

Open Public Meetings Act 101

Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) - 42.30.080 RCW

- All meetings shall be open and public and all persons shall be permitted to attend.
- There are no conditions required for attendance.
- Meeting dates, times and location shall be made public.
- There is no requirement that the Committee must allow everyone to speak at a public meeting. The Committee has significant authority to limit the time (such as 2-3 minutes) or to not allow anyone to speak.
- No agenda or other description of the business to be transacted is required by the OPMA for regular meetings.
- A special meeting may be called at any time. Notification to those who have requested to be notified of special meetings shall receive email, fax or snail mail 24 hours in advance of the special meeting.
- No notice is required for an emergency meeting.

The Board of Park Commissioners accepts two types of verbal communication during its meetings.

The first is Oral Communication, which occurs near the beginning of the meetings and is limited to 15 minutes. If there is more than 15 minutes of testimony, the remaining testimony will not be heard until after all the other business has been attended to, so as to allow the Board to keep on track. Then any remaining speakers are allowed to come to the podium and testify at the end of the meeting. There is a two minute speaking time limit. [This is a similar model to what the PLCAC adopted at their June 25, 2013 meeting].

The second type of verbal communication accepted by the Board is public hearing testimony. Each person can speak up to three minutes and there is no time limit on how long the Board will listen to public hearing testimony – some hearings have lasted three hours.

Here are some standard specifics:

- People can sign up ahead of time (usually a half hour).
- Each speaker gets a set amount of time to speak (two or three minutes is typical).
- The Chair politely reminds those signing up that it is not necessary for the same message to be repeated again and again. She might say something like “if someone else has already expressed your sentiments, you may simply state that you concur with so-and-so’s comments.”
- It needs to be clearly communicated that testimony is also welcome by phone, email, snail mail, and testimony received in these ways carries equal weight with live testimony.
- The Park District Oversight Committee might want to establish a cutoff date for accepting testimony (the Board of Park Commissioners allows comments up until close of business the day before the public hearing).
- The Park District Oversight Committee should define how the testimony will affect the outcome.

Prior to a public hearing, staff will prepare an information sheet describing how/when people can testify, and post on the project’s webpage and made available at to the public preceding the hearing date.