

Port of Houston Authority

PUBLIC COMMENT POLICY



A. Policy Statement.

1. It is the policy of the Port Commission of the Port of Houston Authority of Harris County, Texas (the "Port Authority") to encourage public comment relevant to agenda items at public meetings of the Port Commission and of its committees and task forces ("Public Meetings").

2. This Public Comment Policy (the "Policy") is intended to provide interested parties the opportunity to present their views, while permitting the Port Commission to conduct Public Meetings in an efficient and effective manner.

3. The Port Authority urges interested parties to address Port Authority administrative, business, or related matters with Port Authority staff prior to requesting an appearance or speaking at a Public Meeting.

B. Advance Requests to Appear at a Public Meeting.

1. Interested parties may request in advance to appear on the agenda and speak at Public Meetings. Requests should be made to the office of the Executive Director of the Port Authority, in person or by telephone, mail, email, or facsimile.

2. Such requests must be received no later than seven (7) days before the scheduled date of the Public Meeting for which the appearance is requested.

3. Requestors should provide their name, organizational affiliation, contact information, and a brief description of the subject matter of their comments.

4. The Port Authority reserves the right to determine whether the appearance of an interested party is placed on the agenda of a Public Meeting.

5. Prior to the Public Meeting the Port Authority will notify requestors whether their appearance has been added to the agenda.

C. Requests to Comment Made Immediately Prior to a Public Meeting.

1. Interested parties may also request to speak at a Public Meeting on the day of the meeting by completing the sign-in sheet provided for the Public Meeting. The Port Authority maintains sign-in sheets near the entrance to the Port Commission meeting for this purpose.

2. Requestors should complete the sign-in sheet with their name, organizational affiliation, and a brief description of the subject matter of the appearance.

3. Port Authority staff provides the sign-in sheet(s) to the Chairman presiding at the Public Meeting prior to its commencement.

4. The Port Authority reserves the right to move any such matters to a place on the agenda of the Public Meeting, or the agenda of a future Public Meeting, to better assure the efficient conduct of Port Commission business.

D. Public Meeting Conduct.

1. Copies of the posted Port Commission meeting agenda are available near the entrance to the Public Meeting prior to its scheduled start, or the agenda will be electronically displayed on a meeting room screen.

2. The Chairman may announce the Port Authority's guidelines for conduct during the Public Meeting. Public Meetings are also subject to the requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act (Texas Government Code Chapter 551), including its restrictions on remote participation.

3. The Chairman will generally conduct the Public Meeting in the order shown on the agenda, and call speakers first in the order shown on the agenda and then in the order shown on the sign-up sheet.

4. Persons commenting at the Public Meeting may speak when the Chairman calls on them.

a. Speakers must appear in person.

b. Speakers should step up to the podium and state their name and affiliation.

c. All statements and responses to comments by the Port Commissioners, or committee or task force members, must be made at the podium and spoken into the microphone.

d. Additional information presented by the speaker should be in paper format; ten (10) copies should be provided prior to the Public Meeting to the office of the Executive Director or Chief Legal Officer, for distribution to the Port Commission, committee, or task force, and Port Authority staff.

5. Permitted Speaking Time.

a. A speaker whose subject matter relates to an item of business on the agenda is limited to three (3) minutes speaking time.

b. A speaker whose subject matter does not relate to an item of business on the agenda is limited to one (1) minute speaking time.

c. If more than one member of a group has requested to speak, the group must select one representative to present its comments. The group's representative is limited to three (3) minutes speaking time, regardless of whether or not the comments relate to an item of business on the agenda.

6. A Port Authority staff member will time each speaker with a timer that clearly informs the Chairman and speakers of their elapsed or remaining speaking time. A Port Authority staff member will escort the speaker from the podium when the permitted time has elapsed.

7. Comments should be addressed to the Port Commission as a whole, and no inquiries, requests, etc. may be asked of Port Commissioners or staff except through the Chairman. The Chairman may refer inquiries, requests, etc., to the Executive Director for handling and later response as appropriate.

8. The Chairman will close the public comment session after any speakers who are on the agenda and any speakers who have signed up have been given the opportunity to speak, subject to the following.

a. Persons attending a Public Meeting shall not delay, interrupt, or disrupt the proceedings, or refuse to obey the orders of the Chairman.

b. The Chairman may order persons who do not conduct themselves in an orderly and appropriate manner to leave the Public Meeting, and deny them the opportunity to speak at that Public Meeting and subsequent Public Meetings.

c. The Port Authority reserves the right to decline to hear any person who has spoken at a Public Meeting in the prior six (6) months and whose request to speak does not relate to an item of business on the agenda.

D. Policy Exceptions.

1. The Port Authority reserves the right to waive this Policy to accommodate the comments of persons and organizations invited by the Port Authority to speak at Public Meetings.

2. The Port Commission reserves the right, on behalf of the Chairman of any Public Meeting, to waive this Policy when necessary to conduct a Public Meeting efficiently and effectively.

E. Reasonable Accommodations. Persons with disabilities may contact the office of the Executive Director if needing reasonable accommodations to participate in a Public Meeting. Such requests should be received at least seven (7) days prior to the Public Meeting. If a request for an accommodation has been submitted but due to circumstances is no longer needed, the office of the Executive Director should be promptly informed.

F. Adoption. This Policy was adopted by the Port Commission on September 29, 2015, as evidenced by Minute No. 2015-0929-08.