



MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council

FROM: Carol Frazey, Councilmember

RE: Open Session Procedures (WCC 2.02.040 Meetings – General rules)

DATE: December 2, 2022

The Whatcom County Council values community input through emails, letters, phone calls, and public comment. Open session and public hearings are important elements of the council's agenda where members of the public may be heard live and in real time prior to Council action.

There are several challenges presented by the current format for public comments:

1. Council meeting days are often very long, starting early in the morning and continuing late into the evening;
2. Often there are many speakers during open session, resulting in extended segments of public comment early on the agenda prior to council action;
3. Councilmembers are voting on agenda items very late in the evening;
4. There is an inefficiency for county staff/resources staying late into the evening for council action.

To address the aforementioned challenges, the following are proposed changes for consideration:

1. Change speaker time for open session and public hearings to two minutes;
2. Specify a duration for Open Session as 30 minutes (*for Open Session only, not applicable to public hearings*); and
3. Encourage members of the public to email comments to council@co.whatcom.wa.us.

MRSC provides guidance on public comments, including the following:

- Public comment is not required at special council meetings, so the council can decide to only allow public comment at regular meetings. Council can further qualify this to only allow public comment at regular meetings where final action is being taken.
- If public comment is offered on an agenda, council may decide on requirements such as the following:
 - Public comments only on agenda items (no comments on topics not on agenda);
 - Speaker time less than 3 minutes (any period of time is fine);
 - Overall time allowed for general public comment set to a specified time period – for example, 30 minutes;
 - Only written public comment accepted and set a deadline for submittals.

Additionally, for your reference, Ann McFarlane (Jurassic Parliament) provides guidelines on public comment here: (<https://jurassicparliament.com/guidelines-public-comment/>).