

Crawford



County

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John M. Amato
Vice-Chairman
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Office of the Commissioners

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Chief Clerk
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August 25, 2016

Crawford County Board of Commissioners Public Comment Policy

The Crawford County Board of Commissioners welcomes Crawford County citizens to board meetings and is willing to hear any Crawford County citizen or group desiring to appear and comment before the Board of Commissioners. However, the Crawford County Board of Commissioners will not participate in a public debate regarding any item of public comment. The Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners is charged with enforcing this Policy. All comments must be directed to the Chairperson.

The Board of Commissioners recognizes the value of comment and inquiry by Crawford County citizens on County Executive/Legislative matters¹ and the importance of involving Crawford County citizens in Commissioner's meetings. The Board of Commissioners also recognizes their responsibility to implement a structure for conducting business on County matters and the necessity to conduct public meetings in a disciplined, orderly, effective, and transparent manner². The Board of Commissioners will, through the adoption of this policy, establish procedures for public comment at Commissioner's Work Sessions and Commissioner's Regular (or Business) Meetings.

To establish a fair and orderly procedure for public comment, this policy will provide an opportunity for Crawford County residents, business interests, taxpayers (at large), any representative of a firm eligible to bid on material or services solicited by the Commissioners; any state agency or municipal representative, to comment on all County matters relative to official action or deliberation before the Commissioners prior to final action by the Board of Commissioners at a Commissioner's Regular (or Business) Meeting. Unless granted prior approval by the Board of Commissioners, non-residents will not be allowed to comment at the Regular Meeting. Multiple requests by different persons representing the same group will not be honored. Any group desiring to address the Board of Commissioners should select a spokesperson who can express the views of the group.

At Work Sessions and Regular (or Business) Meetings, it is the objective of the Board of Commissioners to offer Crawford County citizens a recognizable process and an opportunity to offer comments on County matters. In order to facilitate public comment, the following policy is established.

WORK SESSION: The County Commissioners host a Work Session on the first and third Wednesday of each month at 9:30AM in the Commissioners Meeting Room or another time, date, or location previously announced and advertised³. At these Work Sessions, matters of potential business are presented. These presentations may be in the form of updates with no further official action required. These sessions provide the public with the requisite background information to ask questions or offer comments and interface with the process of the Board of Commissioners.

¹ County matters include the following: operations, contractual, and financial matters of the Crawford County Staff including Veteran's Services; public safety matters specific to Crawford County 911 and the Office of Emergency Services; the Crawford County Care Center; Crawford County Human Services; Crawford County Maintenance; the Office of the Public Defender; the Office of the Chief Assessor; Tax Claim Bureau, and Crawford County Voter's Services. County matters include financial and contractual matters of the Crawford County Correctional Facility, the Crawford County Conservation District Board, the Crawford County Planning Commission, Crawford County Elected Offices, and the Crawford County Court of Common Pleas, but does not include their operations.

² 65 Pa.C.S.A § 710. Rules and regulations for conduct of meeting"

³ 65 Pa.C.S.A § 709. Public Notice

While it is not necessary to give notification for public comment at a Work Session, it is requested that comments or questions relative to potential County matters be made at this time. The Board of Commissioners request that comments be made with a recognition of time constraints on County Staff as well as a courtesy to others in attendance that may desire to offer comments. All public comments will be made at the conclusion of each Work Session. These comments may be informal in nature regarding a specific County matter. The Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners will allocate time for public comment at a Work Session and reserves the right to limit any comment that either exceeds a reasonable time, or otherwise determines that the comment is not germane to County matters.

If the Board of Commissioners determines there is not sufficient time for public comment at a Work Session, the comment period will be deferred to the next Work Session, or, if scheduled, a Special Meeting prior to the next regularly scheduled Regular (or Business) Meeting.

Whenever a request for information on a County matter is identified by a Crawford County citizen, they will be referred to the Chief Clerk and dealt with in accordance with those policies and procedures and within the organizational structure of the County. The Chief Clerk will make every effort to gather information to answer specific requests for information on County matters and provide answers to the Board of Commissioners.

REGULAR (or BUSINESS) MEETING: It is at these formal, recorded meetings that the business of the County is transacted with official action by the Board of Commissioners. These meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesday of a given month at 9:30AM in the Crawford County Courthouse Assembly Room or another time, date, or location previously announced and advertised.

Any person representing a recognized group in Crawford County, as well as any Crawford County citizen must contact the Chief Clerk no later than two business days prior to a Regular Meeting in order to be on the Regular Meeting AGENDA. Anyone requesting to be placed on the Regular Meeting AGENDA must specifically state their topic and restrict their comments to the County matter that is on the published agenda, or to a County matter that is or can be reasonably expected to be a future actionable item by the Board of Commissioners.

At the beginning of a Regular Meeting, a speaker may be granted up to three (3) minutes to address an item on the published AGENDA for that Regular Meeting, or any other County matter that is or may reasonably be expected to come before the Board of Commissioners for action. This comment period is limited to 30 minutes. The Board of Commissioners may waive this time limit on a case-by-case basis and with regard to the interest of Crawford County citizens.

The Board of Commissioners will not allow comments on operations and individuals over which the Board of Commissioners exercises no operational authority. This includes other Elected Officials, the Crawford County Court of Common Pleas and their Departments, Magisterial District Justices, and any County entity that reports to a designated Board (e.g. the Crawford County Conservation District Board, the Crawford County Prison Board of Inspectors, Crawford County Planning Commission, etc.).

Prior to offering comments, the Speaker will be recognized by the Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners. The Speaker must begin by providing the Speaker's name, address, group affiliation (if any), and specific County matter on which the Speaker intends to comment.

At no time during a Regular Meeting will a speaker be 'cross-examined' or otherwise questioned by anyone in attendance. Likewise, County Department Heads, Elected Officials or their representatives, or any member of the Court of Common Pleas may not address the comments of a Crawford County citizen. All comments must be directed to the Chairperson.

⁴ 65 Pa.C.S.J. § 709. Public Notice

Electronic recording devices and cameras, in addition to those used as official recording devices, are permitted at Regular Meetings⁵.

The Board of Commissioners will not allow:

A speaker to address repetitive subject matter discussed at a previous meeting, or to speak more than once on the same topic unless the subject matter may reasonably be expected to be the subject of official action or deliberation by the Board at a future meeting, as determined by the Chairperson.

Comments on any ongoing criminal investigation, or pending or ongoing litigation.

A speaker to relinquish time to another speaker.

Political placards, advertisements or other political propaganda that blocks the view of those in attendance or is deemed disruptive to the conduct of the meeting. This is applicable to Work Sessions and Regular Meetings.

A speaker to address or question a Commissioner individually.

The Chairperson may:

Interrupt or terminate a Speaker's statement when the comments are too lengthy, personally directed, abusive, threatening, derogatory, obscene, or irrelevant.

Request any individual to leave a Meeting when that person does not observe reasonable public decorum.

Request the assistance of the Sheriff's Office to remove a disorderly person when his/her conduct interferes with the orderly progress of a Meeting.

Call a recess or adjourn a Meeting when the lack of public decorum interferes with the orderly conduct of the Meeting.

Waive these rules with the approval of the Board of Commissioners.

A citizen may be barred from speaking further before the Board of Commissioners if the Speaker's conduct is deemed out of order. A citizen, once barred for improper conduct, will not be permitted to continue or again address the Board of Commissioners in that meeting unless a majority vote of the Board of Commissioners allows. In the event a speaker, thus barred, fails to obey the ruling, the Chairperson may take such action as is deemed appropriate. The Chairperson may bar a person from addressing the Board of Commissioners during any public meeting for up to thirty (30) days for improper conduct. Once barred from speaking for improper conduct, a citizen may request of the Chairperson, verbally or in writing, early reinstatement.

Francis F. Weiderspahn, Jr., Chair

Attest

John M. Amato, Commissioner

Gina Chatfield, Chief Clerk

John Christopher Soff, Commissioner

⁵ 65 Pa.C.S.A. § 711. Use of equipment during meeting.

⁶ 65 Pa.C.S.A. § 710. Rules and regulations for conduct of meeting.

