

Public Meeting  
11.8.2024

The purpose of a meeting of the city council is to accomplish the City's work lawfully, in full view of the public and with reasonable opportunity for public participation. If the work is carried out efficiently and in an orderly and harmonious manner depends upon the council members' determination to do so. A smooth meeting engenders and sustains public trust, especially when the stakes are high and the audience is hostile, does require civility and well-practiced procedures.<sup>1</sup>

Organization, notice and preparedness are essential. The City has an order to the agenda in order to carry out the efficient, orderly and harmonious operation of the City.

The call to order establishes the time the meeting starts followed by the pledge of allegiance, which reaffirms for all that the Council and the citizens are there to operate the government.

The consent agenda are items which do not appear to require specific discussion but do need to be acknowledged by both Council and citizens that are occurring. If any member of the Council or the citizens desire to ask questions or discuss a consent agenda item that person requests the removal of the item, which is placed on the first "action" item of the agenda and the balance of the consent agenda is moved and approved. Then the removed item (or items) are discussed by the Council, citizens and action(s) is taken accordingly.

The **meeting process** used by the Three Forks Council on an agenda item is as follows:

Item/Issue – presentation in writing of the topic. At times this involves a written staff report. Other times the item is called by the Mayor and a staff member explains what is being asked.

If there is an applicant, that person is asked to present information. After the applicant presentation the Council may ask questions to gather further information. This is **not** the time for comment on the presentation. This is the time to gather information.

Then the public is asked to comment. Again, the Council may ask questions of the public to gather further information. This is **not** the time for comment on the presentation. This is the time to gather information.

After the applicant and public, the matter is **brought back to the Council for discussion and decision.**

The Board may ask additional questions of staff, applicant, and public to further gather information. These are questions – not a debate of the staff's, applicant's or public's opinions, recommendations or suggestions.

**Board discussion has a process which continues the efficient, orderly and harmonious operation of the City.**

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<sup>1</sup> Montana Municipal Officials Handbook, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Section 2.404

If there are no further questions to gather information, the Board engages in discussion of the topic. For example, “Based upon this information, what I believe is the course of action is ..... I move to .....”.

If there is a second to the motion, the Council discusses the Motion. Each Council person is not required to agree with the motion. Rather, by making, seconding and discussing the motion, all who are participating are clear on the action that is being discussed.

After discussion, a call for the questions (or call for vote on the motion) is made. The vote is taken.

- If the motion fails, then another Council person starts the process again: “Based upon this information, what I believe is the course of action is ..... I move to .....”.
- If the motion passes the next agenda item is called.

For a meeting to move at an orderly rate does not mean that the items are rushed. It means that the Council must come prepared having read the information packets in advance in order to start formulating questions. The applicant is allowed to present the information they feel is necessary, important and helpful for the Council to reach a decision. The public comment is listened to on the topic. For each part the Council must be willing to ask questions on items they do not fully understand.

Once the information is gathered, then the Council discusses and debates the decision to be made.

Teamwork is essential. Accepting the majority vote of the Council is essential. Once the vote is taken and the decision made by the majority, it becomes the decision of the Council and City.

If a council person believes that the decision is not one to be repeated, there is an action for that as well. The decision on the application stands. The policy or regulation which was the “rules” for the decision can be discussed and debated after process. For example, if the Council votes on a zoning application and does not like the outcome on the application, the Council person is free (and arguably obligated) to request that discussion of the policy or regulation be reviewed. That request can be made at a meeting and sent to the appropriate committee to review and commence discussion of the policy or rule.

Decision on an application is not the time to debate with the applicant or public. Decision on an application is not the time to debate the policy or rule. The discussion and decision is time for the Council person to express their opinions about the application as it applies to the rules. If is fair to say, ‘I don’t like the outcome of this application because of the way this rule is written but I am obligated and have agreed to follow the rule.’ After the decision, ask for the rule to be examined or put on another agenda for discussion.

It is not fair to change the topic – go from application to discussing changing a rule mid-stream. No one has an opportunity to be prepared, consider ways the rule can be changed or debate the working or lack of working as the rule exists.

Public meeting/hearing on applications are not time for debate to convince the applicant, public or staff that they should agree with the Council's decision.

It is the obligation of the Council people to explain the reason for their vote. That is what is owed to the applicant, public and staff. As individuals, we can like/dislike, agree/disagree, be happy/sad. However, we as individuals are not the City. You as the elected Council are the decision maker for the City and the applicant, public and staff need to understand the reason for the decision.

A smooth meeting engenders and sustains public trust, especially when the stakes are high and the audience is hostile, does require civility and well-practiced procedures.<sup>2</sup>

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11.8.2024

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<sup>2</sup> Montana Municipal Officials Handbook, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Section 2.404