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Owner Anne Goon  
Area Governance

## Public Participation in Board of Health Meetings

### PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to outline how the Seneca County Board of Health will provide opportunities for members of the public to express themselves on public health matters of community interest.

### POLICY STATEMENT:

The Seneca County Board of Health is the public body that governs the Seneca County General Health District, as outlined in Ohio Revised Code Chapter 3709.02. The Board of Health conducts its meeting in accordance with Ohio's Open Meetings Act, which requires the Board to conduct its business in meetings that are open to the public. The Board must give appropriate notice of its meetings; make meetings open to the public at all times so that the public can hear discussions, deliberations, and members' votes; and keep and maintain meeting minutes.

Although the Open Meetings Act does not require a public body to afford citizens the rights of "public speech" during a public meeting, the Seneca County Board of Health recognizes the value of allowing members of the public to express themselves on matters of community interest. In order to permit the fair and orderly expression of such comments, the Board shall provide a period for public participation at Board meetings and publish rules to govern such participation on the Seneca County General Health District website.

The purpose of the public comment period is to provide an opportunity for members of the public to inform the Board about their views. The meeting itself, however, belongs to the Board of Health. The public does not participate in the decision-making, but rather provides input to the Board, which takes the input into consideration in making its decisions.

## DEFINITIONS:

Deliberation: Weighing or examination of reasons for and against taking a course of action.

Discussion: The exchange of words, comments, or ideas.

Meeting: Defined by the Ohio Meetings Act to be a pre-arranged gathering of a majority of members of a public body who are discussing or deliberating public business. The name of the gathering is immaterial (e.g., work session, retreat, etc.). Information-gathering, attending presentations, or isolated conversations between employees are not considered as the discussion or deliberation of public business.

Public body: A decision-making body at any level of government, including its committees and subcommittees, even if they don't make final decisions for the public body. The Open Meetings Act requires public bodies to conduct their business in "meetings" that are open to the public. Per the Ohio Sunshine Manual, the Open Meetings Act does not require a public body to afford citizens the rights of "public speech" during a public meeting.

## STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES:

- A. Standard operating guidelines for public participation at Board of Health meetings are published on the Seneca County General Health District website. A copy may also be provided at Board of Health meetings.
- B. Anyone having a legitimate interest in the actions of the Board may participate during the public portion of the meeting.
  1. Attendees must register their intention to participate in the public portion of the meeting upon their arrival at the meeting, using the sign-in sheet provided by the Health District.
  2. An individual will be provided a maximum of three (3) minutes to provide their oral statement.
  3. Participants are required to state their name and where they reside (e.g., name of township, village, city) before speaking.
  4. Speakers are required to address their remarks to the Board of Health President or presiding officer.
- C. The Board of Health President or presiding officer shall be guided by the following:
  1. Public comment may be accepted for a maximum of 30 minutes at each meeting, although the presiding officer may modify the total time based on the length of the meeting agenda, the number of community members wishing to participate in the meeting, the length of time Board members are available to conduct the Board's regular business, limitations on room or building availability, and other similar factors.
  2. Neither Board members nor staff will speak or engage in dialogue with the public during the Public Comment period. The Board of Health President or presiding officer may provide brief factual information, if appropriate. However, they will not

enter into back-and-forth exchanges with the public.

3. Staff will note input or questions from members of the public and provide responses at the next Board of Health meeting.
4. The presiding officer may:
  - a. Review the guidelines for public participation at the beginning of each comment period if necessary, and explain that this time is for citizens and residents to express their views in order to inform the Board. Neither Board members nor staff will engage in dialogue with the public during this time.
  - b. Limit the number of times a participant may speak in order to provide an opportunity to speak to as many individuals as possible.
  - c. Interrupt, warn, or terminate a participant's statement when the statement is too lengthy, personally directed, abusive, obscene, or irrelevant.
  - d. Request any individual to leave the meeting when that person does not observe reasonable decorum.
  - e. Request the assistance of law enforcement officers in the removal of a disorderly person when that person's conduct interferes with the orderly progress of the meeting.
  - f. Call for a recess or adjournment to another time when the lack of public decorum so interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting as to warrant such action.

## REFERENCE(S):

1. Ohio Revised Code Section 121.22. <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-121.22>. Last accessed 7/26/2022.
2. Ohio Attorney General. 2002 Ohio Sunshine Laws, An Open Government Resource Manual. <https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Publications-Files/Publications-for-Legal/Sunshine-Laws-Publications/2022-Sunshine-Manual.aspx>. Last accessed 7/26/2022.

## APPENDICES:

None

## Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date
BOH	Anne Goon: Health Commissioner	09/2022

Anne Goon: Health  
Commissioner

09/2022