

# Effective and Efficient Meetings and Membership

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Effective meetings occur when two things happen: a clear and reasonable agenda is determined and individuals come to the meeting prepared to discuss items on the agenda and take appropriate actions. In this way, it is the responsibility of every member to make each meeting as efficient and effective as possible.

An effective meeting will:

- Start on time.
- Follow an agenda.
- Adhere to parliamentary procedure.
- Demonstrate respect for everyone in attendance and their points of view.
- Keep discussions focused and on point.
- Encourage participation and an open exchange of ideas and information.
- Make use of staff expertise and experience.

## Working with Town Staff

To work well with the Board, Commission, or Committee staff liaison, or Town employee, the Commission member can be more effective if they:

- **Ask questions.**  
You need as much information as possible in order to understand an issue before you cast your vote. It is the job of Town staff to study and understand complex situations. Ask for clarification if you need it.
- **Inform staff liaison of meeting absences in advance.**  
If you know you will need to miss a meeting because of a schedule conflict, let the staff liaison know about it as far in advance as possible. This allows meetings to be rescheduled if it is clear there will not be a quorum.
- Treat all staff as professionals.
- Communicate clearly, honestly, and directly.
- Build a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.
- Don't ask Town staff to perform tasks or share information outside the role as liaison.

## Making the Public Feel Welcome

Making the public feel welcome is an important part of the democratic process and every effort should be made to be fair and impartial in listening to public testimony. There should be no sign of partiality, prejudice, or disrespect shown by a member of a Town Board, Commission, or Committee towards anyone participating in a public forum.

**The public will feel most comfortable if they:**

- Are treated with politeness and respect.
- Have a fair and equitable opportunity to share their points of view.
- Feel that members of the Board, Commission, or Committee are really listening, with an open mind, to what they have to say.
- Are asked questions and are not argued with or criticized.
- Never hear or feel a personal attack of any kind.

**Role of the Chair in welcoming the public.**

- Ask speakers to identify themselves for the record.
- Enforce time limits so that all speakers have an equal opportunity to convey their views.
- Don't allow verbal exchanges to break out between speakers and opponents in the audience, or between speakers and members of the Board, Commission, or Committee, or between speakers and staff.
- Soothe tempers and quiet emotions among everyone in attendance by adhering to meeting procedures and insisting that discussion stay orderly, focused, and impersonal.

**Public Conduct at Meetings**

The Town strongly encourages active participation in the public process, which is the cornerstone of democracy. If a member of the public wishes to speak to an item either on or off the agenda, it may be addressed during the "Verbal Communications" period. A time limit may be allocated to speakers to better facilitate the meeting.

The purpose of a Town Board, Commission, or Committee meeting is to conduct the business of the community in an effective and efficient manner. This is done by following meeting guidelines set forth in State law and in the Town Code. Conduct which is considered disruptive during Town Council and/or Town Commission meetings include, but is not limited to:

- Addressing the Commission without first being recognized.
- Interrupting speakers, Commissioners, or staff.
- Continuing to speak after the allotted time has expired.
- Failing to relinquish the podium when directed to do so.
- Repetitiously addressing the same subject.

For the benefit of the community, the Town asks that the Town's meeting guidelines are followed and that everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

## Effective Members

To participate effectively, each member of a Board, Commission, or Committee needs to:

- **Understand the purpose of the Board, Commission or Committee.**  
Be clear on your role and responsibilities and how this particular Board, Commission, or Committee fits into the governance of the Town of Los Gatos.
- **Prepare for each meeting in advance.**  
Read through the agenda and know what will be discussed at each meeting. Read through staff reports or other background materials or visit sites, as appropriate.
- **Bring an open mind to each meeting.**  
You are representing the entire community in your role as a member of a Town Commission, so it is important to put aside personal opinions and be open to new ideas, information, and points of view.
- **Treat everyone with respect and dignity.**  
You are playing an important part in the democratic process which guarantees access and fair treatment to all. Your behavior and attitudes are in the spotlight and should reflect the highest standards of the community.

## Tips for New Members

- Attend meetings of the Board, Commission, or Committee before applying for the position.
- Read through minutes of previous meetings of the Commission to become familiar with the current issues under discussion. These are available online in the Agenda and Minutes Center at <http://www.losgatosca.gov/13/Agendas-Minutes>.
- Ask the staff liaison if there is background material that may be helpful for you to read and study, such as the General Plan.
- Become familiar with the basic rules of parliamentary procedure.
- Attend or watch online at least one or two Town Council meetings to better understand how the role of the individual Board, Commission or Committee fits into the overall governance of the Town.

## Enforcement

- If a member of a Town Board, Commission, or Committee does not follow the Commissioner's Handbook, the Mayor or his/her designee will counsel that member regarding the rules and their importance to the Council and the Town (see Resolution 1999-167 and Town Council Code of Conduct Policy).

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