

Norfolk changes comment process at council meetings

Mayor says new rules will help streamline sessions



Members of the Norfolk City Council listen to a speaker during Tuesday's meeting. The board voted unanimously to change two the public commenting process. BILL TIERNAN/FREELANCE

BY TREVOR METCALFE STAFF WRITER

NORFOLK — The City Council took steps to streamline the public comment process at its bimonthly meetings, including limiting comments on new business to a single meeting each month.

Members voted unanimously Tuesday to change two portions of the public commenting process outlined in the body's rules of procedure.

Under the new rules, members of the public who wish to speak about items on the regular and consent agendas will do so at the beginning of each meeting. Previously, public comment occurred before the council voted on each item.

According to the changes, each speaker will get three minutes total to discuss any item or multiple items on the regular and consent agendas, rather than

three minutes per individual item.

Secondly, public comments on new business will now only occur at the first meeting of each month. Previously, that portion of public comments happened at the end of both monthly meetings.

In a text message, Norfolk Mayor Kenny Alexander said the changes will help streamline the meeting process and save time.

“More importantly, applicants and their architects, attorneys and engineers often face long wait times to speak on their agenda items — whether on the regular or consent docket — often at the applicant’s expense, as these professionals charge for their time,” he said. “The goal is to improve efficiency by scheduling more items on the consent and regular agenda dockets.”

Additionally, Alexander said the new business will be handled at meetings after most of the other agenda items have already been addressed at a previous meeting.

“This change will help accommodate those who have previously complained about long wait times for new business discussions,” he said.

The changes come after some speakers have gone over time limits and veered off-topic at previous meetings. Some meetings have just a handful of speakers, while others have lasted more than two hours, in part because numerous residents comment on several agenda items. At the most recent meeting during comments for new business, one speaker spoke about troubles with parking a dump truck near his house, while another detailed struggles with rebuilding a house and keeping people off her yard.

The process for public comments for public hearing items will remain unchanged, where comments will be heard before the vote on each item. Prospective commenters must sign up to speak by 3 p.m. the day of the meeting. Personal attacks are not allowed. Public comment on agenda items must address those agenda items, and comment on new business must discuss new business.

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