

The 3 Minute Rule

by
Phil Rasmussen

Most public meetings held by city and county governments have an “open forum” or “public comment” session. In general, speakers are limited to three (3) minutes in which to speak their mind. Also in such meetings, speakers need to “sign-up” in order to speak.

Ostensibly, according to the meeting organizers, these “rules” are made so that “everyone who speaks can have their voice heard.” The problem is that at some point in the past, usually elsewhere, someone made such rules and now everyone has adopted them.

While some speakers are well organized, others often are not. Often times those who are not organized tend to be more passionate (interpreted by the city/county officials as emotional) than the organized speakers. Speakers need to be organized and not speak off the cuff. They need to prepare their speech.

Regardless of whether a speaker is organized or not, the impression of the audience sitting in the gallery believes that the officials for the most part, are NOT listening to the speakers. They may hear the speakers, but they are not truly listening to them. This is evidenced when officials continually check their computers, watches, cell phone, or read papers. This is also evidenced when there is no constructive feed-back or questions from the officials. It is further evidenced in some meetings when an official asks for the removal of a speaker, especially when the subject is not to the official’s liking.

The 3-minute rule is archaic and needs to be removed. These officials are elected by the people and need to listen to what they have to say, whether they like it or not.

Now there is a way around the 3-minute rule. What is required is for the speaker to gather a group of like minded people and have each of them sign up to speak. These speakers can either dovetail on the main speaker’s comments, or give their time over to the main speaker to continue speaking. This technique is often used in state and federal legislatures and needs to trickle down to the local level until local officials start to truly listen to their constituents.

Remember that these officials are supposed to be serving us - the people - and not the other way around. Start demanding that they listen to you!