



## **Rules of Procedure, Conduct, and Decorum for Public Meetings**

The Harris County Housing Authority (HCHA) business is conducted at public meetings attended by the Harris County Housing Authority Board of Commissioners (the Board), its Chief Executive Officer, and those department heads, employees, consultants, experts, or attorneys asked to participate. The HCHA intends to provide open access to the public to observe and express their points of view on matters coming before the Board. With this goal in mind, the HCHA also intends to conduct its meetings in a safe and orderly manner. The Board has adopted these Rules of Procedure, Conduct, and Decorum (Rules) to provide open access and allow reasonable and safe participation by the public in its open meetings.

### **1) Public Comment.**

- a. **Registration Required.** The public is invited to attend all meetings of the HCHA except those meetings, which, by law, are closed to the public. The public may observe but is not allowed to participate in the meeting unless: (i) in advance of the meeting the member of the public is asked to address the Board on a particular issue; or (ii) the member of the public registers to speak. To register to speak, the member of the public must complete a Public Comment Form, identifying the agenda item (or items) on which the member intends to comment, and submit the completed form to HCHA. The Public Comment Form must be received within the time announced by the Board at the meeting or, if no time is announced, at least five minutes **before** the time the agenda item is considered. A sample Public Comment Form is attached as Exhibit "A" to these Rules. In the sole discretion of the Board of Commissioners, the Board may invite the public to submit written comments in the notice of the public meeting.
- b. **Time Limits.** During the public comment portion of the meeting, for each agenda item identified on the Public Comment Form by the speaker, the speaker may speak for a maximum of three (3) minutes. If no agenda item is identified on the Public Comment Form, the speaker may speak for a maximum of three (3) minutes only. If the speaker registered to comment on more than one agenda item, at the end of the speaker's comment on one item, the speaker must promptly offer a comment on the additional agenda item(s). Regardless of the number of agenda items a speaker registers to comment on, no member of the public will have more than six minutes during which the speaker may offer public comment. Speakers may not give or relinquish their allotted time to another speaker.
- c. **Extension of Time for Translation.** A member of the public who provides comment through a translator will be given twice the amount of time as a member of the public who does not require the assistance of a translator.

- d. Timekeeping. For each agenda item a speaker comments on, a representative of the HCHA will note the time the speaker begins. If the speaker exceeds the allowed amount of time on any agenda item, the HCHA representative will inform the speaker that he or she has exceeded the allowed time, and the speaker must immediately cease offering public comment on that agenda item. If the speaker exceeds the maximum amount of time allowed, the HCHA representative will inform the speaker that he or she has exceeded the maximum allowed time and must cease speaking.
- e. Time Limits per Agenda Item. Except for special public meetings, the maximum period for comment on any agenda item, regardless of the number of speakers registered to address the Board, is limited to eighteen (18) minutes per agenda item. If more than six (6) members of the public wish to address a particular agenda item (or items), then 20 minutes will be allowed for public comment on that agenda item, and the amount of time will be divided equally between all members of the public registered to speak on that agenda item.
- f. Special Meetings. At special public meetings on which there is only one significant agenda item before public comments begin, the Housing Authority may announce and establish a reasonable time limit for all public comments. Under this rule, the Housing Authority may give each person registered to speak the lesser of: (i) three minutes; or (ii) the total minutes announced for all public comment divided by the number of persons registered to speak.
- g. Permission to Speak Required. Before making a public comment, the speaker must be recognized and asked to proceed by the presiding officer of the Board. After being asked to speak, the speaker must clearly state his or her full name and identify any group or organization for which the speaker is appearing. Persons speaking out of turn and without permission of the presiding officer may be asked to leave the meeting.
- h. Written Comments. If the Board exercises its discretion to invite the public to submit written comments, a member of the public unable to attend or speak at the meeting may, instead, submit written comments. Written comments must be submitted with or on the Public Comment Form. Written comments must be legible and reasonable in length. The time required to read the comments must not exceed three minutes for an average reader. In its discretion, the Board may consider only those public comments delivered to the HCHA by 5:00 p.m., the day before the meeting, but it may exercise its discretion to consider written comments received immediately before the public comment part of the meeting begins. Written comments received timely will be included in the record of the meeting. By majority vote of the Commissioners in attendance, the Commissioners may elect to have the written comments read aloud at the meeting.
- i. Expanding or Limiting Time. In matters of exceptional interest, by vote of the Board taken before public comment begins, the Board may shorten or lengthen the

time allowed for all public comment, the amount of time allowed public comment on specific agenda items, the time by which the Public Comment Form must be delivered, and the time by which written comments must be delivered.

- j. Limited Response if Not on Agenda. If a speaker comments on a matter that is not on the agenda, the only responses the Board may give are: (i) a statement providing specific facts relevant to the comment; (ii) a statement of the Housing Authority's current policy; or (iii) consideration as to whether to place the matter on the agenda of a future meeting. The Board may also decline to make a response.

## 2) **Decorum and Respect Required.**

At all meetings, whether observing, commenting, or otherwise participating, all persons appearing before the Board must conduct themselves with proper respect and decorum in speaking to and addressing the Board and all others in attendance at the meeting. Persons who do not conduct themselves in an orderly, respectful, and appropriate manner will be ordered to leave the meeting. Refusal to abide by the Board's order or continued disruption of a meeting may result in legal action. In situations where the Board reasonably believes public safety is at risk, it may request enforcement of its orders by the appropriate law enforcement authority.

The use of profane, insulting, or threatening language and the use of racial, ethnic, or gender slurs or epithets is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Any person violating this rule will be ordered to leave the meeting. (This rule will not be applied to a speaker who accurately quotes offensive language for the limited purpose of bringing it to the attention of the Board. Provided, however, the speaker must use the quoted language sparingly, and the speaker must not use this very limited exception to circumvent the prohibition against offensive language.)

## 3) **Reasonable Public Safety Measures**

During any time Harris County is under Threat Level 1 (Severe) or Threat Level 2 (Significant), indicating there is a high level of spread of COVID-19 in Harris County, the following additional rules shall be in effect at all public meetings of the Housing Authority.

- a. Screening for COVID-19. If the public meeting is being held indoors, for the protection of the public, each person attending the meeting will be screened. Persons who have symptoms of a COVID-19 infection or are reasonably considered at risk of infecting others with COVID-19 will not be allowed to enter the building. An alternative for viewing and hearing the public meeting may be offered to the members of the public not allowed inside the building. The Board may, in its discretion, offer those not allowed inside the building an alternative method of offering public comment.
- b. Screening Questions. All those seeking entry into the building where the meeting is to be held will be screened. In addition to asking whether the person is experiencing symptoms consistent with a COVID-19 infection, the screener may ask:
  - Have you tested positive for COVID-19 in the last ten days?

- In the last ten days, have you been diagnosed with COVID-19 by a licensed healthcare provider?
- In the last ten days, have you been told by a licensed healthcare provider that you may have COVID-19?
- In the past ten days, have you been in close contact with or exposed to any person diagnosed with COVID-19?
- In the past ten days, have you been in close contact with or exposed to any person with symptoms of COVID-19?
- In the past ten days, have you been in a foreign country?

Persons answering “yes” to any of these questions may be refused entrance to the building. Other questions may be asked to better evaluate the risk.

- c. Screening for Fever. Using a contactless thermometer, the temperature of each person seeking to enter the building will be taken. Any person with a temperature equal to or higher than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit will not be allowed to enter the building.
- d. Use of Face Coverings. The HCHA strongly encourages all persons to wear face coverings when inside or when within six feet of another person not in the same household.
- e. Social Distancing. The HCHA strongly encourages all persons to maintain a distance of at least six feet from all others, except those in the same household.
- f. Other Legal Requirements. If laws (including county orders, city ordinances, state law, or executive orders) relating to health and safety apply to the building in which the meeting will be held, the Board will ask all those attending to comply with the law. To illustrate, if at the time the meeting occurs the Harris County Judge requires the wearing of a suitable face covering, the Board will ask all attending to either wear a suitable face covering or leave the building.

These Rules of Procedure, Conduct, and Decorum at Meetings of the Harris County Housing Authority are effective immediately upon their adoption by the Board and will remain in full force and effect until amended or repealed by a majority vote of the Board.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY on the 15th day of September, 2021.

By signature below, the undersigned Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Harris County Housing Authority certifies that the foregoing Rules of Procedure, Conduct, and Decorum of the Harris County Housing Authority were so adopted.



Gerald Womack, Chairman