City shall provide the public with reasonable access to observe City Council meetings in real time through in-person attendance and, when available, through City-provided broadcast or streaming services.
- ii. Public access through broadcast or streaming is intended for observation only. The City does not provide for public participation, testimony, or comment through remote or online platforms.
- iii. In-person attendance remains the method for public participation and testimony before the City Council.

D. Technology disruptions

- i. The presence of a physical quorum allows the Council to continue its meeting notwithstanding interruptions to broadcast, streaming, or other technology systems.
- ii. The presiding officer may declare a brief recess to address technology disruptions when practicable; however, the meeting is not required to stop or be adjourned solely due to a technology failure affecting broadcast or remote viewing.
- iii. Council actions taken during a meeting at which a physical quorum is present remain valid, provided all other legal requirements are satisfied.

E. Voting and record

All votes shall be taken and recorded in a manner that clearly reflects each Councilmember's vote. Remote participation by Councilmembers or presenters shall not impair the accurate recording of votes or proceedings in the official record.

3.2.7 Recess, reconvening, and adjournment

A. After a quorum is established and business is underway, the Council may recess and reconvene within a reasonable period not to exceed 24 hours, or may adjourn until the next duly posted open meeting.

B. Brief recesses (breaks) with an announced reconvening time are treated as continuations of the same meeting; quorum requirements still apply when business resumes.

C. If the Council cannot recess and reconvene within 24 hours, the meeting should be adjourned, and any continuation must be posted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

3.2.8 Polling for meeting scheduling (administrative only)

The City Manager's Office may poll Councilmembers for the limited purpose of identifying availability and scheduling dates/times for special meetings, workshops, briefings, or similar convenings. Polling shall be limited to logistical scheduling and shall not include discussion, debate, deliberation, or polling of member positions on City business.

3.2.9 Attendance, excused absences, and forfeiture

A. The Mayor and Councilmembers are expected to attend all regular and special meetings.

B. The Council may excuse an absence by majority vote of Councilmembers present. An absence recorded as excused does not alter any Charter-defined forfeiture standard; it is for administrative recordkeeping unless the Charter provides otherwise.

C. Forfeiture: Pursuant to the City Charter, the Mayor or a Councilmember shall forfeit office upon Charter-defined grounds, including excessive absences from regular Council meetings. The Council serves as the judge of the election and qualifications of its members and of the grounds for forfeiture, and any determination shall follow applicable notice, hearing, and due-process requirements.

SECTION 3.3 — NOTICE AND POSTING REQUIREMENTS

3.3.1 Legal compliance

All meetings shall comply with the Texas Open Meetings Act and other applicable laws.

3.3.2 Notice timing (state-law requirement)

A meeting notice must be posted for at least three (3) full business days before the scheduled meeting date, unless an exception applies under state law.

City Council Regular Meeting agendas are generally posted on the second Thursday preceding the meeting.

3.3.2.1 Counting "business days."

For notice compliance, "business days" exclude Saturdays, Sundays, and City-recognized holidays. The meeting date is not counted as a notice day. Any questions regarding counting or sufficiency shall be referred to Legal.

3.3.3 Notice responsibilities

- City Secretary posts notices and supports meeting administration and the official record.
- Legal provides guidance on notice sufficiency and compliance.

SECTION 3.4 — AGENDA GOVERNANCE: ROLES, DEVELOPMENT, AND WORKFLOW

3.4.1 Roles and responsibilities

The City Manager is responsible for coordinating, preparing, and organizing the City Council agenda and related materials.

The City Secretary is responsible for meeting administration, posting notices as required by law, and maintaining minutes and the official record.

Legal provides review and guidance as necessary to ensure compliance with the City Charter, Code of Ordinances, and applicable law.

Mayor's agenda authority. Consistent with the City Charter, the Mayor has the right to add items to the Council agenda and consult with the City Manager regarding proposed agenda items for regular and special meetings.

3.4.1.1 Mayor–City Manager agenda review

A. The Mayor shall consult with the City Manager regarding proposed agenda items for regular and special meetings; the Mayor or presiding officer may waive this review.

B. The review should be an update regarding the agenda, recommended actions, and developments; it is not intended to be a staff briefing.

C. The review is not subject to Open Meetings Act posting requirements unless attended by additional Councilmembers.

3.4.2 Agenda categories and Councilmember item limits (3 + 3)

A. Council Issue Discussion (Council Member Communications)

Each Councilmember, including the Mayor, may place up to three (3) items on the agenda for each regular meeting. This limit includes items tabled or left pending from a previous meeting.

These items shall not be substantively edited or removed without the consent of the submitting Councilmember.

Any exceptions to numeric limits or sequencing must occur by Council action or under an adopted Council rule; administrative workflow adjustments do not alter Councilmember placement rights unless adopted by Council.

B. Communications & Recognitions (Non-action / Ceremonial)

Each Councilmember, including the Mayor, may place up to three (3) items on the agenda for each regular meeting.

These items are intended for announcements, invitations, and recognitions and should remain brief.

The combined structure provides each Councilmember up to six (6) protected agenda placements per regular meeting ("3 + 3").

3.4.3 Consent agenda management

A. Purpose and use

The Consent Agenda is intended to allow the Council to approve routine, non-controversial items efficiently through one motion and vote, while preserving the ability of any Councilmember to request separate consideration.

B. How items are placed on the Consent Agenda

- I. Items may be placed on the Consent Agenda when they are routine in nature, have been appropriately reviewed through the administrative process (including fiscal and legal review as applicable), and do not require extended Council deliberation.
- II. Placement on the Consent Agenda is an administrative agenda-organization tool and does not limit Council authority to discuss, amend, defer, or deny any item.

C. Single-member pull from Consent Agenda

Any one Councilmember, including the Mayor, may request that an item be removed ("pulled") from the Consent Agenda for separate discussion and action. No reason is required. The pulled item shall be heard as a separate agenda item in the appropriate portion of the meeting.

D. Consent vote and effect

- I. Consent Agenda items remaining on the Consent Agenda may be approved by a single motion and vote.
- II. Adoption of a Consent Agenda item constitutes Council action and is recorded as such in the minutes.

3.4.4 Standard Order of Business

Consistent with the City Charter, the Council determines its order of business.

Unless modified by an adopted Council decision for a particular meeting, the regular order of business is reflected on the agenda as follows:

1. Call to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance and Texas Pledge
3. Moment of Silence
4. Roll Call
5. Approval of Minutes
6. Citizen Comments (Non-agenda Items)
7. Communications and Recognitions (Announcements / Invitations / Recognitions / Communiqués)
8. General Council Discussions and Presentations
9. Appointments to Commissions, Boards, and Committees
10. Public Hearings
11. Introductory Ordinances
12. Final Readings of Ordinances
13. Consent Agenda (Resolutions / Motions)
14. Staff Reports
15. Executive or Closed Sessions
16. Adjournment

3.4.5 Agenda adoption and suspension of the order of business

A. Adoption of the agenda.

The Council may adopt the agenda (order of business) by majority vote. Adoption is not required for the Council to proceed with posted business.

B. Suspension / re-ordering for efficiency.

The Council may suspend the agenda and consider posted items in a different order, typically for efficiency or to accommodate constituents. This may be done by inviting Councilmembers to state their requests, then adopting a single motion to suspend the agenda to allow those requests; additional timely requests may be made as the meeting proceeds.

C. Effect of adoption on vote threshold.

I. If the Council does not adopt the agenda, the order of business is followed unless suspended by unanimous consent (voice vote with no objection) or by majority vote of Councilmembers present.

II. If the Council adopts the agenda, the order of business may be suspended by unanimous consent (voice vote with no objection) or by a vote of six (6) Councilmembers or five (5) Councilmembers and the Mayor.

These vote thresholds reflect existing adopted rules and/or ordinance practice; this Manual does not independently establish or amend voting thresholds. If any conflict exists between this subsection and the City Charter or Code of Ordinances, the Charter/Ordinance controls.

SECTION 3.5 — WORKFLOW INSERTIONS (AGENDA INTAKE, APPROVALS, AND LATE ITEMS)

The following workflow standards are administrative timelines designed to ensure compliance with state posting requirements and to improve the completeness and quality of agenda materials. These standards do not change Councilmember placement rights unless adopted by the City Council.

3.5.1 Standard submission deadline

Staff-initiated Items should be submitted to the agenda system no later than five (5) weeks before the target Council meeting, consistent with the published closing-date calendar.

3.5.2 Review and approvals

Items proceed through the established internal approvals chain (Department → Finance, where applicable → Legal). Items not approved by the closing deadline are deferred to the next available meeting.

3.5.3 Late items

Late items are exceptional and should be limited to deadline-driven or emergency matters. Any late item request must include a written rationale to the agenda coordinators and follow the City's published late-item process.

3.5.4 Amended Agenda (timing controlled by state posting requirement)

A. Purpose

An amended agenda mechanism may be used to (a) place time-sensitive items after the standard posting date; (b) make necessary administrative corrections or clarifications to previously posted items; or (c) re-post items when a change is material, while preserving transparency and ensuring compliance with legal notice requirements.

B. Submission authority

Amended items or new items to be added to an agenda through an amended agenda may be requested by the Mayor, any Councilmember, or the City Manager. The City's administrative workflow, readiness standards, and lawful posting requirements determine whether and when the item can be posted in time for the requested meeting.

C. Posting constraint (controls everything)

Any amended item or addition through an amended agenda must be received early enough to allow:

- I. internal review as applicable (including legal review when required); and
- II. lawful posting of the amended agenda and any required supplemental notice/materials for at least three (3) full business days before the meeting, unless a state-law exception applies.

D. Administration and operational cutoffs

The City Manager's Office, in coordination with the City Attorney's Office as needed, shall set and publish the operational cutoff time(s) for amended agenda submissions to ensure compliance with the posting requirement and consistent application. As a standard practice, amended agendas will be posted on Tuesdays preceding a Council meeting, subject to the posting constraints above.

E. Readiness and non-circumvention

The amended agenda process is intended to address actual time-sensitive needs and necessary administrative corrections; it shall not be used to circumvent standard submission timelines or readiness expectations. Items that cannot be timely posted in compliance with the law, or that are not sufficiently prepared to support informed Council consideration, may be deferred to a subsequent meeting or routed to a workshop/briefing for further development.

3.5.5 Late items and readiness

A. Late item criteria. "Late items" are agenda items submitted after the standard submission deadline established by this Chapter and related workflow procedures. Late items should be limited to matters that are time-sensitive due to legal deadlines, public health/safety, external partner timelines, or other demonstrable urgency.

B. Readiness requirements. Late items must meet minimum readiness standards before posting, including: an explicit action request; a complete staff report or memo, as applicable; fiscal impact information, where relevant; and legal review, when required.

C. Coordination and deferral. The City Manager's Office, in consultation with the City Attorney's Office, may recommend deferring a late item to a future meeting when the item cannot be posted in compliance with the law or is not sufficiently prepared to support informed Council action.

3.5.6 Post/republish control after notice is posted

After an agenda is posted, material changes to an item title, description, or action requested, or the addition of substantive supporting documentation that changes the public understanding of the item, must be coordinated through the City Manager's Office with Legal review as needed to determine whether reposting or other corrective action is required under state law.

SECTION 3.6 — COUNCIL-INITIATED ITEMS: SCOPE, LANES, AND GUARDRAILS

3.6.1 Lane separation: discussion → directive → action

- Discussion identifies issues, requests information, and explores options.
- Directive occurs when Council votes to instruct the City Manager to perform analysis, return with options, or prepare a future agenda item.
- Action authorizes policy adoption, contracting, expenditures, or binding commitments and must be posted as an action item with appropriate fiscal and legal documentation.

Clarification — "Discussion with possible action" in the Council Issue Discussion lane is not intended to bypass administrative procurement, contracting, or fiscal review. Where contracting, expenditures, or procurement are implicated, the Council should direct the City Manager to return with a properly prepared action item.

3.6.2 Appropriate scope of Councilmember requests (Guidance)

Councilmember-initiated items are intended to raise issues, request information, and propose policy considerations.

Councilmember items may request:

- information, status updates, data, or timelines;
- analysis of options, impacts, or alternatives;
- preparation of a future agenda item for Council consideration;
- referral to a workshop, committee, or administrative review;
- follow-up on previously adopted Council directives.

Councilmember items should not request or direct:

- selection or hiring of specific vendors, consultants, or professional services;
- authorization of expenditures or purchases without full administrative review;
- initiation of procurement or negotiations;
- operational direction to staff outside the City Manager;
- personnel actions involving named individuals.

Rationale — This guidance protects Council's authority and the City's fiduciary responsibilities by ensuring that procurement, contracting, and expenditures occur only after appropriate administrative review, budget verification, legal compliance checks, and, where required, competitive or qualification-based processes. It reduces avoidable risk, improves the quality of Council decisions, and preserves the Council–Manager form of government.

3.6.3 Clarification (not permission) and optional routing

Nothing in this subsection authorizes denial, removal, or substantive editing of a Councilmember-submitted item.

A limited clarification review may occur solely to confirm the appropriate agenda category, identify fiscal/legal/procurement implications, or recommend (not require) routing to a workshop, committee, or administrative process.

Clarification shall not include gatekeeping, delaying placement, or requiring sponsorship.

3.6.4 Sponsorship — Voluntary signal, not a requirement

Sponsorship by additional Councilmembers is voluntary and may signal broader Council interest or readiness for expanded staff preparation. Lack of sponsorship shall not be used to deny, delay, edit, or de-prioritize a Councilmember's item.

3.6.5 Council requests for information (RFI)

A. Informal requests (off-agenda)

Councilmembers may request information from the City Manager outside of the agenda process. Informal requests are intended to resolve routine questions, obtain background, or clarify facts without consuming business-meeting agenda time.

B. Requesting information on the agenda (Issue Discussion lane)

If a Councilmember wants an information request to occur publicly on the agenda, the Councilmember may place the item under **Council Issue Discussion (Council Member Communications)** as one of the Councilmember's three (3) protected items for that meeting.

C. From information request to Council action

- i. An information request item may remain an informational discussion item.

ii. If the Council adopts a motion, directive, referral, or other decision related to the item, it becomes a **Council action**. It is tracked as Council-directed work through the City Manager, consistent with the conversion rule in Section 3.1.4.

SECTION 3.7 — EXECUTIVE / CLOSED SESSIONS

3.7.1 Permitted purposes

Executive sessions may occur only as permitted by law and only for topics posted under a lawful executive-session authority.

3.7.2 Entry and return

Council may recess into executive session when permitted and shall return to open session for any vote or formal action.

Executive session may occur during the meeting as discussion evolves, but only for matters posted on the agenda and for a lawful executive session purpose.

3.7.3 Attendance standard

Attendance is limited to those whose presence is reasonably necessary, including the Mayor and Councilmembers, City Attorney (or designee), City Manager, and subject-matter staff only when required for the specific discussion.

3.7.4 Sensitive briefings

The City Manager may provide confidential or sensitive factual briefings in executive session, consistent with permitted purposes and limited to what is necessary and lawful.

SECTION 3.8 — DIRECTIVE INTAKE, TRACKING, AND REPORTING

3.8.1 Directive creation

Directives should be issued by formal Council action to ensure clarity and accountability.

3.8.2 Tracking and reporting

The City Manager shall maintain a directive-tracking system and provide periodic written updates to Council, including the status and next steps for each directive.

3.8.3 Ownership and attribution

Consistent with Section 3.1.4, once adopted, directives and actions are Council-owned and tracked as Council actions rather than as individual Councilmember items, unless explicitly listed by Council action in the directive.

3.8.4 Directive clarification, sequencing, and return to Council

The City Manager is responsible for implementing Council directives in a lawful, practical, and fiscally responsible manner. When a directive is unclear, incomplete, inconsistent with adopted policy, or implicates legal, fiscal, procurement, operational, or intergovernmental considerations that require additional Council direction, the City Manager may defer final implementation action and return the matter to Council for clarification or further discussion.

This authority is not a veto of Council direction. It is an administrative duty to ensure the City's actions are executable, legally compliant, and aligned with Council intent.

3.8.4.1 When deferral and return may be appropriate. The City Manager may return a directive to Council when one or more of the following occur:

- **Ambiguity of intent:** the directive is stated in general terms, or multiple Councilmembers express differing understandings of what was directed.
- **Scope expansion risk:** implementation would reasonably be viewed as expanding beyond what Council discussed or voted to direct.
- **Legal or compliance constraints:** implementation depends on legal authority, regulatory approvals, confidentiality requirements, or Open Meetings Act posting specificity.
- **Fiscal or procurement impacts:** implementation requires an appropriation, budget amendment, competitive procurement, contract negotiation, or other process that must be adequately prepared for Council action.

- **New material information: significant facts arise after the directive that would likely affect the** Council's decision-making.
- **Operational sequencing:** staffing, timing, interdependencies, or emergency priorities require sequencing to protect essential services.

3.8.4.2 How deferral and return should occur (process) When returning a directive for clarification or further direction, the City Manager should:

- **Document the directive as understood** in the directive log, including the meeting date and the motion language to the extent available.
- **Prepare a brief "Directive Clarification" summary** identifying the specific decision points needing Council confirmation (e.g., scope, cost ceiling, procurement method, timeline, preferred option set).
- **Place the matter on a subsequent agenda** in the appropriate lane:
 - **Council Issue Discussion** for clarification, referral, or direction; and/or
 - a properly prepared **action item** when Council action is required (contract, expenditure, policy adoption).
- **Identify interim steps** staff may take (if any) that are consistent with the directive and do not create unintended commitments.

3.8.4.3 Effect on timing and accountability: Returning a directive for clarification pauses final implementation until Council confirms scope and intent. The item remains tracked as an active Council directive, with status updates provided through the City Manager's directive reporting process.

3.8.4.4 Council retains final authority. Council may affirm, modify, or rescind a directive by Council action. If Council directs an accelerated schedule or specific deliverable, the City Manager will implement accordingly, subject to legal and fiscal requirements.

SECTION 3.9 — PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND WITNESS RULES

3.9.1 Public participation framework

Public participation before the City Council occurs through agenda-based opportunities, including public hearings and other posted items, as well as any additional participation process adopted by Council rules. All public participation shall be conducted in accordance with the City Charter, the Texas Open Meetings Act, and adopted Council procedures, including comments on posted agenda items and Citizen Comments (non-agenda items) when included on the agenda as a listening period.

3.9.1.1 Public comment on posted agenda items

Members of the public shall be allowed to address the City Council on posted agenda items before Council deliberation or action, consistent with the Texas Open Meetings Act and adopted Council procedures.

Unless otherwise limited by law or Council rule, each speaker shall be allotted three (3) minutes per agenda item, subject to reasonable time limits and decorum standards administered by the presiding officer. The agenda-integrity tools in Section 3.9.4 are intended for Citizen Comments (non-agenda matters) and do not limit public hearings or other agenda-item testimony required or governed by law.

3.9.1.2 Citizen comments on non-agenda matters (listening-only lane)

- a. The Citizen Comments period is intended to allow residents to address the Council on matters **not otherwise posted** for Council action at that meeting.
- b. No Council action will be taken on non-agenda matters during Citizen Comments. Council responses, if any, are limited to brief clarification, referral to the City Manager, or a request that a matter be placed on a future agenda consistent with law and adopted procedures.
- c. Time limits for Citizen Comments are governed by Section 3.9.4 (including chair framing, topic grouping, and written comment substitution).

3.9.2 Witness standards and decorum

Individuals addressing the City Council ("witnesses") shall observe order and decorum consistent with adopted Council procedures, including:

- a. Testimony shall focus on issues, not personalities.
- b. All comments shall be directed through the presiding officer and to the Mayor and Council as a body.
- c. Witnesses shall not engage in direct debate with City staff or other witnesses.
- d. Witnesses shall reflect courtesy toward all participants and shall be treated courteously.
- e. Witnesses shall state their name and who they represent.
- f. Witnesses shall complete any required witness card and provide needed information, pledging to testify truthfully under oath when applicable.
- g. Remarks shall be limited to the subject identified on the posted agenda.
- h. Witnesses shall observe time limits established by Council.
- i. Witnesses shall comply with the Texas Open Meetings Act, including limitations on Council responses to topics not posted on the agenda.
- j. Witnesses should avoid repetitious testimony when the same points have already been made; the presiding officer may encourage speakers on the same topic to designate a spokesperson or submit written comments.
- k. Witnesses may submit written testimony or supporting materials for the record, subject to reasonable administrative procedures. Any digital presentations requested for the meeting should be submitted to the City Manager's office at least 3 hours before the meeting.

When recognized, witnesses should be prepared to clarify factual statements and answer procedural questions from the presiding officer. Nothing in this subsection authorizes debate or cross-examination; the presiding officer retains discretion to maintain order and manage time.

3.9.3 Administration by the presiding officer

The Mayor or other presiding officer shall administer public participation and witness testimony to ensure fairness, safety, order, and efficient conduct of the meeting, consistent with adopted Council rules.

3.9.4 Public comment administration to preserve agenda integrity

This subsection applies to Citizen Comments on non-agenda matters and is intended to protect the integrity of the agenda while maintaining fair access to public input. The City Council values public participation and will provide opportunities for residents to be heard. Following these procedures will also ensure the Council can complete its posted business efficiently, fairly, and in compliance with applicable law. Nothing in 3.9.4 limits comments on posted agenda items under 3.9.1.1.

A. Chair framing statement (standard opening)

At the start of the public comment period, the presiding officer shall clearly state that:

- i. Public comment is a listening period.
- ii. No action will be taken on matters not posted for action.
- iii. Council responses, if any, are limited to brief clarification, referral to the City Manager, or a request for a future agenda item.
- iv. Silence or limited response should not be interpreted as agreement or disagreement.

B. Standard time per speaker and extension (current practice)

- i. Each speaker shall be allotted three (3) minutes to address the Council during a designated public comment period.
- ii. Additional time may be granted only by Council approval consistent with current practice.
- iii. The presiding officer may establish reasonable procedures to ensure time limits are applied consistently and fairly.

C. Topic grouping

- i. To promote efficiency and reduce repetitive testimony, the presiding officer may announce groupings of speakers who have signed up to speak on substantially the same topic.
- ii. When appropriate, speakers may be encouraged—but not required—to designate a spokesperson or consolidate remarks.
- iii. Topic groupings shall be identified and announced based on subject matter only, and may not be used to limit speakers based on viewpoint, opinion, or affiliation.

D. Public Comment Time Structure and Per-Topic Management

i. Baseline expectation.

Citizen Comments on non-agenda matters are ordinarily structured to allow each registered speaker up to three (3) minutes. The Council expects that all registered speakers will be accommodated when reasonably practicable.

ii. Per-topic time caps.

When an unusually high number of individuals register to speak on the same topic, the presiding officer may impose a reasonable total time cap for that topic to ensure the orderly and efficient conduct of the meeting, provided that all of the following conditions are met:

- a) The cap is reasonable in relation to the total number of speakers and the overall agenda.
- b) The cap is announced before the start of public comment on the topic; and
- c) The cap is applied in a viewpoint-neutral and equitable manner.

iii. Speaker participation under a per-topic cap.

When a per-topic cap is established, speakers may:

- Speak within the remaining time available on a first-come, first-served basis; or
- Voluntarily coordinate among themselves to designate a spokesperson or make joint or consolidated remarks.

iv. Equal application.

All speakers addressing the same topic shall be subject to the same time limitations established under a per-topic cap, unless otherwise adjusted by Council vote applied uniformly and without regard to viewpoint.

E. Written comment substitution

- i. Once a per-topic time cap is reached, additional speakers on that same topic shall be offered the opportunity to submit written comments for the record.
- ii. Written comments shall be accepted in a reasonable format (paper submission, email, or other City method) and shall be provided to Council and maintained consistent with the City's records practices.

iii. The presiding officer may announce that written comments received by a stated cutoff time will be included in the meeting record or distributed to Council as soon as practical.

F. Order, decorum, and continuation of business

i. The presiding officer shall enforce decorum and relevance rules consistently to ensure public participation remains respectful and workable.

ii. After the public comment period concludes (including any grouped-topic procedures), the Council shall proceed with the posted agenda.

SECTION 3.10 — AMENDMENT, SUSPENSION, AND IMPLEMENTATION

3.10.1 Amendment and suspension

Any amendment or suspension of procedural rules must comply with Charter requirements and applicable law.

3.10.2 Implementation notes

Administrative workflow documents (Legistar calendars, closing-date schedules, training materials) may be updated for operational clarity, provided they do not conflict with Charter, ordinance, or adopted Council rules.