



## **Public Observation and Participation Guidelines for Commission Meetings**

Public interest in the proceedings of the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County (the "Commission," the "Agency," or "HOC") is appreciated and valued. At any open meeting of the Commission, the general public is invited to observe.

Beyond the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act ("OMA"), the Commission has a practice of reserving a portion of its monthly meetings, the Community Forum, to hear commentary from members of the public. Observation of any open meeting and participation during the Community Forum shall occur in accordance with the guidelines set forth below.

### **1. General Information**

- 1.1. Meetings of the Commission may be held either in person at a physical location, or virtually via electronic platforms, at the discretion of the Commission. The agenda for each meeting is posted in advance on the HOC website at [www.hocmc.org](http://www.hocmc.org) under "Commissioners" and "Agendas, Minutes, and Archives." The agenda includes the format of the meeting and provides information on the location of an in-person meeting or how to attend a virtual meeting. Most of the process for observation of Commission meetings will be the same regardless of the meeting format. Those areas where the process for participation is different will be noted below.
- 1.2. Please note that in compliance with the OMA, all Commission meetings are recorded, archived, and available to the public on the Agency's website at [www.hocmc.org](http://www.hocmc.org) under "Commissioners" and "Agendas, Minutes, and Archives." A virtual Commission Meeting will be recorded by HOC staff and streamed live on the Agency's YouTube channel. The recording will be publicly accessible on the Agency's YouTube channel within 24 hours of the conclusion of the meeting.
- 1.3. If you require aids or services to fully participate in a Commission meeting, please contact Bonnie Hodge, Chief Ombudsman Officer, at (240) 249-8967 during business hours or via e-mail ([bonnie.hodge@hocmc.org](mailto:bonnie.hodge@hocmc.org)) three (3) business days prior to the scheduled meeting.

## **2. General Guidelines for Observation**

- 2.1. Courteous, respectful, and civil behavior is expected from all persons attending a Commission meeting.
- 2.2. A person attending an open meeting of the Commission may not engage in any conduct that interferes with the conduct of business or with the safety of members of the public, staff, or Commissioners. In accordance with guidance from the OMA, a person attending an open meeting of the Commission may not engage in any conduct, including visual demonstrations, that disrupts the meeting or that interferes with the ability of members of the public to observe the meeting. Individuals who are disruptive may be given a warning, and, if necessary, will be removed from the meeting.

Abusive or intemperate language (written or verbal), and unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks or threats leveled at Commissioners, staff, property managers, and other customers will be considered inappropriate and are prohibited.

## **3. Community Forum Guidelines**

- 3.1. There are ten (10) time slots available for speakers during the thirty (30) minute Community Forum portion of the agenda. Registered speakers will have a maximum three (3) minutes during their designated time slot. The Community Forum will conclude when all designated registered speakers have been heard or at the expiration of thirty (30) minutes, whichever occurs first. Should more than ten persons seek to address the Commission during a meeting's Community Forum, of the ten (10) slots available, priority will be awarded in the following order:
  - 3.1.1. HOC customer issues (e.g. property residents, customers with subsidies, individuals on the Housing Path wait list) (Customers with specific property and/or program complaints or concerns may be referred to an appropriate Commission staff person for assistance);
  - 3.1.2. Items related to the current meeting agenda;
  - 3.1.3. Other HOC business.
- 3.2. To participate in the Community Forum, persons wishing to address the Commission must complete and submit the "Request to Address the Commission" Form found on the HOC website at least 24 hours prior to the start of the meeting.
- 3.3. Participants will be required to provide their full first and last name, a valid email address, and a valid telephone number so that staff can inform designated speakers of their selection to speak and time on the agenda.
- 3.4. Approved Community Forum speakers will be notified via phone or email no later than 12:00 pm (Noon) on the day of the Commission Meeting and provided the order in which to make comments.
- 3.5. If the speaker list has reached capacity, additional participants will be permitted to submit written comments using the link on the HOC website. Written comments are limited to two (2) pages typed, single-sided, on 8.5 x 11" paper, double-spaced, using 12-point font. Participants assigned designated Community Forum slots are also permitted to submit written comments up to two (2) pages typed, single-sided, on 8.5 x 11" paper, double-spaced, using 12-point font using

the same link. Written comments will be provided to the Commissioners and Executive Director for review. Written materials will not be accepted or considered if they contain personal attacks, abusive or intemperate language, or if they are unrelated to HOC business or a speaker's oral commentary.

- 3.6. Comments should be addressed to the Commission as a whole, and not to individual Commissioners or staff. The Commission has the discretion to restrict comments that are inappropriate.
- 3.7. A tone will chime and HOC staff will mute the speaker's microphone when the speaker's time has expired.
- 3.8. Speakers may not yield time to another speaker.
- 3.9. Speakers are required to follow any regulation related to observation of Commission meetings or participation in the Community Forum in order to maintain their speaking slot. Failure to do so may result in the revocation of the speaker's registered time slot.
- 3.10. If the Commission votes to close a portion of the meeting and a member of the public desires to object, the person may verbally object (at an in-person meeting) or submit a written objection statement to the Special Assistant to the Commission or via the HOC website. The objection is handled per OMA requirements. Under the OMA, an objection by a member of the public has no bearing on the Agency's ability to continue with scheduled business and close the meeting.

#### **4. Virtual Meetings**

- 4.1. Current technology requires all participants to provide an email address and a telephone number that they will use to participate in the virtual Community Forum. The telephone number will be used to identify and grant access to an approved speaker. If a telephone number is not provided, or if the participant does not use the listed phone number to participate in the Community Forum, that individual forfeits the opportunity to participate as a speaker.
- 4.2. All speakers are encouraged to join via phone at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting (usually at 3:50 pm) to assure the technological connection is working. If a speaker is not present on the line at the start of the Commission Meeting (usually 4:00 p.m.), that speaker may forfeit the opportunity to participate as a speaker. Microphones will be muted by HOC staff until the speaker is called upon to speak during their designated turn.
- 4.3. When called upon, HOC staff will unmute the speaker's microphone and indicate when the speaker's time has begun. The speaker will state his or her name, and his or her title if representing an organization or association of individuals.

#### **5. In-Person Meetings**

- 5.1. All speakers are encouraged to arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting (usually at 3:50 pm). If a speaker is not present at the start of the Commission meeting (usually 4:00 p.m.), that speaker may forfeit the opportunity to participate as a speaker. Cellular devices must be silenced.
- 5.2. All members of the public attending an in-person Commission meeting shall be seated in the chairs provided in the meeting or overflow room.

- 5.3. When called upon, a registered speaker shall proceed to the presenter's chair, state his or her name, and his or her title if representing an organization or association of individuals.
- 5.4. Each speaker will be given three (3) minutes to address the Commission. At the end of their comments, or when the chime indicates that the 3 minutes allotted has concluded, the microphone will be muted and the speaker shall cease speaking and return to their regular seat.
- 5.5. A member of the public may record open meetings of the Commission by means of a tape recorder, video camera recorder, cellular device, or any other recording device if the device does not create excessive noise or light that disturbs members of the Commission or other persons attending the meeting.
  - 5.5.1. If a member of the public wishes to photograph or videotape a Commission meeting, a staff member of the Commission will provide instruction as to acceptable locations for such activities so as to not disturb other persons observing or participating in the meeting.
  - 5.5.2. A recording or any transcript derived from such a recording may not be deemed a part of the record of any proceeding of the Commission.

## **6. Effective Date**

These guidelines are effective as of September 28, 2020 and may be updated from time to time by the Commission as appropriate.