



CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council **DATE:** February 18, 2020
FROM: Matthew Bronson, City Manager
PREPARED BY: David Hale, City Attorney
SUBJECT: Revised City Council Decorum Policy

RECOMMENDATION

Approve a revised City Council Decorum Policy regarding policies and procedures for conduct and decorum at Council meetings.

BACKGROUND

The City Council welcomes and encourages civic participation and debate on issues. The Council values the public's opinion and in every Council meeting invites and encourages the public to address the Council on any matter of interest. To this end, the Council adopted "Policies and Procedures for Conduct and Decorum at Council Meetings" (referred to as "Decorum Policy") on April 16, 2007 to establish a decorum and guidance for public participation during Council meetings. This original Decorum Policy is shown as Attachment 1. In addition, the Council on June 19, 2018 adopted the San Luis Obispo County Regional Code of Civility along with other cities and the County to set a common expectation of how all public business would be conducted in the region. This Code of Civility is shown as Attachment 3.

On November 18, 2019, the Council provided direction to staff to consider updating the City Council Decorum Policy in response to uncivil discourse and discourteous behaviors at recent Council meetings. Attachment 2 includes a revised Decorum Policy that seeks to provide greater clarity to preserve the intent of open government and maintain a positive environment for public input and Council decision-making. Pending Council's consideration and approval, this revised policy would be attached to subsequent Council agendas similar to how the existing policy is displayed. The Council also provided direction at the February 3, 2020 meeting to consider incorporation of material regarding bigotry and hate speech from an outside group called Bend the Arc into the revised Decorum Policy. Staff has reviewed this material and would like to first bring this back to the Council for discussion at a future meeting following the approval of the revised Decorum Policy.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact to this action.

ALTERNATIVES

The City Council has the following alternatives to consider:

1. Approve a revised City Council Decorum Policy regarding policies and procedures for conduct and decorum at Council meetings; or
2. Provide staff with alternative direction.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The agenda was posted in accordance with the Brown Act.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Existing City Council Decorum Policy
2. Revised City Council Decorum Policy
3. Regional Code of Civility



CITY OF GROVER BEACH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCT AND DECORUM AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

(Pursuant to Resolution No. 07-44, adopted 04-16-07)

1.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – COUNCIL MEMBERS

Council Members shall accord the utmost courtesy to each other, to administrative staff and to the public appearing before the City Council and shall refrain at all times from rude, abusive, and/or derogatory remarks or those that reflect upon a person's integrity, motives or personality.

2.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – STAFF

2.1 City Manager Responsibilities

The City Manager is responsible for ensuring that members of the administrative staff observe the rules of decorum and order set forth in this Policy.

2.2 Addressing the City Council

Any administrative staff member desiring to address the City Council or members of the public shall first be recognized by the Mayor/Presiding Officer. All remarks shall be addressed to the Mayor/Presiding Officer and not to any individual Council Member or member of the public. Administrative staff members shall accord the utmost courtesy to the City Council, other administrative staff members and the public.

3.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

3.1 Addressing the City Council

Any member of the public desiring to address the City Council or members of the public shall first be recognized by the Mayor/Presiding Officer at the appropriate place on the agenda. All remarks shall be addressed to the Mayor/Presiding Officer and not to any individual Council Member, member of the administrative staff or member of the public.

3.2 Time limitation for addressing the City Council

Public comment when addressing the City Council shall be generally limited to three (3) minutes per speaker. Depending on the extent of the agenda and the number of persons desiring to speak on an issue, the Mayor/Presiding Officer may, at the beginning of the hearing, set a different time limit for each speaker. Any person may speak for a longer period of time upon approval from the Mayor/Presiding Officer, when deemed necessary, for instance when a person is speaking on behalf of a group, or has a graphic or slide presentation requiring more time.

3.3 Removal

Any member of the public making personal, impertinent, and slanderous or profane remarks or who becomes boisterous while addressing the City Council, staff or general public or while attending the City Council meeting and refuses to come to order at the direction of the Mayor/Presiding Officer, shall be removed from the Council Chambers by the sergeant-at-arms and may be barred from further attendance before the Council during that meeting. Unauthorized remarks from the audience, stamping of feet, whistles, yells, and similar demonstrations shall not be permitted by the Mayor/Presiding Officer. The Mayor/Presiding Officer may direct the sergeant-at-arms to remove such offenders from the room.¹

3.4 Prosecution

Aggravated cases shall be prosecuted on appropriate complaint signed by the Mayor/Presiding Officer.

4.0 ENFORCEMENT OF DECORUM

In extreme cases, such as when a meeting is willfully interrupted by a group or groups of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals as provided for in this Policy, the Mayor/Presiding Officer may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session. Only matters appearing on the agenda may be considered in such a session. Duly accredited representatives of the press or other news media, except those participating in the disturbance, shall be allowed to attend any session held pursuant to this Section. Nothing in this Section shall prohibit the City Council from establishing a procedure for readmitting an individual or individuals not responsible for willfully disturbing the orderly conduct of the meeting.



CITY OF GROVER BEACH
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCT AND DECORUM AT COUNCIL MEETINGS
 (Revised by Council 02-18-2020)

1.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – IN GENERAL

- 1.1 The presiding officer is responsible for the maintenance of order and decorum at all times.
- 1.2 The presiding officer shall determine all points of order subject to the right of any Council member to appeal to the City Council by majority vote. If any appeal is taken, the question shall be “Shall the decision of the presiding officer be sustained” in which event a majority vote of the Council shall govern and conclusively determine such question of order.
- 1.3 All Council members, staff members and members of the public should speak respectfully and avoid the use of profanity, vulgarity and slanderous comments. Recognizing that the First Amendment precludes the City Council from prohibiting speakers from speaking based upon the content of their speech, the presiding officer shall use their best efforts, short of enforcement action, to remind and encourage all participating in the meeting to keep their speech respectful towards others and within bounds appropriate for children and persons of sensitivity toward course language as a courtesy to others present or otherwise viewing Council meetings.

2.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 2.1 Manner of Speaking.
 Any Council member desiring to speak shall first address the presiding officer. Upon recognition by the presiding officer, the Council member shall speak only to the question under debate.

2.1(a) Questioning Staff.

A Council member desiring to question the staff should address his question to the City Manager, or, in appropriate cases, the City Clerk or City Attorney, who shall be entitled either to answer the inquiry or to designate some staff member for that purpose. Such a designation may be made at the time of any staff presentation or on the agenda listing for the item.

2.1(b) Interruptions.

Once recognized, a Council member shall not be interrupted while speaking unless called to order by the presiding officer; unless a point of order is raised by another Council member, or unless the speaker chooses to yield to questions from another Council member.

3.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – STAFF

- 3.1 City Manager Responsibilities
 The City Manager is responsible for ensuring that members of the administrative staff observe the rules of decorum and order set forth in this Policy.
- 3.2 Addressing the City Council
 Any administrative staff member desiring to address the City Council or members of the public shall first be recognized by the presiding officer. All remarks shall be addressed to the presiding officer and not to any individual Council Member or member of the public. Administrative staff members shall accord the utmost courtesy to the City Council, other administrative staff members and the public.

4.0 DECORUM AND ORDER – MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- 4.1 Addressing the City Council
 Any member of the public desiring to address the City Council or members of the public shall first be recognized by the presiding officer at the appropriate place on the agenda. All remarks shall be addressed to the presiding officer and not to any individual Council Member, City Manager, City Attorney or member of the administrative staff or member of the public.
- 4.2 Time Limitation for Addressing the City Council
 Public comment when addressing the City Council shall be generally limited to three (3) minutes per speaker. Depending on the extent of the agenda and the number of persons desiring to speak on an issue, the presiding officer may, at the beginning of the hearing, set a different time limit for each speaker. Any person may speak for a longer period of time upon approval from the presiding officer, when deemed necessary, for instance when a person is speaking on behalf of a group or has a graphic or slide presentation requiring more time.
- 4.3 Failure to Yield, Disruptions

Any person who refuses to relinquish the floor after their allotted time or while attending the City Council meeting engages in conduct or speech which disrupts the business of the meeting shall be brought to order and/or removed from the room if the sergeant-at-arms is so directed by the presiding officer. Disruptive remarks from the audience, stamping of feet, clapping, whistles, yells and similar demonstrations shall not be permitted by the presiding officer who may direct the sergeant-at-arms to remove such offenders from the room.

4.4 Prosecution

Aggravated cases shall be prosecuted on appropriate complaint signed by the presiding officer.

5.0 ENFORCEMENT OF DECORUM

5.1 The Chief of Police or his designee shall be the ex-officio sergeant-at-arms of the City Council. The sergeant-at-arms shall carry out all legal and valid orders and instructions given by the presiding officer for the purpose of maintaining order and decorum in the Council Chamber. Upon instructions from the presiding officer, it shall be the duty of the sergeant-at-arms to remove any disorderly person from the Council Chambers or place the disorderly person under arrest or both.

5.2 As set forth in Government Code Section 54957.9, in the event that any meeting is willfully interrupted by a person or group of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible or impedes the ability of the Council to hold the meeting, and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals who are willfully interrupting the meeting, the presiding officer may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session. Only matters appearing on the agenda may be considered in such a session. Duly accredited representatives of the press or other news media, except those participating in the disturbance, shall be allowed to attend any session held pursuant to this Section. Nothing in this Section shall prohibit the City Council from establishing a procedure for readmitting an individual or individuals not responsible for willfully disturbing the orderly conduct of the meeting.

CODE OF CIVILITY

A healthy democracy respects the people's right to debate issues with passion. A healthy democracy not only tolerates disagreement but welcomes it in order to refine ideas and create policies that benefit the greater good.

The deterioration of civility across the country and within our community poses a threat to our democracy and our civic well-being. This deterioration:

- Compromises the integrity of a healthy, representative democracy
- Closes the door on depth of thought, reducing complex problems to harmful oversimplification
- Deters potential leaders from running for office or serving in government
- Poisons the civic well and discourages citizens from engaging on pressing community issues
- Casts the spotlight on poor behavior rather than shining a light on possible solutions
- Sets a poor example for our children

We have crafted this Code of Civility as a promise to each other, and to the people and institutions we serve, that we will always strive to conduct our debates - whether in person, online, or in written communication - in ways that allow for the widest range of opinions on ideas and policies, yet also respect the dignity, integrity and rights of those with whom we might disagree. With our individual and collective commitment to this code, we welcome our elected colleagues, the press and the public to hold us accountable.

In our deliberations we pledge to:

Listen First

We will make an honest effort to understand views and reasoning of others by listening to understand, not listening to find fault, allowing thoughtful discussion to lead to the best possible outcomes.

Respect Different Opinions

We will invite and consider different perspectives, allowing space for ideas to be expressed, opposed and clarified in a constructive manner.

Be Courteous

We will treat all colleagues, staff and members of the public in a professional and courteous manner whether in person, online, or in written communication, especially when we disagree.

Disagree Constructively

We strive to advance solutions to community issues; when faced with disagreement, we do more than simply share our concerns with differing positions, we work to propose a course of action of mutual benefit.

Debate the Policy Not the Person

We will focus on the issues, and not personalize debate or use other tactics that divert attention from the issue.