

Public Comment Policy

The Hazen Public Library Board of Directors welcomes and values public input during its meetings. This policy outlines the procedures for public comment to ensure that all individuals have a fair opportunity to be heard while maintaining an orderly, transparent, and efficient meeting environment.

1. A public comment agenda item will be the first non-procedural agenda item at all regular meetings of the Library Board of Directors.
2. To provide public comments, each individual must sign a speaker sheet located at the board meeting table that includes the individual's name and address.
3. A reasonable accommodation will be made for those requiring it pursuant to the City's Title VI policy.
4. Each individual will be allotted up to five minutes to make comments; the time may be extended at the discretion of the chair. The individual will be notified when the time has expired.
5. An individual may not yield his or her allotted time to another individual.
6. The public comment agenda item may be limited to a total of fifteen minutes. The initial fifteen minutes may be extended at the discretion of the chair, but each speaker will continue to be limited to five minutes.
7. All comments must address an item of the current agenda or an agenda item from the preceding meeting.

Comments **may not:**

Be defamatory, abusive, harassing, or unlawful. If an individual's comments become any of the above, you will be dismissed and your time will be terminated at the discretion of the board chair.

Include information that is exempt or confidential under North Dakota open records law.

Interfere with the orderly conduct of the meeting.

Must be pertinent to the public entity.

Library Board of Directors Regular Meeting
Public Comment Sign-In
Meeting Date: _____

Name	Address

Library Board of Directors - Public Comment

Public comment at an open meeting is a critical component of fostering transparency, community engagement, and accountability in the decision-making process. However, the role of board members during the public comment period is specifically **to listen** and **not engage in dialogue** with the speakers at that time. This distinction is key in ensuring the process remains fair, orderly, and compliant with public comment and open meeting laws. This allows for equal opportunity for all speakers, prevents confrontation, keeps the meeting on track, and avoids board members' personal bias or favoritism.

Public Comment Procedures During a Regular Board Meeting

At the beginning of each regular board meeting, the Library Board of Directors President or Chair will call the meeting to order and will introduce the Public Comment agenda item, "We will now have public comment" and will state the following from the Public Comment Policy:

"Each individual will be allotted up to five minutes to make comments; the time may be extended at the discretion of the chair. The individual will be notified when the time has expired."

"An individual may not yield his or her allotted time to another individual."

"The public comment agenda item may be limited to a total of fifteen minutes. The initial fifteen minutes may be extended at the discretion of the chair, but each speaker will continue to be limited to five minutes."

"All comments must address an item of the current agenda or an agenda item from the preceding meeting."

"Comments may not:

- Be defamatory, abusive, harassing, or unlawful.
- Include information that is exempt or confidential under North Dakota open records law.
- Interfere with the orderly conduct of the meeting.
- Must be pertinent to the public entity."

If comments are defamatory, abusive, harassing or unlawful the board president will give ONE warning to speaker, if speaker continues in the same manner, then their time will be terminated.

"Anyone who wishes to speak, please come forward. Let us know the agenda item you're speaking to, sign in on the speaker sheet, and tell us your name."

If an individual comes forward, the library's Administrative Office Manager will set a 15-minute timer and a five-minute timer for each speaker.

If no one comes forward... state "Second call for Public Comment."

If no one comes forward... state "Third and final call for Public Comment."

If no one comes forward or at the end of the Public Comment period... state "Public Comment is closed." Move on to the next agenda item.

Best Practices for Public Comment and Board Meeting Etiquette

The Library Board of Directors President is responsible for maintaining order and control of the meeting:

- Foster a respectful environment by setting the tone for civility and handling disruptive behavior.
- Apply the Public Comment policy fairly to everyone. Intervene if there are violations of the policy. Redirect off-topic comments to the discussion at hand.
- Enforce or extend time limits, according to the Public Comment policy. Ensure an equitable opportunity by providing all individuals who wish to speak with the opportunity to do so.

- Free speech: If a speaker is perceived as disruptive but is not creating an unsafe environment:
 - ✦ Allow the five minutes for public comment.
- ✦ Redirect off-topic comments to the agenda item being discussed. Warn the speaker that their five minutes may be cut short if they don't redirect comments. If the speaker does not redirect, decide whether cutting the five-minute timeframe short is an appropriate course of action.
- If a speaker is perceived as creating an unsafe environment by posing an immediate danger:
 - ✦ The Board President or Chair has the right to intervene and ask the speaker to refrain from threatening language. If the speaker does not comply, they may be asked to end their public comment early and may be asked to leave.
- ✦ If at any time there is an active safety threat, Hazen Police Department/911 will be called.

All Library Board of Directors:

- Refrain from comments and dialogue.
- Listen actively and give full attention to each speaker, demonstrating attentiveness and respect for their input through eye contact, nodding, and taking notes.
- After each speaker concludes, thank them for their time and input. This demonstrates appreciation without engaging in a back-and-forth exchange.

Free Speech in Open Meetings

- Open meetings laws guarantee the public's right to participate in government proceedings and offer public comment, but they also allow governing bodies to set reasonable rules to ensure that the meeting remains productive, respectful, and free from disruptions.
- Public Comment as a Right: The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees individuals the right to express their views freely, particularly in public forums like government meetings, even if those views are unpopular, critical, or controversial. In open meetings, public comment is a form of participation in the democratic process.
- Scope of Free Speech: While the public has the right to express themselves, not all speech is protected under the First Amendment. For example, speech that incites violence or poses a danger is subject to restriction to ensure the safety, dignity, and functionality of the meeting. Restrictions on speech must be viewpoint-neutral and necessary to maintain an environment free of danger and physical harm. A government body cannot silence someone based on their opinion about a particular policy or topic.

Adopted: August 13, 2025

Effective: August 1, 2025

Revised: