

Item #2023-09

Comment #1

The purpose of the Gainesville City Commission meetings are to conduct the people's business and sometimes it seems to be an opportunity for several repeat commenters to have a public forum to voice their views multiple times throughout a meeting. At times I have hesitated making a comment because others have used up so much time repeating their comments.

I think we have ample opportunities to make our concerns known. Please leave public comments alone or if anything find a way to decrease some of the repeaters. Thank you for considering my opinion.

Comment #2

Please set "Time Certains" for items on agendas that will likely have significant citizen interest and input whenever possible. Upcoming examples of when this would be helpful and considerate of your constituents would be items addressing the rescinding of the comp plan and associated LDR changes.

Comment #3

Thank you for caring enough to ask Gainesville residents for suggestions that – if the City Commission adopts them - will enhance public engagement in the myriad issues which affect us all. As a Gainesville resident and former Alachua County Commissioner, I respectfully submit the following suggestions for your consideration; and have included examples from the Alachua County Commission to demonstrate that the suggestions can be accomplished.

Proper Staff response to question when the answer is unknown.

Suggestion: Direct the City Manager to tell staff that it is ok if they do not know the answer to a question, and that the proper response (whether to a City Commissioner or resident) is “ I don’t know, but I will find out and get back to you. How should I contact you?”

As a resident who has called City staff over the years, many times they tell me everything EXCEPT the answer to my question. When watching meetings, frequently a staff response to a question is to embark on palaver which doesn’t answer the question – but wastes time. And when a staff person doesn’t know the answer yet waxes on and on about anything else, it causes frustration on both parts and undermines public confidence in City Hall. The simple response listed above allows for education for all.

Gainesville City Commission email

Suggestion: Require the City Manager to reconfigure the City’s website to automatically upload all incoming and outgoing City Commission email correspondence. Place a link to this archive site (where the public can read these emails) within the City Commission website at: <https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/City-Commission> It is past time that the Gainesville City Commission joins the 21st Century and provides Gainesville residents the ability to access this email, which is a part of the decision-making process in which all have a right to participate.

For the last 23 years, the Alachua County Commission has provided the public the right to remotely read all incoming and outgoing Commission correspondence. It is automatically uploaded; no one can prevent these public documents from being read. The Alachua County Commission email archive is located at: <https://alachuacounty.us/depts/bocc/pages/commissioneremailarchive.aspx> You and your colleagues

have probably accessed this many times over the years. Isn't it time that the City Commission allows our residents this right?

Gainesville City Commission Rules of Procedure

Suggestion: The City Commission adopt rules and/or procedures for how the City Commission will operate. Place a link to this adopted handbook/ordinance on the City Commission's "Public Meeting Participation" page. It should not be listed on Legistar.

In several places on the City Commission website, there are links to "Public Meeting Participation"; for example, <https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/Government-Pages/Government/Public-Meeting-Participation> Listed are someone's suggested "Dos" and "Don'ts" for the public. However, there is NO mention of the City Commission's adopted rules, so the public has no clue about how the City Commission operates and makes decisions. If you list "dos and don'ts" for the public, the City Commission itself should operate by some rules so the public knows what to expect.

During my 1993 service as Chair, I drafted the Alachua County Commission's first rules handbook. Although the ordinance is amended every year, the public knows exactly what to expect. In addition, this knowledge also helps to create more decorum during the business meeting. <https://public.powerdms.com/ACBOCC/documents/2281088>

Building and Development – more public participation

By separate email message, I will forward to you a message sent to the previous City Commission, which I received no response (like 95% of the email messages I sent. Were they even read? How would I know?) The public deserves the right to participate as equals in the process with developers and land speculators, yet this is not the case in your adopted Comprehensive Plan and land development regulations. Based on the experience I detail in the email message, I have some specific recommendations which I hope you will consider adopting in your codes.

Thank you again for asking for this public input.

Comment #5

I think we need to find a way to create a *dialog* between residents and the commissioners in order to build trust and promote consensus building. The way it is now the commissioners and staff take their (no time limit) turns at making their cases and then the citizens get their individual (3 minute) turns typically pleading and/or complaining about the commissioners actions, or lack thereof, in regards to their interests. Neither side knows whether the other side has actually heard them. This format's complete lack of dialog over time promotes distrust and a confrontational atmosphere.

One way to enable dialog is to set aside a time slot, say 15 minutes on each agenda item, where a citizen gets to ask questions of the commissioner(s) of their choice. Those commissioners would then have the opportunity to exhibit that they have indeed listened and the opportunity to give a genuine and thoughtful off the cuff response, both of which would go a long way toward building the trust necessary to build consensus which is a necessary component of moving forward together which I believe has been a stated goal of every commissioner and community leader.

You could even require a proportional number of attending (remote or in person) citizens to cede their allowed 3 minutes on that item to the designated questioner. That way this change would take up no more time than under the current rules.

Comment #6

It's my understanding that the city commission would like residents to submit in writing suggestions for improving citizen input.

Historically, very few people attend city commission meetings on a regular basis because many are not comfortable with public speaking or don't have the time nor the interest. The vast majority of the frequent speakers are well informed, civil and add a tremendous value for the commission and the public.

I have been attending city meetings since 1994 and canvassing neighborhoods for over a decade. Many residents tell me how much they appreciate hearing from the citizens who speak at city meetings on a regular basis because they get a better understanding about the city issues and policies after listening to them speak.

For decades, city hall was a welcoming place for citizens to come address their city commission.

Former Gainesville City Commissioner Ed Jennings Sr. would frequently have to remind the commission that they might not want to hear what the people had to say, but it was their job to listen, and that he did.

As Ms. Tana Silva stated at the last regular city commission meeting, the city commission majority, a few short years ago, made drastic changes to city rules for public input, in an effort to silence decent, creating a hostile environment that needs to be corrected.

For decades, at regular city commission meetings, citizens were allowed to come before the commission, and speak three times during 'General Public Comment' on anything not on the agenda.

The first opportunity was at the very beginning of the meeting, after the commission approved the consent and regular agenda, again in the afternoon after proclamations were presented and again at the very end of the meeting after commission comments.

I never saw anybody spend the whole day at city hall just to speak three times at 'General Public Comment' and it never led to late night meetings.

What it did do, was give people more opportunities to address new concerns as the meeting evolved, in real time when it matters, that was a much more effective and friendlier way of communicating with the commission and the public, and residents are asking you to bring that rule back.

Also, for decades, city commissioners and mayors understood citizens were not bureaucrats and were lenient with them when they spoke and never interrupted them while they were speaking, like we have seen over the past few years with the new restrictive rule changes.

Some cities allow greater opportunities for public input at their city meetings and some cities are much more restrictive.

All you have to do is look right here in Gainesville at how citizen friendly it was for decades at city hall before the previous city commission majority made all the drastic rule changes for public input.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Comment #7

Before your workshop tomorrow, may I offer these few suggestions for much-needed public participation in city policies and priorities:

- Recognize that the mayor has no more authority than commissioners and does not lead the commission, set its priorities, solely decide anything, or individually represent the city. The mayor presides over commission meetings and signs documents only according to the whole commission's consensus.
- Restore predictability and civility at meetings. Allow only emergency late additions to agendas. Get rid of sign-up cards to speak. Allow real-time phone comments at meetings. Consider returning Roberts Rules of Order. Commissioners feel free to interact with public speakers. For your own sake, don't take things personally. Reinstate the rule of not rebutting what people say after they've spoken.
- Revise patterns of the past seven years of overreliance on consultants, generic policy research reports, surveys, ad hoc committees, general policy committee, staff working groups, and unvetted, unannounced motions. Return a few standing committees of two commissioners each and drop the rest; standing committees give interested parties citywide a means to work together on policy with collective insights. These are valuable checks and balances.

You're in the spotlight, making consequential decisions. That is hard, in a harshly politicized national setting made worse by caustic social media and unhelpful habits that took hold in city governance since 2015. Your welcoming, even seeking diverse perspectives can set the city on a better path. Thank you.

Comment #8

I apologize that this is an hour late. I just had the 1/12 date on my mind and just noticed it was due by Noon. However, if you can add this suggestion I would appreciate it - although, I'm sure other people may have already submitted a similar request. I believe the commission meetings need to allow for call in comments. I know there was an issue about the expense of using the outside firm, but the county has figured out how to handle it in house so I would think the city could follow suit. I listen to almost all of the meetings, but I work during the day (as a City Clerk/Administrator) and there are many times I would have liked to comment on a particular agenda item (as I have many times in the past). I am unable to attend the meetings in person, as are many, many others, and believe it is an important alternative means of communicating with the commission in real time.

Comment #9

I write to provide an opinion on public comment from someone who does have occasion to make public comment but who does not feel the need to comment on every item at every meeting.

It is perpetually disheartening that the same few, seemingly independently wealthy, people consistently abuse public comment to verbally assault their political opponents.

I believe any changes to public comment need to address the consistent abuse and intimidation by these few individuals. More citizens would be inclined to come and express their opinions if they didn't already know they'd have to sit through 30 minutes of people complaining about past issues that they tenuously link to whatever agenda item is up at the time.

Real citizens have real problems that they would like you to address but they don't have the time to waste while those few individuals monopolize public comment.

Allowing public comment via phone would not contribute to the discussion but instead allow these same people to monopolize public comment and squeeze out citizens who have lives and schedules to keep. If someone is unable to attend a meeting, they may email, snail mail, or even call the commissioners office to discuss it with them prior to the meeting.

I implore you not to expand public comment in the interest of pleasing the same people who monopolize it now but instead reform public comment so that all citizens may equally address the commission instead of the same old people. Thank you.

Comment #10

GAINESVILLE HAS A CIVILITY PROBLEM, AND PART OF IT IS HOW OUT OF CONTROL SPEAKERS GET AT CITY HALL.

WEVE GOT PEOPLE COMING TO CITY HALL JUST TO YELL ABOUT AGENDAS THEY DIDNT READ OR ARGUE ABOUT VOTES THEY DIDNT BOTHER ATTENDING A MEETING FOR. HOW EMBARRASSING IT IS SEEING THESE MEETINGS BE TAKEN CONTROL OF BY THE SAME PEOPLE EVERY TIME THE GAVEL COMES DOWN AND THE VIDEO STARTS!!! IT ISNT LIKE THIS WHEN I VISIT FAMILY IN DALLAS. DALLAS DOESNT PLAY GAMES LIKE THIS, THEIR ELECTED OFFICIALS DONT PUT UP WITH THIS NONSENSE, THEY TELL PEOPLE TO STAY ON TOPIC OR WALK AWAY FROM THE MICROPHONE!!!

THE SAME PEOPLE SOAK UP CITIZEN COMMENT LIKE A SPONGE! IS THIS A KIDS CARTOON?? IS NATHAN SCOTT THE NEW SPONGEBOB??? I FEEL LIKE IM WATCHING THAT YELLOW SQUARE DEMON THAT MY GRANDKIDS LOVE SO MUCH WHEN THEY VISIT AND TURN ON THE LAPTOP. IT IS AWFUL. IT MAKES ME WANT TO DRINK!!!!

PLEASE DONT MAKE CHANGES THAT ARE GOING TO MAKE IT SO THESE PESTS TAKE TIME AWAY FROM PEOPLE THAT ACTUALLY WANT TO SPEAK AND BE PRODUCTIVE. IF NAUTICAL NONSENSE BE SOMETHING YOU WISH, THEN MAKE RIDICULOUS CHANGES AND BE FORCED TO LIST TO NATHAN FLAP HIS GUMS LIKE A FISH.

Comment #11

Commissioners,

As a lifelong resident of Gainesville, I ask you to please go forward as a new commission in a way that encourages all people living here to feel welcome, and to not make changes that will further allow a handful of people to soak up meeting time as they have been.

It is difficult for my wife and I to travel at our age as it is, and seeing the same people time and time again speaking to every single issue you are all discussing, and seeing them get away with yelling and interrupting not just you all but even other people there to talk, discourages my wife and I from even showing up.

I'm not as knowledgeable about local government as I probably should be, but I do know that I can almost always turn on a city meeting and within a few minutes see the same people (I believe their names are Joe Batty and Newman Scope) raise their voices, point their fingers, and yell at commissioners, citizens and employees alike.

I read that some people want to change things with how people participate. If you're going to change anything, please make it so these out of control bullies don't keep controlling the meeting. If you want people to be civil, to show up and express their ideas, make it a welcoming place to do so. Turning on the meeting and seeing the same people bullying everyone for dozens of minutes at what seems like every meeting I watch is not the way to make anyone but those bullies feel welcome.

Comment #12

I moved to Gainesville a number of years ago after my sister and her husband passed suddenly, so that I could work here and take care of their three children. Time was always a premium and most of it I had was given to my two nieces and my nephew so that they could have the best life possible.

The youngest, my nephew, graduated in 2021 and moved to Atlanta to go to Georgia Tech. I was, and continue to be, extremely proud of him and his sisters and how much they've overcome.

I was finally on my own that year and wanted to spend my newfound time becoming more involved, but wasn't sure where to look. I decided to look at city and county meetings since they were being posted on Facebook at the time. I was shocked at what I saw at city meetings. It was always the same handful of people yelling about every discussion being made, no matter how inconsequential. It came off like they just wanted to be on TV and had a chance to force everyone to listen to them. I saw a number of times where they would even yell at other people in the audience, booing anyone that disagreed with them.

And ever since I watched that first meeting a couple years ago, whenever I decide to watch a city meeting, it's always the same two or three people. No matter the hour of the day, no matter how long the meetings last, it's a handful of people adding hours onto already long meetings. I want to show up

and talk to the people that work every day to run this city. I think it's valuable for people to see you in person and hear what you have to say. But I don't feel comfortable doing so, and seeing this same handful of people walk over Mayor Poe for two years makes me feel like they're the only ones city hall cares about.

I'm in my sixties and I have barriers to traveling downtown. I just can't see myself going there if I'm going to be harassed by the same group of angry, old white retirees. I'm an old, white retiree myself. But I used to think being angry and bullying others wasn't the way to get things done. I'm embarrassed to see people who grew up the same as I did acting the way they do, and I'm saddened to have seen a commission that let them do it. If you're going to make changes, please make changes that encourage other people to participate, and discourage this group of folks from keeping on like they have been.

Comment #13

I have lived in Gainesville all my life. My mother and father were Irish immigrants that moved to Florida in the 70s, bringing me, their teenage daughter at the time, with them. They had me late, in their 40s, which I was told frustrated my grandparents to no end. I was born in 1960, a few decades after the two of them had moved to this country with their respective parents, my grandparents.

One of the common themes growing up was how thankful they were to come to this country and see the opportunities available, but also knowing very well from their own parents how the very powerful and hateful and make things harder on anyone not willing to bow down to the people pulling the strings behind the scenes. My grandparents had to deal with the fear of not politicians or police, but the people that told the politicians and police what to do.

While certainly not the organized crime controlling the powers that be that my grandparents had to deal with when they came to the United States so many decades ago, Gainesville seems to have a less-dangerous but very similar problem. A new commission is in power, but a handful of people that I see taking up hours on Channel 12 whenever I tune in appear to control how meetings happen. How often does Miss Batey need to demand to question an agenda she already can read? How many minutes does government need to spend making sure Mister Scott has ample time to yell? How many council members are going to give into their demands after they pound their fists and yell? This is not 1920s New York. We should be beyond letting a handful of threatening goons control our government.

This isn't the America my grandparents dreamed of. It's the one they tried to escape decades ago.

Please, think of all those that came before you before you make changes.

Comment #14

I was recently made to be aware of a number of exchanges on emails indicating the possibility of how people currently speak at meetings being modified.

I cannot fathom why such changes would be made, unless they would be to limit the currently out-of-control system in place now.

Residents of Gainesville don't have to go down to city hall to see how dysfunctional things can be. Simply tuning into channel 12 gives great insight into just how much power a handful of elite politicians have when it comes to controlling our local politicians. One can only hear the same individual complain about "the process" so many times before becoming nauseated, so my greatest amount of respect goes out to each of you for the length of time of service you've endured.

It is clear from viewing your meetings that a handful of influential people, many I've noted who have given both money and endorsements to multiple members of your body, add sometimes hours onto what would otherwise be concise meetings. Having the same handful of people seemingly cashing in their campaign donations by derailing meetings by going completely off-topic for every single agenda item is as disturbing as it is disheartening.

During the previous election cycle, I constantly heard about "Respect, courtesy, civility, and professionalism." The idea that now the same handful of people that show up to city hall and are disrespectful, discourteous, berating and unprofessional would somehow be allowed even more chances to play the lead in their own show on Channel 12 gives the appearance that either people supporting such an idea haven't actually attended or watched city meetings before, or are somehow paying back a debt they feel they owe.

Please, I ask each of you to be the person on the dais you say you are outside of city hall.

Comment #15

I'm a simple man from a simple upbringing. My old man taught me to do unto others as you'd have them do unto you and yours, and I've lived that ideal my whole life.

I commend Mr Book for finally standing up to the liberal elites that control this town. I know for a fact that many people don't come downtown because it's an echo chamber and it's oppressive. The liberals keep talking about our wonderful governor trying to do the right thing as if it's bad.

And Gainesville is worst of them all. Mr Nathan Skop is a respectable person and a lawyer. He knows what he talks about unlike most of you all. I'm tired of seeing people like me getting told to tone it down, avoid personnel attacks or stay on topic. Conservatives matter same as anyone else here and y'all need to know that we are people just like y'all. Three minutes isn't not enough time. If me and mine wanna come to city hall then I get it, we should let everyone have time for themselves to speak.

But if me and mine and my friends wanna come down and talk about whatever grace or gracelessness and pet projects y'all are pushing, we should be free to share our time and I for one would be proud to get as many people as possible to donate time to a fine man like Nathan. I promise you I could go down my phone and find at least 20 or 30 people that would all donate three minutes to him so he could finally present some data and give y'all some actual sense instead of this woke nonsense you always talk about. Change it so we can do that. I wanna see the day Nathan has an hour or two to speak for US CONSERVATIVES since none of you except maybe Mr Book are real conservatives.

Mr Book I personally want to thank you for fighting for our voice. We ain't had someone good up there since Chase left and now we have a real champion GOD BLESS YOU AND YOURS!!

Comment #16

How appropriate that Mr. Book has the name he does, for Commissioner Book's WORDS are a reflection of His truth! Praise be to he!

For too long, His people have been stopped from spreading His word in ALL corners! Praise be to he!

City Hall needs to hear His message! Praise be to he! How the worldly powers in this city restrict His message needs to, must change! Praise be to he!

My brothers, my sisters, His children have a right to spread His word! Stopping them for our worldly minutes is stopping His voice! Praise be to he!

Allow His children, your brothers, your sisters, to speak! Not all of my brothers and my sisters in Christ have the words to express their needs, their feelings, their hearts and souls. But we all have a brother or sister found through Him that can spread His word! Praise be to he!

Change comment! Let His children speak! Let brothers and sisters in Christ donate their time to others who He has blessed with His voice! Let His children give up their time so that another may have more time to spread His word! Praise be to he!

If you allow myself and my siblings that stand in His glow to do this, we can come downtown. We can all choose one voice to speak as much as He needs us to! Comment will no longer be a three minute wall! It will be limited only by His children's donation of time! Let us share our three minutes so that they may be hours of prayer and gospel and guidance for our city, not brief moments counted in three minutes of time. Imagine the inspiration and ideas that could come from just 10, 15, 20 of Gainesville's own donating their time! 30, 45 minutes! An hour! One voice, one hour! People power! Praise be to he!

Do this in His name! Praise be to He!

IN THEIR HEARTS HUMANS PLAN THEIR COURSE, BUT THE LORD ESTABLISHES THEIR STEPS.

PROVERBS 16:9

Comment #17

As a lifelong Gainesville resident, I can appreciate the diversity of opinion in our city and county, and appreciate the passion behind words that come from people who visit city hall to let their voices be heard. That itself is commendable.

What I don't appreciate and what is not commendable is the dozens upon dozens of hours that the same small group of retiree extremists have taken away from our city staff, our elected officials and our community.

I don't consider myself to be as engaged or political as perhaps I should be. My activism is limited to voting (I am in your district, Commissioner Book, and I never miss an election) and watching meetings when my schedule allows.

My work schedule and my demands as a single, widowed mother of two young boys means that such

opportunities to see meetings on TV or online are rather sporadic. Despite this, I have seen enough of the same handful of people soaking city time to have remembered their names: Joe Beady, Nathan Scop, Gabe Hellel, Debbie Martinez, Ray Washington. I apologize if any of their names are misspelled.

While a few of the above-named individuals have themselves appeared to have at times taken brief absences from meetings, the fact remains that despite my rather sporadic and often hectic schedule, a majority of them still manage to appear every time I watch a meeting and will be there for hours on end, commenting on every item.

Either people like Joe Beady and Nathan Scop have schedules that have directly matched that of a single, widowed parent working 50+ hours a week in ever-changing shifts, or they have so much free time that they can attend almost every meeting without being concerned about having time to instead spend with friends, family, or working. Judging by their personal communication skills and the unlikelihood of them following my own schedule, I think it's same to assume that the latter is true.

There is a direct and reverse relationship between the amount of time this group of extremists has and the amount of insight they bring to city meetings. Their conduct is distressing, hateful, bullish, and above all fruitless. It is upsetting to think that city leaders would somehow wish to give this group more time than they already have, and not instead seek ways to enable other people to speak instead.

Please think of the citizens you serve. Think of the job you signed up to do. Think of the children looking to you as role models. When and if you decide to change how people attending speak, please do so knowing that at least two young boys are watching who is speaking on both sides of the podium.

Comment #18

I am writing to talk about your next Generic Policing Meeting.

I saw on your meeting on the video on your website that you guys want to make changes about how people we people talk to you and how much we talk and stuff like that so I wanted to email you and tell you how I feel about what your doing.

A lot of the people that come already from what I see on your meetings on my internet or on the tv sometimes if I can watch on there at home is that the people get really rowdy and act out really badly and it isnt good.

It seems like the same people at every meeting do this and they will come up all the time and say the same things even if different things are being talked about and they dont stay on topic they just kind of force the topic to be what they wanna talk about like the biomass plant or the process and not the stuff that is supposed to be being talked about at the time.

Please dont do anything to make this worse since it is already bad and making it so these same handful of people can make things even louder and more distracting isnt good if you want people to show up and talk to all of you people there at the city's hall.

This is are city and it is good a lot but sometimes it could be better so please dont not do that thanks

