

Lebanon Public Libraries Board of Trustees
Meeting Public Comment & Participation Policy

A. General Meeting Policy:

1. Meetings of the Board shall be open to the press and public in accord with RSA 91-A, the NH right-to-know law.
2. The purpose of Board meetings is for the Board to discuss and act upon matters within its authority. Although public access and observation of meetings is guaranteed under RSA 91-A, the public right to speak or comment is not. However, in the interest of encouraging public participation, the Board will provide opportunity for members of the public to provide input and comment at Board meetings consistent with the meeting and participation rules as described below.
3. This policy will be posted on the website of the Lebanon Public Libraries and hard copies will be available at meetings.

B. Opportunity for Public Comment:

The Board will provide the opportunity for members of the public to comment on library matters at all regular Board meetings. Public comment periods may not be included on the agenda for emergency meetings or for meetings the sole purpose of which is to address one or more issues in non-public session. If there will not be public comment available, this will be noted on the agenda.

In order to ensure that all persons who wish to appear before the Board may be heard, and to ensure that the Board may conduct its business and meetings properly and efficiently, the Board adopts as policy the following specific procedures and rules pertaining to public participation at Board meetings:

1. Members of the public shall not speak unless recognized by the Board Chair or other person presiding over the meeting (“Chair” shall apply to either in this policy).
2. The Board will generally schedule the public comment period at the start of the meeting, before the other agenda items.
3. The Board will provide a minimum of thirty minutes to hear general public comment relating to matters on the agenda for the current meeting only. This period may be extended by a majority vote of the Board. If speakers do not fill the public comment period, the Board will move to table the remainder of the time

until the end of the meeting. If insufficient speakers remain at the end of a meeting to fill the balance of thirty minutes, the Board will close public comment.

4. Individual speakers will be allotted a maximum of three minutes per person, and each speaker will be permitted equal time. Each person may speak one time per meeting. Speakers may not relinquish allotted time to another speaker. The Board may at the outset of the public comment period increase or decrease the individual time limit for all speakers (maintaining at least thirty minutes in total). The Trustee Secretary will be the time keeper. If the Secretary is unavailable another Trustee will serve as time keeper.
5. The Chair may recognize alternating Pro and Con speakers to an agenda topic in order to present multiple viewpoints.
6. The Board makes meetings accessible online in real time with meeting links included on the meeting notice. Although the Board will allow public comment from remote participants, attendance in person to offer public comment is highly encouraged. The Board cannot and will not guarantee that in all cases the technology will/can function adequately. If technological issues arise either before or during the meeting such that the comments are not reasonably audible at the meeting location, the Chair may terminate opportunity for remote public comment or terminate a speaker's comment period.
7. The Board will accept written comment from persons unable to attend a meeting. Written comments that meet the requirements of this paragraph and other provisions of this policy will either be (a) included in the materials publicly available at the meeting, (b) briefly described in the minutes (in the same manner as verbal comments), or (c) attached to the minutes. In the event that the full thirty minutes for public comment have not been exhausted, the Board may read the written comments aloud at the meeting on a first received basis until the comment period has expired. Written comments must be submitted at least three days prior to a Board meeting, shall include the name and town/city of residence of the commenter, and shall be limited to 150 words. Anonymous written comments will not be accepted. Only one written comment is permitted per individual for each meeting.¹
8. In order to comply with the requirements for meeting minutes in RSA 91-A:2, II, speakers shall identify themselves clearly for the record, stating their full names and their town/city of residence.
9. During the public comment period, an individual may offer comments on current agenda items only.

¹ Written comments submitted to the Board will be deemed "governmental records" under RSA 91-A:1-a and available to the public pursuant to RSA 91-A. As such, the content of a written comment may not be read aloud or made available for public disclosure if it contains information exempt from the right-to-know law per RSA 91-A:5.

10. Defamatory statements, comments threatening bodily harm, or other unprotected speech will not be tolerated.
11. Comments which do not adhere to the above provisions may be ruled out of order by the Chair.
12. Persons appearing before the Board are reminded that the public comment period is an opportunity for members of the public to provide their input to the Board but is not a question and answer session. Board members are without authority to answer spontaneously on behalf of the Board. Thus, in most instances, Board response, if any, will be deferred pending consideration by the full Board.

C. Meeting Disruptions.

The primary purpose of Library Board meetings is to conduct the business of the Board as it relates to policies, programs, and operations. While members of the public have the right to attend and may be allowed to offer input during the public comment period of meetings, they do not have the right to disrupt the meetings. Impermissible disruptions include but are not limited to:

- Shouting at any time or speaking while someone else has been recognized by the Chair
- Obstructing the view of others with posters or otherwise;
- Refusing to terminate public comment after a speaker's time has expired;
- Any other sustained or intentionally loud noises after the Chair has called for order; or
- Any other conduct intended to disrupt the meeting or person speaking.

If, after at least two warnings from the Chair, an individual continues to disrupt the meeting by words or actions, the Chair may direct the person to leave the meeting. Upon refusal, the Chair may request assistance from law enforcement officials to have the individual removed, with the potential for criminal charges.

Interruptions may result in a recess or, provided the thirty minutes for public comment has expired, adjournment of the meeting. The Chair may alternatively move to terminate the public comment period prior to the exhaustion of thirty minutes, if the meeting is disrupted and a majority vote of the board would confirm the termination of the public comment period.

Contact Information:

The following contact information is provided to contact the Chair or the Board outside of Board Meetings:

trustees@lelibrary.com

Chair
c/o Kilton Public Library
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