

**POLICY STATEMENT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

Title: Public Comment Policy

Policy Number: 31

Adoption Date: June 14, 2022

Revision Date:

Purpose: To offer citizens the opportunity to provide public comments during Board of Selectmen Meetings on matters within the scope of the Board's authority.

I. Introduction

The Shrewsbury Board of Selectmen encourages all residents to attend its meetings and welcomes their views on matters within the Board's jurisdiction whether expressed in person, by phone or by written communication. All comments made by the public and members of the Board of Selectmen must be civil and respectful.

All regular and special meetings of the Board of Selectmen shall be open to the public and shall conform to the Open Meeting Law of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (M.G.L Ch. 30A, §20). The public shall be precluded from attending an executive session meeting of the Board of Selectmen for reasons pursuant to M.G.L Ch. 30A §21.

II. Authority of the Chair

The Chair of the Shrewsbury Board of Selectmen is the designated individual who presides over the meetings. Pursuant to M.G.L Ch. 30A §20(g), no person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the Chair, and all persons shall, at the request of the Chair, be silent.

If a person:

- Speaks out of order,
- Expresses obscenities, threats, or inflammatory words,
- Engages in other disorderly conduct during a meeting,
- Attempts to engage in dialogue regarding pending litigation, Town Personnel, or other subject matter inappropriate for a public meeting,
- Attempts to address a matter that is not within the public body's scope of authority and responsibility, the Chair shall have the right to rule said person out of order.

III. Procedure for General Public Comments

1. Public comment will occur at each business meeting held in open session after the agenda section Special Reports/Actions/Updates, except as otherwise determined by the Chair. Public comment shall not be included in meetings that include open session only for voting to enter executive session or at board workshops. The public comment period shall not address matters related to public hearings included on the Board's agenda.

2. Public Comments must be related to current or potential actions of the Board of Selectmen. Comments shall not be about prior decisions or actions (completed business) of the board. Comments should not be political.
3. Those wishing to speak at a regularly scheduled meeting must notify the Chair of the Board of Selectmen through the Selectmen's office by the end of business on the Monday prior to its next regularly scheduled meeting by written correspondence or email at selectmen@shrewsburyma.gov. The request must include first and last name, address, the organization being represented (if any), and the topic to be discussed.
4. A speaker or group/ organization will be allowed to offer public comment once per meeting and shall be limited to speaking once per month on the same topic. The order of speakers will be randomly assigned by staff prior to the meeting.
5. The public comment period is not to exceed 15 minutes to allow the Board to complete its required business in a timely manner. Comments will be limited to 3 minutes per person/group, allowing a maximum of 5 speakers per meeting. Verbal comments will be curtailed by the Chair once they exceed the time limits.
6. There will be a limit of two speakers from a group or organization whose members wish to speak on the same topic. Group members are encouraged to consolidate their remarks and/or select a spokesperson to comment during the public comment period.
7. Speakers will begin their remarks by stating their first and last name, address, and affiliation (group, organization, etc.) for the record. All remarks will be addressed through the Chair of the meeting.
8. Speakers may not assign their time to another speaker, and in general, extensions of time will not be permitted. However, speakers who require reasonable accommodations for a speech-related disability or who require language interpretation services may be allotted a total of five (5) minutes to present their material. Speakers are encouraged to notify the Chair of the Board of Selectmen by email, or through the Office of the Board of Selectmen by phone at 508-841-8504, at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting if they wish to request an extension of time for one of these reasons.
9. The Chair reserves the right to terminate speech which is not Constitutionally protected because it constitutes true threats, incitement to imminent lawless conduct, comments that were found by a court of law to be defamatory, and/or sexually explicit comments made to appeal to prurient interests.
10. Written comments may be presented to the Board of Selectmen before or after the meeting for review and consideration by members of the Board at an appropriate time. Written comments shall include the individuals first and last name and address in accordance with Policy 15 item five of the Board of Selectmen's Operational Policies.

IV. Response to Public Comments

- a. Upon closing of the General Public Comment period, further public comments shall not be heard.
- b. The Public Comment Period is not a time that any individual or group may question any member of the Board of Selectmen concerning a particular course of action pending or upcoming. This time will not be used for any debates by an individual or group concerning the Board's previous actions and decisions or pending and upcoming matters. The Board of Selectmen will generally listen rather than respond to comments, except under extenuating circumstances and only if the Chair permits.
- c. Public comments related to repairs, maintenance, safety issues or general information will be referred to the appropriate department through the Town Manager.

V. Policy Review

Six months after implementation and practice, this policy will be reviewed by the Board.