

Effective Date: December 2008

Public Input and Conduct at Library Board of Trustees' Meetings Policy

The New York State Open Meetings Law (OML) was enacted to open the decision-making process of government officials to the public while protecting the ability of government to carry out its responsibilities. Accordingly, it is essential to the legislative and governmental process that the Seymour Library Board of Trustees' public business be performed in an open and public manner so that the public can attend meetings of the Library Board and listen to the deliberations and decisions that go into the making of public policy for the Library. The people's right to know the process of the Library Board's decision-making is essential. The performance of the Library Board's business in an open and public manner is different from the issue of public participation in Library Board meetings. Such public participation is not required by law except in the case of a public hearing, where comments from the public regarding a particular issue are both encouraged and mandated by law. Every public body has an inherent right to regulate its own procedures. Legislative bodies need rules so that the will of the majority is expressed and the rights of the minority are protected. To allow members of the public the opportunity to provide input and comments on library-related issues, the Seymour Library Board of Trustees has established the following procedure.

The Board of Trustees will post meeting notices in compliance with OML.

Public Input and Conduct at Library Board of Trustees' Meetings Procedure

1. The public shall be allowed to speak only during the public comment period of the meeting or at such time as recognized by the presiding officer
2. A public comment period shall be held at the beginning of every regularly scheduled Library Board meeting
3. The subject matter to be addressed must be relevant to the Library Board and its interests—the Library Board has the sole and absolute discretion to determine whether a speaker's topic and/or comments are relevant to the Library Board or its interests, and if he/she determines that they are not, then the presiding officer shall rule the speaker out of order and terminate his/her remarks
4. Speakers must speak from the lectern provided unless a speaker has mobility issues, in which case such speaker may speak from his/her seat
5. Members of the public acknowledged during this comment period by the presiding officer shall be afforded three (3) minutes to address the board regardless of the number of topics
6. Speakers must be recognized by the presiding officer—no member of the public shall be permitted to address the Library Board until and unless recognized by the presiding officer—after recognition by the presiding officer, speakers must state their name, address and group/organization affiliation, if any

7. The public comment period is limited to a total of fifteen (15) minutes
8. The Library Board will listen to the presentations and may ask questions for clarification, but it should be noted this is a time for listening, not resolution—while speakers may ask questions of the Library Board, no speaker has the right to demand an answer to a specific question from the entire Library Board or any particular member of the Library Board; responses from the board will occur at a later date after the Library Board has had time to deliberate the issue, to seek more information, and/or to take recommendations from the director
9. No request for a show of hands or a “vote” of persons present at a regular meeting on any matter is allowed—it should be noted that this is a time for listening, not uncontrolled debate
10. All remarks shall be addressed to the Library Board as a body and not to any member thereof nor to other members of the public in attendance
11. Library Board Trustees may interrupt a speaker during their remarks, but only for the purpose of clarification or information
12. It is important to note that a Library Board meeting is a meeting conducted in public, not a public meeting. In other words, the public, and possibly media representatives, are there to watch the board work
13. Speakers shall observe the commonly accepted rules of courtesy, decorum, dignity and good taste—no person attending a Library Board meeting shall engage in disorderly or boisterous conduct, including without limitation, the utterance of loud, threatening or abusive language, the display of signs, whistling, booing, hand-clapping, stamping of feet or any other acts which disturb, disrupt or otherwise prevent the business of government or which impede the orderly conduct of the meeting
14. Interested parties or their representatives may address the Board by written communications and a copy of such written statements shall be provided to the Library Board

The Library Board reserves the right to suspend the above rules as needed.

Adopted: December 2008

Revised: January 2009, March 2019

Reviewed: