

PUBLIC FORUM RULES

INTRODUCTION

Councils may hold a public forum prior to meetings of the council and committees of the Council for the purpose of hearing oral submissions from members of the public on items of business to be considered at the meeting.

Penrith City Council holds public forums prior to ordinary meetings of the Council as per Part 4 of the Model Code of Meeting Practice 2025.

The provisions of the Code of Meeting Practice requiring livestreaming of meetings also apply to public forums.

Persons wishing to participate in the public forum must complete the required form prior to 12 noon on the day of the relevant meeting.

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1. General

- 1.1 A public forum may be held prior to each ordinary meeting of the council for the purpose of hearing oral submissions from members of the public on items of business to be considered at the meeting.
- 1.2 Public forums may also be held prior to meetings of committees of the Council
- 1.3 Public forums are to be chaired by the Mayor or their nominee
- 1.4 Smart casual dress is the preferred minimum dress standard.

2. Application to speak

- 2.1 To speak at a public forum, a person must first make a written application to the council in the approved form. All parts of the application must be completed.
- 2.2 Applications to speak at the public forum must be lodged prior to 12 noon on the day of the relevant meeting. Applications can be lodged by email or at the Penrith Civic Centre.
- 2.3 Applications to speak must identify the item of business on the agenda of the meeting the person wishes to speak on, and whether they wish to speak 'for' or 'against' the item.
- 2.4 A person may apply to speak on no more than 2 items of business on the agenda of the meeting.
- 2.5 Legal representatives acting on behalf of others are not to be permitted to speak at a public forum unless they identify their status as a legal representative when applying to speak at the public forum.

3. Refusal of application

- 3.1 The General Manager or their delegate may refuse an application to speak at a public forum. The General Manager or their delegate must give reasons in writing for a decision to refuse an application.

4. Limit on number of speakers

- 4.1 No more than 6 speakers are to be permitted to speak per public forum, with no more than 2 'for' and no more than 2 'against' each item of business on the agenda for the meeting.
- 4.2 If more than the permitted number of speakers apply to speak 'for' or 'against' any item of business, the General Manager or their delegate may request the speakers to nominate from among themselves the persons who are to address the public forum on the item of business. If the speakers are not able to agree on whom to nominate to address the public forum, the General Manager or their delegate is to determine who will address the public forum.
- 4.3 If more than the permitted number of speakers apply to speak 'for' or 'against' any item of business, the General Manager or their delegate may, in consultation with the Mayor or the Mayor's nominated chairperson, increase the number of speakers permitted to speak on an item of business, where they are satisfied that it is necessary to do so to allow the council to hear a fuller range of views on the relevant item of business.
- 4.4 The applicant will receive confirmation by 4pm on the day of the Public Forum as to whether their application to speak is accepted. Where an application is not accepted, the reason for this will be provided in writing.

5. Submission of supporting material

- 5.1 Approved speakers at the public forum are to register with the council any written, visual or audio material to be presented in support of their address at the public forum, and to identify any equipment needs prior to 12 noon on the day of the relevant meeting. The General Manager or their delegate may refuse to allow such material to be presented.

6. Order of speakers

- 6.1 Speakers must attend council 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start time to register their attendance for the public forum.

- 6.2 The General Manager or their delegate is to determine the order of speakers at the public forum. The order of speakers may be redetermined by the chairperson at the public forum.

7. Speakers

- 7.1 Each speaker will be allowed 5 minutes to address the public forum. This time is to be strictly enforced by the chairperson.
- 7.2 Speakers at public forums must not digress from the item on the agenda of the council meeting they have applied to address the public forum on. If a speaker digresses to irrelevant matters, the chairperson is to direct the speaker not to do so. If a speaker fails to observe a direction from the chairperson, the speaker will not be further heard.

8. Questions

- 8.1 A councillor (including the chairperson) may, through the chairperson, ask questions of a speaker following their address at a public forum. Questions put to a speaker must be direct, succinct and without argument.
- 8.2 Speakers are under no obligation to answer a question put to them. Answers by the speaker, to each question are to be limited to one minute.
- 8.3 Speakers at public forums cannot ask questions of the council, councillors, or council staff.
- 8.4 The General Manager or their nominee may, with the concurrence of the chairperson, address the public forum for up to 2 minutes in response to an address at a public forum after the address and any subsequent questions and answers have been finalised.
- 8.5 Where an address made at a public forum raises matters that require further consideration by council staff, the General Manager may recommend that the council defer consideration of the matter pending the preparation of a further report on the matters.

9. Conduct at Public Forums

- 9.1 When addressing the public forum, speakers must refrain from engaging in disorderly or disrespectful conduct or making statements that impute improper motives to or unfavourably personally reflects upon anyone, or that are potentially defamatory.
- 9.2 If the chairperson considers that a speaker at a public forum has engaged in conduct of the type referred to in clause 9.1, the chairperson may request the person to refrain from the inappropriate behaviour and to withdraw and unreservedly apologise for any inappropriate comments. Where the speaker fails to comply with the chairperson's request, the chairperson may immediately require the person to stop speaking.
- 9.3 Where a speaker engages in conduct of the type referred to in clause 9.1, the General Manager or their delegate may refuse further applications from that person to speak at public forums for such a period as the General Manager or their delegate considers appropriate.
- 9.4 Speakers do not have absolute privilege (parliamentary privilege). A speaker who makes any potentially offensive or defamatory remarks about any other person may render themselves open to legal action.

10. Conflict of Interest

- 10.1 Councillors (including the Mayor) must declare and manage any conflicts of interest they may have in relation to any item of business that is the subject of an address at a public forum, in the same way that they are required to do so at a council or committee meeting.
- 10.2 The council is to maintain a written record of all conflict of interest declarations made at public forums and how the conflict of interest was managed by the councillor who made the declaration meeting.

11. Livestreaming of Public Forums

- 11.1 Public forums must be livestreamed via council's website or a link published on the council's website.

- 11.2 The chairperson must inform persons attending the public forum that:
- a. the public forum is being recorded and livestreamed via the council's website, and
 - b. person attending the public forum should refrain from making defamatory statements.
- 11.3 When applying to address the public forum, a person must provide their consent to broadcast their voice and image in the livestream and confirm that their address will not include any comments or information that may present legal risk.
- 11.4 A person's attendance at the public forum is to be taken by the chairperson that the person has agreed to be included in any livestream.
- 11.5 The recording of a public forum is to be made publicly available on the council's website for at least 12 months after the forum or for the balance of the council's term, whichever is the longer period.

12. Participation by members of the public at public forums by audio-visual link

- 12.1 Members of the public are requested to make their representations at a public forum in person, however, may in their application request participation by audio visual link where relevant circumstances exist.

Document Control

History	Date