



COMMISSIONERS COURT  
COMMUNICATION

COURT ORDER NUMBER 144600

PAGE 1 OF 5

DATE: 1/28/2025

**SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION TO ADOPT THE TARRANT COUNTY DECORUM  
POLICY**

**COMMISSIONERS COURT ACTION REQUESTED**

It is requested that the Commissioners Court consider the adoption of the Tarrant County Decorum Policy.

**BACKGROUND**

The intent of this policy is to ensure the safety of the public, the staff, and members of the Commissioners Court, and to maximize citizen participation, efficiently receive public input, and maintain respectful decorum during each meeting.

The Tarrant County Decorum Policy is attached for the Courts consideration. If approved, this policy will be in effect beginning with the February 4, 2025 Commissioners Court meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

SUBMITTED BY	Administrator	PREPARED BY:	Kandice Boutte
		APPROVED BY:	Chandler Merritt



## TARRANT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT RULES OF DECORUM

The Tarrant County Commissioners Court (“Court”) adopts the following rules of decorum to govern regular and special meetings of the Court. The intent of these rules is to ensure the safety of the public, the staff, and members of the Court, and to maximize citizen participation, efficiently receive public input, and maintain respectful decorum during each meeting.

### **Public Participation**

During the regularly called meetings of the Commissioners Court, members of the public shall have an opportunity to address the Court in a general public comment session on any subject matter. At all meetings of the Commissioners Court, members of the public who desire to address the Court regarding an item on the agenda shall be allowed to do so before or during the Court’s consideration of the item. Members of the public may address the Court once they are verbally recognized by the County Judge or, in the absence of the County Judge<sup>1</sup>, the presiding officer. The County Judge will recognize a potential speaker before a Court vote is taken on an agendized item or, for a matter not agendized for action, during the public comment period.

### ***Time Limits***

- The speaking time limit is up to three (3) minutes per speaker whether the speaker is discussing an item on the posted agenda or during the public comment portion of Court. At the discretion of the County Judge, this time limit can be reduced for the purpose of efficiency based on the total number of public commenters on a particular topic. If there are twenty (20) speakers or more signed up to speak on one agenda item the time limit will be reduced to two (2) minutes per speaker. If forty (40) speakers or more are signed up to speak on one agenda item, the time limit will be reduced to one (1) minute per speaker. In making such adjustments to speaker time limits, the County Judge shall act in a reasonable and non-discriminatory manner. If an adjustment is made to speaker time limits, such adjustment shall be applied equally to all speakers on a particular topic regardless of the position taken by the speaker on the topic. The Deputy County Clerk, serving as Clerk of the Court, or another person designated by the County Judge shall keep the time for all speakers.
- If a person is addressing the Commissioners Court through a translator, the speaking time limit is up to six (6) minutes.
- At the conclusion of the speaker’s time, the Deputy County Clerk or other person designated by the County Judge shall sound a buzzer, alarm, or other audible device to signal the conclusion of the speaker’s time.

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<sup>1</sup> As used in these rules, the term “County Judge” refers to the County Judge when acting as the presiding officer of the Court, or to the member of the Court who serves as the presiding officer in the absence of the County Judge.

### ***Public Comment Forms***

Any person wishing to address the Commissioners Court at a regular or special meeting must complete, sign, and submit a public comment form no later than 5 pm the day before the published start time of the Commissioners Court meeting. Failure to do so will result in the individual not being recognized or allowed to address the Court. This cutoff time is intended to allow County staff sufficient time to compile all speaker forms and provide copies of the forms to the County Administrator's Office.

A member of the public who does not wish to speak may instead file a public comment form in the County Administrator's Office no later than 5 pm the day before the commencement of the regular or special Commissioners Court meeting. The County Judge or presiding officer will not read the comments in open Court, but the comments will be filed into the Court record. The County Administrator's office is located at the following address:

Tarrant County Administrator's Office  
100 E. Weatherford, Suite 404  
Fort Worth, Texas 76196  
Phone: (817) 884-1267  
[tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov](mailto:tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov)

For each Commissioners Court meeting, members of the public may submit public comment forms online at [www.tarrantcountytx.gov/PublicCommentForm](http://www.tarrantcountytx.gov/PublicCommentForm) immediately after the posting of the agenda which occurs no later than seventy-two (72) hours prior to the start of the meeting. Alternatively, members of the public may submit physical public comment forms during county business hours. Forms will be available at the County Administrator's Office located on the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) floor of the Tarrant County Administration Building.

### ***Guidelines for Speakers***

- Speaker order may be on a first-come, first-served basis (using the date and time the public comment form is received). However, speaker order is wholly up to the discretion of the County Judge.
- Speakers will be called to speak by the County Judge or presiding officer.
- A member of the public addressing the Court during regular and special meetings shall do so only from the podium.
- Before addressing the Court, speakers may be asked their name, address or Commissioner precinct number, and the agenda item that they will be addressing, if any.
- Speakers shall stop speaking when the allocated time to speak has expired.
- The County Judge maintains the right to interrupt and/or excuse a speaker when the allocated time has expired, if the speaker otherwise violates these guidelines, or for any other matter at the discretion of the County Judge.

### ***Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items***

During non-agenda items, public comments may not be addressed to staff or other members of the public; however, the Court may ask staff to review an issue. Members of the Court cannot respond to public comments on a non-agendized item except as permitted by Texas Government Code Section 551.042.

## **General Rules of Decorum**

Everyone attending a regular or special meeting of Commissioners Court must adhere to these general rules of decorum, so each meeting is conducted in a timely and orderly manner.

### ***Prohibited Behavior***

- Personal attacks, impertinent, profane, obscene, or slanderous remarks.
- Threatening, disruptive, or unruly behavior.
- Disruptive remarks or actions of approval or disapproval from the audience, such as feet stomping, snapping, whistling, yelling, clapping, verbal affirmation or rejection, or similar distractions, except that orderly clapping during the Proclamations, Resolutions, and Presentations section of the agenda is permissible.
- Approaching the dais on which the members of the Commissioners Court sit beyond the speaker's podium or to the immediate left or right of the podium, unless by the invitation of a member of the Commissioners Court.
- Wearing or displaying signs, flags, banners, props, placards, or similar items larger than 8 ½ by 11 inches. This includes items that can be illuminated or be attached to any pole, stick, or other device. This does not include words or symbols on personal apparel, such as shirts, hats, and other standard items of clothing.

### ***Cell Phones and Electronic Devices***

All cellular phones, electronic devices, or other communication devices are to be on "silent" mode at all times while Commissioners Court is in session.

### **Failure to Comply**

Failure to comply with any part of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court Rules of Decorum may result in sanctions, including but not limited to, the following:

- removal from the Court by the County Judge or presiding officer;
- temporary prohibition from commenting in person during Court;
- cancellation of a speaker's remaining time;
- a finding of contempt of Commissioners Court pursuant to Texas Local Government Code Section 81.023 which is punishable by a fine of not more than twenty-five (25) dollars or by confinement of not more than twenty-four (24) hours;
- referral of matter for other civil sanctions and/or criminal charges as may be authorized under the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas.

### **Bailiff**

The Tarrant County Sheriff or designee shall provide Bailiffs at all meetings of the Court. Bailiffs are charged with maintaining order in the courtroom and will remove any person from the courtroom who has violated the decorum of the Court at the request of the County Judge.

The Bailiff is permitted to issue criminal trespass warnings barring entrance to the premises of the G.K. Maenius Administration Building during meetings of the Court to members of the public who have: 1) caused a continuing series of disruptions over a single or multiple meetings of the Commissioners Court and have failed to comply with less restrictive means of correcting the disruptions; or 2) caused a substantial and serious disruption of a Commissioners Court meeting such that less restrictive means of correcting the

disruption would be futile. Any criminal trespass warning notice issued shall prevent entrance to the Commissioners Courtroom for a period determined by the Bailiff to be proportionate to the necessity to stop and remediate any misconduct, but shall be for no longer of a period than one hundred and eighty (180) days per incident that results in a criminal trespass warning. A member of the public who has been issued a criminal trespass warning by the Bailiff shall have the right to appeal the warning to the Tarrant County Sexually Oriented Business Board. Through the appeal, the Tarrant County Sexually Oriented Business Board may rescind the criminal trespass warning, reduce the amount of time for which it is in effect, or leave the warning in place.

### **Courtroom Capacity**

Members of the public are welcome to attend all public portions of Court meetings. In the event the courtroom is unable to accommodate seating for all members of the public or the fire safety capacity of the courtroom is reached, the Bailiff or Tarrant County Fire Marshal may close admission to the courtroom. If admission to the courtroom is closed, an overflow room shall be made available where members of the public can view a live video feed of the meeting as space permits. In addition, meetings of the Court are publicly streamed online.

### **Requests for Accommodations**

Persons with disabilities who plan to attend Court and need accommodations, auxiliary aids, or services such as interpreters, readers, or large font size are requested to contact the Tarrant County Administrator's Office at (817) 884-1267. The request needs to be made at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the Commissioners Court meeting. If the County receives a request less than forty-eight (48) hours before the Commissioners Court meeting, the County will make reasonable attempts to provide accommodations.

### **Contact Information**

For any questions or clarifications, please contact us at:

Tarrant County Administrator's Office  
100 E. Weatherford, Suite 404  
Fort Worth, Texas 76196  
Phone: (817)884-1267  
[tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov](mailto:tcadmin@tarrantcountytx.gov)