

# **MGL Chapter 30A Section 20 (g)**

September 14, 2021

## MGL Chapter 30A Section 20 (g)

- (g) No person shall address a meeting of a public body without **permission of the chair**, and all persons shall, at the request of the chair, be silent. **No person shall disrupt the proceedings of a meeting of a public body**. If, after clear warning from the chair, a person continues to disrupt the proceedings, the chair may order the person to withdraw from the meeting and if the person does not withdraw, the chair may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person from the meeting.

## **MGL Chapter 30A Section 20 (g)**

- The key is the chair must preserve order – fair but firm
- There is a skill to running meetings/public hearings
- Marlboro City Council rule 7 – President shall preserve order
- All councilors need to be on board that they have a role to perform in ensuring the council activities take place – representing all people in the city

# Role of the Chair for Public Hearings

- Typically public hearings are for zoning changes, ordinance changes, special permits, annual budget, tax classification and some special items
- State how the public hearing will be conducted
- Four stages:
  - Public speaking in favor
  - Questions from the public
  - Public speaking in opposition
  - Questions from the City Councilors
  - Ask 3 times before moving to next portion of public hearing to ensure people had a chance to speak
- Individuals may only speak once until everyone has opportunity to speak
- Chair can set time limit for speaking – need to be firm with adherence to time requirement
- If everyone knows the rules for speaking – reasonable people will follow the rules
- Use of “Recess” if things get out of hand
- Need to maintain impartial stance on issues to allow all that want to be heard

# Public Hearing Conduct

- Ability to de-escalate situation
- Be empathetic and non judgmental
- Respect personnel space
- Keep your tone and body language neutral
- Avoid over reacting. Remain calm, rational and professional
- Ignore challenging questions
- Set limits
- Allow silence
- Plug MIIA training on “De-escalation Techniques” October 5

# Public Hearing Conduct

## •Useful Tips for Conducting Public Hearings:

- Try to understand the potential emotions associated with the public participation
- Add MGL Chapter 30A Section 20 (g) to the start of the public hearing to reinforce behavior
- Set rules for participation at the beginning of the meeting and follow them
- If there is a time limit – have a time keeper and provide an warning prior to time ending
- Be respectful on public concerns but fair – you are conducting business for the city
- Maintaining control of the meeting is key – President is in charge – responsible for preserving order
- Use the “Recess” to temporarily stop the meeting as necessary
- If the meeting is anticipated to be controversial with high emotions and large turnout, have law enforcement available to remove individuals that are not allowing the public hearing to be conducted in accordance with guidelines
- Not going to please everyone – do what is in the best interest of the entire city/town
- Be civil!!!