

SELECT BOARD POLICY

Conduct and Decorum for Public Meetings Policy

Date Approved by Select Board:

Signature of Chair

I. BACKGROUND

- a. The Town of Lexington recognizes the importance of maintaining a respectful and efficient environment during public meetings. Recent rulings by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court have underscored the necessity of ensuring that public participation and discourse are conducted in a manner that respects constitutional rights while fostering an orderly governance process.

II. PURPOSE & SCOPE

- a. Purpose:
The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for conduct during public meetings to create an orderly, efficient environment that encourages public participation and upholds the governance process in accordance with 2023 Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court rulings. (*Barron v. Kolenda*)
- b. Scope:
This policy applies to all meetings conducted by public bodies within the Town of Lexington, including committee members, staff, presenters, consultants, and the public.

III. APPLICATION

- a. Public Participation
The Chair should state guidelines for public participation at the beginning of each meeting. A specific time for public comments should be designated, typically allowing two minutes per speaker. Comments must be orderly and peaceable, with no viewpoint discrimination. All comments must be addressed to the Chair, and speakers must adhere to established time limits.
- b. Maintaining Order
Participants must wait for the Chair to recognize them before speaking. Interruptions are not permitted. The Chair has the discretion to issue warnings, call for recesses, or take other actions to maintain order, provided such actions do not infringe on constitutional rights.
- c. Suggested Language for Chairs

- i. "Remember, we are all neighbors working toward common goals."
 - ii. "Let's keep our discussions focused and respectful."
 - iii. "Please wait for recognition before speaking."
- d. Civil Discourse
Participants should respect diverse opinions and engage in democratic deliberation, focusing on discussing policies and ideas rather than people. Only one person should speak at a time, using helpful, not hurtful, language. It is important to clarify how individuals prefer to be addressed (e.g., Mr., Ms., first name, pronouns) and to restate ideas when requested. A civil tone of voice should be maintained at all times. Participants should respectfully listen to and consider differing points of view, using "I" statements to express personal viewpoints.
- e. Prohibition of Discriminatory or Harassing Behavior
Treat others with respect and dignity. Discriminatory or harassing behavior will not be tolerated. Disruptive behavior, including interruptions and personal attacks, may result in removal, provided it complies with constitutional protections.
- f. Implementation
This policy will be included in the Lexington Select Board Procedures, Policies, and Regulations Manual (last updated 12-4-2023) and in the Town Clerk's Board and Committee Handbook (Last update: 2024 Edition replaces Page 17).

IV. REFERENCE

Louise Barron & others v. Daniel L. Kolenda, 491 Mass. 408 (2023).
Lexington Select Board Procedures, Policies, and Regulations Manual (12-4-2023)
Town Clerk's Board and Committee Handbook