

FIFTEEN ROPE FERRY ROAD
WATERFORD, CT 06385-2886



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**EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE RTM
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 9, 2026, 5:00 P.M.
APPLEBY ROOM, TOWN HALL**

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
WATERFORD, CT
2026 SEP - 3 P 2:26
ATTEST: *David A. Langley*
TOWN CLERK

1. Establishment of quorum and call to order.
2. Public Comment.
3. Consideration of and action on minutes of the March 15, 2021, committee meeting.
4. Consideration of and possible action on issues referred to committee:
 - Public Comment Guidelines (RTC 8/3/26)
5. Adjournment

encl: Education Minutes March 15, 2021
Public Comment Guidelines Referral
Public Comment Guidelines from Newark, DE

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MINUTES
EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE RTM
SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, March 15, 2021
7:00 P.M. - Waterford Town Hall
ZOOM Remote Access Only

2021 MAR 19 PM 12:52

The March 15, 2021 Special Meeting of the Education Standing Committee of the RTM was called to order by Chairperson Danielle Steward-Gelinas at 7:01 P.M.

ROLL CALL

Present: Greg Attanasio, Valerie Metivier, Sally Ritchie, Michael Rocchetti, Danielle Steward-Gelinas.

Absent: None

Also Attending: Town Clerk David Campo, RTM Member Paul Goldstein

PUBLIC COMMENT

RTM Member, Paul Goldstein, speaking as resident spoke in regard to the issue of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Minutes

MOTION by Rocchetti, seconded by Ritchie, to approve the minutes from the February 23, 2021 meeting.

VOTING IN FAVOR: Unanimous with one member abstaining. (Attanasio)

AGENDA ITEM 6: Social Justice (RTC 10-05-20)

The committee discussed the authority of the committee and the Town's movement toward a DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Work Group being organized by LEAP Consultant and Equity Coach Elizabeth McGee.

MOTION by Attanasio, seconded by Rocchetti, to recommend reporting the issue of the "Social Justice" out of committee at the next meeting of the RTM to allow LEAP Consulting Owner Elizabeth McGee to pursue the formation of a Town DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Work Group, that would be representative of the town, and that the RTM makes a formal request to have representation on the work group.

VOTING IN FAVOR: Unanimous

MOTION by Rocchetti, seconded by Ritchie, to adjourn at 7:41 P.M.
VOTING IN FAVOR: Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,
Danielle Steward-Gelinas
Chairperson



LEGISLATION & ADMINISTRATION STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE RTM
COMMITTEE REPORT
REVIEW OF A PUBLIC COMMENT ORDINANCE (RTC 2/6/23)

ATTESTED
TOWN CLERK

2026 JUL 22 10:02

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Background

Sep. 18, 2023 Committee Meeting. Review of a "Public Comment Ordinance" RTC 02/06/23 Brief discussion. More work to follow.

Feb. 24, 2024 Committee Meeting. Initial meeting for new committee. Public comment: Consensus that with limited board/commission response to RTM Jan 2023 recommendation to include public comment periods, providing written guidance to these specialized groups would be helpful-e.g., setting parameters such as time limits for each speaker or restricting comments to agenda items, and explaining that it is not a Q&A session, but speakers could contact boards/commission members after the meeting if questions weren't answered in deliberation. The FOIC's requirement that while there is some flexibility in handling public comment periods, the standards/rules during each public comment period must be applied equally to all speakers. Town Attorney will be consulted on whether RTM options include codifying universal public comment periods through ordinance, resolution, or "strong recommendation.

Aug. 15, 2024 Committee Meeting. Brief discussion on requiring all boards and commissions to provide public comment periods. Dembek expressed concern for the volunteers serving on those bodies, and the additional time department heads would have to wait after work-hours to present their agenda items. Questions as to whether there are special exemptions or legal considerations for certain bodies, such as Planning & Zoning and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Feb. 13, 2025 Committee Meeting. No discussion on this issue; with Attorney Avena present, focus was on ethics and YFSB/Senior Citizens ordinances. Consensus to defer other issues to future meeting.

Current Committee Action

Jan. 21, 2026 Committee Meeting. Initial meeting of the new committee; general overview of all pending issues. Discussion noted limited background was available for this referral. Following discussion, the committee agreed that the intent of the referral was to ensure the public has a chance to comment on decisions or recommendations that committees, commissions, boards, etc. are considering. Committee generally agreed the matter could be referred, but drafting a letter encouraging all committees to offer public comment with basic guidelines was warranted. Franklin agreed to draft that letter for discussion at a future meeting.

Feb. 9, 2026: The Committee continued discussion regarding public comment at board and committee meetings. Members reiterated general agreement that amending ordinances to require public comment at every meeting was not advisable, noting that such a requirement may be inappropriate in certain circumstances or inconsistent with state statute. The Committee discussed the alternative approach of encouraging public comment through a guidance letter to boards and committees, including general best practices to ensure public comment is

appropriate and manageable. Emmy Franklin presented a draft letter for consideration. Discussion included whether to use a previously issued, attorney-vetted letter or Franklin's newly drafted, more comprehensive version, as well as the possibility of attaching Robert's Rules guidance on public comment and distributing the materials annually or as part of new member orientation packets. No action was taken, and discussion will continue at a future meeting.

March 19, 2026: The committee discussed concerns regarding public awareness of when and how to provide comment, as well as consistency in how public comment is handled across meetings. While noting that opportunities for comment may occur during designated public hearings, members emphasized the importance of clear guidance and consistent practices. The committee agreed that an ordinance change is not necessary at this time and voted to refer the matter to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed boards and commissions.

Motion by Steward-Gelinas, seconded by Childs, to report the item out of committee with a recommendation to refer Public Comment Guidelines to the Education Committee, with the suggestion to develop a consistent approach for educating boards and commissions. Voice vote unanimous in favor.

Recommendation: The Committee voted unanimously to report this item out of committee with the recommendation that the RTM refer this item to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed chairs of boards and commissions and the public of these guidelines.

Submitted by:

Erica Casper

Chair, Legislation & Administration Standing Committee

Representative Town Meeting

Town of Waterford

Attached: Summary of RTM discussion on public comment prior to referral to L&A Committee and recommendations on next steps

Summary of RTM Discussion and L&A Recommendations re: Review of a Public Comment Ordinance
(RTC 2/6/23)

(minutes of Oct 3, 2022 regular meeting of the RTM): Public Comment: RTM Member Larder spoke in regard to her concerns on how the body handles PUBLIC COMMENT and noted that some other boards don't offer public comment. Ms. Larder asked Town Attorney Kepple how we can handle. Attorney Kepple replied that the body is free to take a position on a topic such as this and communicate its position to other appropriate town agencies or one of the standing committees of the RTM

(minutes of Dec 5, 2022 regular meeting of the RTM): brief discussion about the issue raised by Maria Lopez in PUBLIC COMMENT ensued. First Selectman Brule will look further into the issue. The body discussed the need of other boards and commissions to provide for public comment as part of their meetings. MOTION by Driscoll, seconded by Olynciw, refer the subject of Public Comment on Boards and Commissions to the Legislation and Administration Standing Committee of the RTM. WITHDRAWN MOTION by Larder, seconded by Welch, to direct Moderator Goldstein to write a letter to the other committees in town of the need to provide for Public Comment as part of a public meeting. MOTION PASSED: Unanimous

(correspondence at the Feb 6, 2023 regular meeting of the RTM): Date: 1/5/23 To: *All Waterford Boards & Commissions, At the RTM Regular Meeting on October 3, 2022 discussion took place regarding the need to provide public comment at public meetings for all Waterford Boards and Commissions. Further discussion and deliberations took place at the December 5, 2022 Regular RTM Meeting. The consensus of the RTM was that Public Comment is vital to an inclusive and transparent government and should be part of Public Meetings. The RTM strongly recommends moving forward that all Waterford Boards and Commissions make Public Comment an agenda item as part of their meetings. The RTM recognizes that the timing and scope of such public comment is best left to the judgement of each Board or Commission. Sincerely, Paul Goldstein, Moderator RTM*

(minutes of Feb 6, 2023 regular meeting of the RTM): MOTION by Gauthier, seconded by Larder, to have the Legislation and Administration Standing Committee of the RTM review the creation of an ordinance to require PUBLIC COMMENT on all agendas. MOTION PASSED: Unanimous

(minutes from March 19, 2026 L&A committee meeting): The committee discussed concerns regarding public awareness of when and how to provide comment, as well as consistency in how public comment is handled across meetings. While noting that opportunities for comment may occur during designated public hearings, members emphasized the importance of clear guidance and consistent practices. The committee agreed that an ordinance change is not necessary at this time and voted to refer the matter to the Education Committee to develop public comment guidelines and a process to inform elected and appointed boards and commissions.

Motion by Steward-Gelinas, seconded by Childs, to report the item out of committee with a recommendation to refer Public Comment Guidelines to the Education Committee, with the suggestion to develop a consistent approach for educating boards and commissions. Voice vote unanimous in favor.

Additional Context:

During its review, the current committee (established January, 2026) discussed both the value of public participation and the practical differences among boards and commissions, including the varying purposes and structures of their meetings.

The committee noted that opportunities for public input may already exist through public hearings, agenda items, correspondence, and other established procedures, though these opportunities are not always clearly communicated or consistently understood by the public.

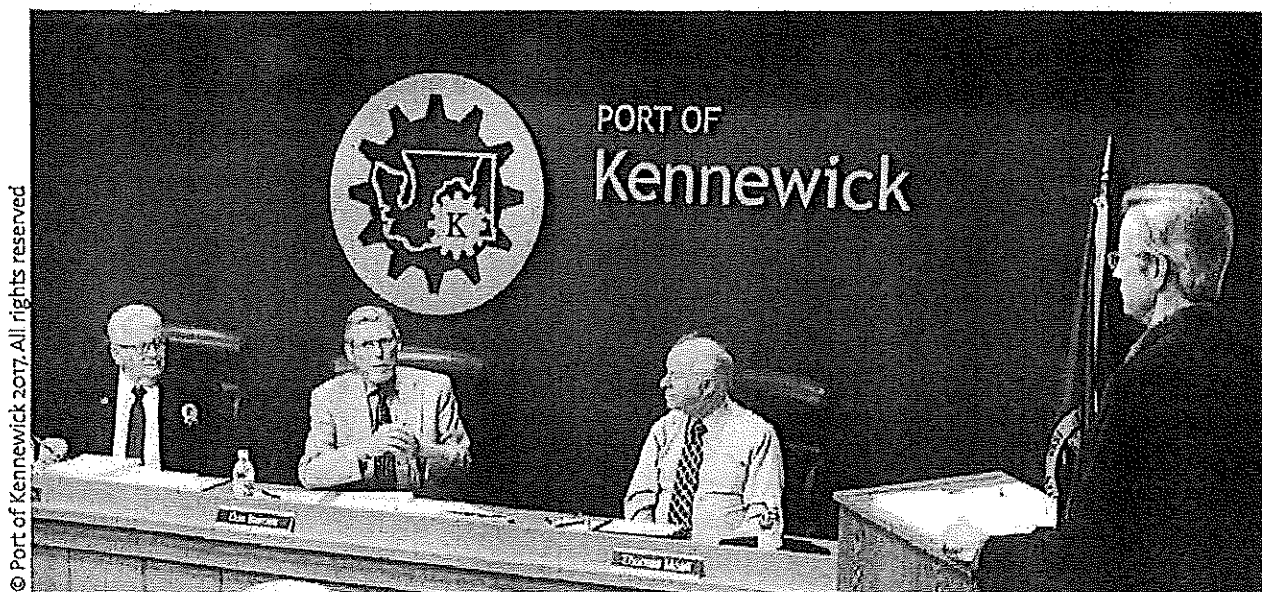
The committee considered the communication from Paul Goldstein (the moderator) to Waterford Boards and Commissions significant, as it reflected an existing RTM position supporting public comment as a matter of best practice while allowing flexibility among boards and commissions.

The committee's discussion ultimately focused on improving consistency, transparency, and public awareness through education and guidance rather than through the creation of a mandatory ordinance requirement.

Recommendations of L&A Committee to the Education Committee:

- The committee does not believe an ordinance requiring public comment at all meetings is warranted at this time.
- The committee does support public comment as a best practice and encourages boards and commissions to include an opportunity for public comment as part of regular meetings whenever appropriate.
- Develop a brief "Public Comment" reference guide or checklist for board and commission chairs, including suggested procedures and best practices.
- Consider including public comment guidance materials in packets provided to newly elected or appointed board and commission members.
- Review whether there is an existing process to ensure newly appointed chairs receive guidance and training materials related to meeting procedures and public comment.
- Develop a basic public-facing guide explaining how and when residents may provide comment, raise concerns, submit correspondence, or participate in public meetings and hearings.
- Explore the creation of a page on the Town website with information regarding public meetings, public hearings, submitting correspondence, identifying the appropriate board or commission for an issue, and other methods for public participation.
- The committee notes that, while concerns regarding consistency and public awareness were discussed, the issue has not generated ongoing complaints or recurring concerns since being referred to the committee.

Guidelines for Public Comment in Local Government



The public comment period is an essential part of local government meetings. These are our guidelines for public comment periods in local government. They refer to ordinary business and work or study meetings of councils, boards and committees. Public hearings and quasi-judicial hearings are governed by different rules.

It is important for elected officials and for the public to be very clear about the purpose of the public comment period. This is an opportunity for members of the public to inform the governing body about their views. The meeting itself belongs to the governing body. The public does not PARTICIPATE in the decision-making. Instead, it PROVIDES INPUT to the governing body, which takes the input into consideration in making its decisions.

A governmental body must craft its requirements with care in order to preserve the free speech rights of its citizens. If questions arise about the public comment period, consult your attorney. State law and regulations and your specific bylaws or rules of procedure have higher standing than Robert's Rules of Order, other parliamentary authorities, or these guidelines.

→ over



► TIME CONSIDERATIONS

1. Establish specific periods for public comment during your meetings, in a way that is consistent with your community's expectations and customs.
2. Set a length of time by which each period will conclude, unless the council votes to extend it.
3. Set a time limit for each individual to speak.
4. Speakers may not give their time to other people.

► WRITTEN GUIDELINES

5. Provide printed copies of the guidelines and expectations.
6. Review the guidelines at the beginning of each comment period if necessary, and explain that this is the time for citizens and residents to express their views in order to inform the council. Explain that the council will not engage in dialogue with the public during this time.
7. The council has the right to set limits on what subjects may be addressed, how long public comment will be, and how many times people may speak. All such limits must be viewpoint neutral: they must not favor one point of view over another.

► DURING PUBLIC COMMENT

8. Check your state law as to whether you may require speakers to give their name and address.
9. Require all speakers to address their remarks to the chair.
10. Require all speakers to keep to the time limits. It is important to be consistent for the appearance of fairness. Some jurisdictions provide a visible public timer, so the speaker knows how much time is available.
11. The chair should thank each speaker, whether positive or negative.
12. In general, it is best not to respond at all to public comment. However, the chair may provide brief factual information, if appropriate. This must not degenerate into lecturing or criticism.
13. The chair must not under any circumstances enter into back-and-forth exchanges with the public. See our blog entry below for more information.
14. We recommend using surnames to address speakers. If you use first names for some speakers, use them for all.
15. Councilmembers refrain from speaking during this portion of the meeting.
16. Have staff ready to note input or questions from the public and to provide responses at a later date. Do not call on staff to give public answers on the spot.

► BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

17. Model courtesy and respect and encourage members of the public to do the same.
18. The public has the right to make critical and harsh remarks. Courts have consistently found that public bodies may not require members of the public to follow the rules of decorum that apply to council members themselves. (See our blog entry below for more information on decorum rules.)
19. Members of the public do not have the right to disrupt the meeting. However, mere words most likely do not constitute a disruption in themselves. All concerned should become familiar with case law on this point, and be able to determine when conduct becomes truly disruptive.
20. The council may prohibit demonstrations (booing, hissing, clapping). These can be chilling to discourse and inhibit free speech, both on the part of the elected officials and of the public.

21. Consult with your attorney and develop an action plan for steps to take in case of disruption. The League of California Cities has excellent material available on their website. In cases of serious disruption, state law may allow you to adjourn the meeting to a different location.
22. Be very cautious about ordering a disruptive member of the public to leave the meeting. It may be advisable to give three warnings to cease from the disruptive behavior before taking any action. Consult with your attorney before doing this.

► RESPONSIVENESS TO THE PUBLIC

23. The body language and manner of the chair and other elected officials are critical to running successful public comment sessions. Councilmembers should listen to each person speaking as if there were no one else in the room.
24. Councilmembers should keep an interested expression on their faces and refrain from checking electronic devices, whispering to each other, or otherwise demonstrating lack of interest in what the public is saying.
25. It is helpful to see oneself on video in order to gauge the impression given to the public. We recommend a facial expression that projects warmth and genuine interest. If a speaker is highly negative, it is appropriate to keep a neutral, serious expression. Do not frown, grimace, sigh, or roll your eyes.
26. It is vital for elected officials to be responsive to their public, and to appear responsive. Given the limitations on the public comment period, we recommend establishing other channels to connect with your public, such as community forums, personal discussions, "coffee with the mayor," a form on your website, surveys, etc.

► OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

27. The council has the right to invite anyone to speak whom it wishes to hear from at other times than the public comment period. This is done by unanimous consent or a majority vote.
28. Provide clearly marked paper inviting individuals who are not heard during the public comment period due to time constraints to provide written comment for the council.
29. We recommend that detailed public comment should not be included in the minutes. It is sufficient to say, "Public comment was given." See our blog entry below for more information.

► SAMPLE POLICY

- Now is the time to hear from our public. We welcome your comments which are very important to us. Note that all comments are limited to three minutes.
- As a reminder, please go to the podium to comment. It is helpful for the council if you would give us your name. Please address your remarks to the chair.
- Note that we will not be entering into dialogue at this time. The purpose of this agenda item is for YOU, the public, to inform US, the council, about your views.
- If members of the public have factual questions, staff will be glad to address them. Please speak with the executive assistant who is seated next to the dais.

More information:

- Don't get into back-and-forth exchanges during public comment
- Don't include detailed public comment in meeting minutes
- Citizen's Guide to Effective Conduct of Public Meetings
- Inappropriate remarks on local government councils

Do you have feedback on these guidelines for us? We are always eager to improve our publications. Visit our website at www.jurassicparliament.com/category/effective-local-government for much more information on local government issues. Contact us at info@jurassicparliament.com or 206-542-8422 with your suggestions. We look forward to hearing from you!

Guidelines for Public Comment in Local Government
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