

# **Public Comment Guidelines for VTA Board & Committee Meetings**

## **Purpose**

Public comment is a very important and valued component of the VTA Board of Directors' (Board) decision-making process. The public is always encouraged to share their comments, feedback, and concerns with the Board and its committees.

The purpose of these Public Comment Guidelines is to preserve and promote the opportunity for the public to provide input while helping ensure that the meetings are conducted in an efficient, fair, consistent, and productive manner so that all items on the agenda are considered in a reasonable and timely manner. In addition, these guidelines provide guidance and parameters to assist the chairpersons to manage the meetings efficiently, fairly, and consistently.

These guidelines apply to public comment at all VTA Board regular, special, and workshop meetings, at all VTA committee meetings, but not to public hearings of the organization, which follow different protocols.

## **A. Guidelines for Written Public Comments for Board/Committee Meetings**

Members of the public are encouraged to submit their written comments early so that they may be included in the online packet in advance of the meeting. The following are the general guidelines for submitting written comments:

- A.1. The correspondence or written public comments may be submitted by regular mail, courier, or by email to the address listed on the agenda.
- A.2. The correspondence or written public comments on items on an agenda must be submitted twenty-four (24) hours in advance of the scheduled start time of the meeting or within the deadline noted on the posted agenda.
- A.3. The correspondence must clearly identify the specific Board/committee, meeting date and time, and the specific agenda item the written public comment addresses.
- A.4. Correspondence received prior to the established deadline will be distributed to the Board or Committee electronically prior to the beginning of the meeting. It will also be made available to the public as part of the online agenda packet and/or the public meeting binder.
- A.5. Members of the public may provide written comments or hand out materials during an in-person meeting. The material should clearly identify the agenda item it is addressing. Members of the public are requested to provide 25 copies to the Board Secretary for distribution to the Board or Committee.
- A.10. Materials received at the meeting will be scanned and included in the online packet after the meeting.

## **B. General Guidelines for Verbal Public Comments during Board/Committee Meetings**

It is the Chairperson's responsibility to manage the meeting and ensure that the agenda can proceed on schedule and thus has the authority to impose reasonable limitations.

- B.1. Depending on several factors such as time constraints, length of the agenda, or number of requests to speak, the Chairperson may structure when best to take public comment. He or she may take all public comments at the beginning of the meeting, take public comment for each agenda item, or take public comments for each section of the Regular Agenda.
- B.2. The Chairperson is also responsible for opening public comment, inviting speakers, and closing public comment.
- B.3. The Chairperson has the discretion to limit or extend public speaker time based on the number of individuals who requested to speak and Chairperson's judgment of meeting factors.
- B.4. Members of the public wishing to provide verbal comments during the meeting may do so by submitting a request to speak. For in-person meetings, the request to speak may be done by filling out a speaker card or indicating to the Chairperson the intent to speak when the Chairperson calls for public speakers. For virtual meetings or teleconferences, members of the public wishing to address the Board/committee will be requested to use the available tools to indicate the intent to speak.
- B.5. Requests to speak on an item after the public comment is closed will not be considered unless there are special circumstances as determined by the chairperson.
- B.6. Speakers will be called in the order in which they signed up, to the extent practicable.
- B.7. Individual public speakers will be given no less than (1) minute each at Board meetings and up to two (2) minutes each at committee meetings. The speaker time limits will be indicated on the agenda.
- B.8. Community groups or multiple individuals who intend to speak on the same topic with the similar viewpoints may be asked to select a spokesperson to represent the group. The Chairperson may grant additional time to the spokesperson, if requested. Other members of the group may come forward, state their name or affiliation, if they wish, and briefly note that they support the spokesperson's comments.
- B.9. If there are significant time constraints or other factors (e.g., emergencies), it cannot be guaranteed that all who have requested to speak will be able to address the Board/committee. The decision to limit overall time for public comment is solely the Chairperson's discretion taking into consideration meeting factors (e.g., length of agenda, number of requests to speak, board discussion, time constraints, etc.). If this situation arises, members of the public will be requested to submit their comments to the Board Secretary's Office in writing. The Board Secretary will distribute the comments after the meeting and will include those comments as part of the online packet.

- B.10. The comments of the speaker must pertain to and have a clear nexus to the agenda item they requested to speak on. It is the chairperson's responsibility to identify when the speaker's comments do not reasonably pertain to the agenda item and remind the speaker to limit his or her comments to that item. It is also the Chairperson's prerogative to disallow further comments by the speaker, when warranted.
- B.11 Speakers are prohibited from using slanderous, derogatory, or profane remarks to Board/committee members, staff, or any individual, group, or entity. Speakers are also prohibited from making threats, inciting violence, or disrupting the meeting. Speakers who make such remarks will not be allowed to complete their time to speak. In addition, any person who fails to follow the audience conduct provision defined in VTA's Board Rules of Procedure may be removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chairperson

### **C. Additional Guidelines for Verbal Public Comments for Certain Sections of the Agenda**

The following are in addition to the general guidelines shown in Section B and pertain to certain sections noted on the Board/committee meeting agenda.

#### **C.1 Verbal Public Comment on items NOT on the agenda**

- At the beginning of each Regular Meeting, the Chairperson will invite members of the public wishing to address the Board/committee on any topic not on the agenda but within the Board/committee jurisdiction. Action or extended discussion is not allowed unless under special circumstances.
- Total public comment period for items not on the agenda at the beginning of the meeting will be no more than thirty (30) minutes.
- After 30 minutes, speakers who were not able to address the Board/committee on items not on the agenda will be asked to provide their comments later, under "Other Items", after all the items have been discussed (see Section C.5). Alternatively, they may provide written comments for inclusion in the online meeting packet.
- Multiple speakers on the same item with similar viewpoints may be encouraged to select a spokesperson to represent the group, who then may be granted additional time (see section B.8).

#### **C.2 Verbal Public Comment for Items on the Consent Agenda**

- The Chairperson will invite public comments for items on the Consent Agenda prior to the vote.
- If speaking on multiple items on Consent, the member of the public will be asked to provide all their comments at once and will be provided the specified amount of time provided for each individual item.
- Multiple speakers on the same item with similar viewpoints may be encouraged to select a spokesperson to represent the group, who then may be granted additional time (see section B.8).

### **C.3 Verbal Public Comment for Items on the Regular Agenda**

- The Chairperson will generally invite public comment on each item on the Regular Agenda after the staff presentation.
- Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate all requests to speak for items on the Regular Agenda.
- Multiple speakers on the same item with similar viewpoints may be encouraged to select a spokesperson to represent the group, who then may be granted additional time (see section B.8).

### **C.4. *Verbal Public Comment for General Manager/Committee Staff Liaison Reports***

- Public comment for General Manager Report/Committee Staff Liaison report, will be entertained at the conclusion of all the topics under the GM/Committee Staff Liaison report.
- If speaking on multiple items in this section, the member of the public will be asked to provide all their comments at once and will be provided the specified amount of time provided for each individual item.
- Multiple speakers on the same item with similar viewpoints may be encouraged to select a spokesperson to represent the group and who then may be granted additional time (see section B.8).

### **C5. *Verbal Public Comment for items under “Other Items”***

- All public comments for items under the “Other Items” section (e.g., Items of Concern and Referral to Administration, Committee Work Plan, etc.) will be heard under the second “Public Comment” before the meeting is adjourned.
- If speaking on multiple items under Other Items, the member of the public will be asked to provide all their comments at once and will be provided the specified amount of time provided for each individual item.
- Multiple speakers on the same item with similar viewpoints may be encouraged to select a spokesperson to represent the group and who then may be granted additional time (see section B.8).