

## **MWRA Advisory Board Public Comment Policy and Correspondence Policy**

The MWRA “Advisory Board” conducts its meetings in compliance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (“OML”—M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Sections 18-25). Under this law, all Advisory Board meetings are open to the public, except when an Executive Session is held in accordance with OML provisions. However, the OML does not require public bodies to allow public comment or discussion during meetings.

M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20(g) explicitly states:

“No person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the chair, and all persons shall, at the request of the chair be silent.”

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 30A, Section 20)

Accordingly, while members of the public may observe all open meetings, the Advisory Board does not, as a general policy, hold a public comment period during its regular meetings.

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### **1. Opportunities for Public Participation**

While public comment is not included in the standard meeting structure, the Advisory Board provides several avenues for public engagement:

#### **A. Engagement Through Representatives**

The Advisory Board operates as a representative body, with each member community selecting a designee to represent its interests. The appropriate channel for public concerns regarding Advisory Board matters is through:

- The appointed Advisory Board representative for the individual's community, or
- The appointing authority of that representative, which may include:
  - Mayors (for cities)
  - Town Managers or City Managers (for strong town government structures)
  - Select Board Chairs (for traditional town governments)

Members of the public are encouraged to raise concerns through these channels to ensure they are appropriately addressed within the Advisory Board’s governance structure.

#### **B. Requesting Agenda Placement**

Individuals or groups wishing to address the Advisory Board on a specific topic relevant to its mission and authority may request to be placed on the agenda. To do so:

- Requests must be submitted in writing to Advisory Board staff.
- Staff will prescreen requests to ensure the issue is germane to the Advisory Board’s role and is not unrelated or outside its jurisdiction.

- Appropriate requests will be brought forward to the Advisory Board “Executive Committee”, which will determine whether or not to place the item on the agenda for a future Advisory Board meeting.

The Advisory Board reserves full discretion over which topics are included on meeting agendas.

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## **2. Discretionary Public Comment Periods**

While the Advisory Board does not include a public comment period during standard meetings, the Executive Committee may, in limited instances, decide to allow public comment on a specific agenda item.

If a public comment period is included in a meeting:

- The agenda will clearly indicate that public comment is allowed on a particular item.
- The Executive Committee will determine the duration of the comment period in advance.
- The Advisory Board “Chair” will manage participation at the meeting based on the level of interest and participation, within the time constraints set by the Executive Committee.
- There is no requirement for the Advisory Board or its members to engage in back-and-forth discussion of, to respond to, or to act upon any public comment.

In all cases, the Chair retains discretion over whether and how to recognize speakers, as provided under M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20(g).

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## **3. Correspondence Policy**

While Massachusetts law does not require public bodies to accept, discuss, or act on written correspondence, the Advisory Board has elected to accept written submissions as a means of engagement.

M.G.L. Chapter 66, Section 10, which governs public access to records, provides a right to request public documents but does not require public bodies to respond to unsolicited correspondence or inquiries.

To ensure transparency, the Advisory Board will:

- Accept written correspondence via email or through the Advisory Board’s website.
- Accept written correspondence mailed to the Advisory Board offices at:  
  
2 Griffin Way, Suite A  
Chelsea, MA 02150
- Forward correspondence to the appropriate Advisory Board representative or appointing authority as needed.

- Not place correspondence on the agenda for discussion or action, unless the Executive Committee determines that this is appropriate.

Submission of written correspondence does not guarantee a response or further action.

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#### **4. Chair's Role in Meeting Management**

The Chair is responsible for managing Advisory Board meetings within the confines of the OML and this policy. This includes:

- Enforcing meeting decorum and adherence to the agenda.
- Recognizing speakers only when appropriate and in accordance with established procedures.
- Ensuring that any permitted public comment period is conducted in an orderly and time-limited manner.

Any other Officer or member of the Advisory Board who presides in the Chair's absence, will follow the same policies and procedures.

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#### **5. Conclusion**

The Advisory Board remains committed to transparency and accountability, while ensuring that its meetings remain focused, efficient, and relevant to its mission.

While the public is allowed to observe all open meetings and submit written correspondence, public comment is not a regular feature of Advisory Board meetings. Requests for agenda placement may be considered through established procedures, and any permitted public comment period will be conducted strictly within the guidelines outlined in this policy.

By implementing this policy, the Advisory Board ensures that its meetings remain productive while providing clear and appropriate pathways for public engagement.