

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. How Do I Submit an Open Records Request?

Public records may be requested, inspected, and copies obtained during normal business hours of Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In most cases, records require retrieval, and therefore, will not be immediately available for inspection. Every effort will be made to respond to the open records request as soon as it is practicable and without delay.

In order to request public records, you will be required to fill out an Open Records Request Form, which can be obtained online or in person from the City Clerk. Your completed Open Records Request Form should be returned to the City Clerk for processing. The cost of photocopying or providing electronic records will also need to be paid to the City at \$0.25 per side of page. The City will also charge for any and all costs associated with complying with an open records request that are above \$50 as allowed by State Statute. Staff will provide an estimated cost to the requestor after receiving a completed Open Records Request Form. Payment of the estimated costs must be made before records retrieval will begin.

More information regarding public records can be found in Wisconsin Statutes Chapter 19.31-19.39, <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/19/II/31>

2. How Do I Make a Public Comment at a Common/City Council Meeting?

City Council meetings are open to the public every month, and Meeting Agendas are made publicly available through the City's website.

People attending a Council meeting do not normally take part in the Council's discussion at a meeting. Only City Councilmembers can make motions and vote at Council meetings. However, the City Council schedules a portion of the meeting for public comment. During this part of the meeting, the Mayor will recognize members of the audience to speak briefly on topics that concern them that are not on the agenda for that meeting.

If a large number of audience members wish to speak, the meeting may not progress efficiently. Likewise, if one person spends a long time expressing his or her view, others may not get the opportunity to present their views. The Mayor may place a limit on the amount of time audience members are allowed to speak at a meeting. For example, the Mayor may ask people to limit their remarks to no more than three minutes or will only allow a specified number of people to speak.

The City has established general rules outlining when citizens may speak at Council meetings. Citizens may speak during Open Comment or during Public Hearings. Citizens are not allowed to speak during other agenda items.

3. What is a Regular City Council Meeting?

Regular meetings of the City Council are held on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month. Special meetings are called as needed.

The Council keeps a schedule of its regular meetings on file at City Hall and the full year schedule is posted on the City's website. If the Council holds a meeting at a different time from that stated in its schedule of regular meetings, it will provide the proper notice required for a special meeting.

4. What is a Special City Council Meeting?

Special meetings are meetings held at a time or place that is different from the regularly scheduled meetings. These are often scheduled to deal with specific items that need to be addressed before the next regular meeting. Generally, any matter that can be addressed at a regular meeting can also be addressed at a special meeting if it has been properly noticed. All state laws governing regular meetings, including the open meeting law, apply to special meetings. Unless otherwise expressly established by statute, the following notice requirements apply to special meetings:

- **Notice to Council.** When a special meeting has been called, the clerk must mail, at least one day before the meeting, a notice to all Councilmembers stating the time and place of the meeting. If all Councilmembers attend and participate in the meeting, the notice requirements will be considered to have been satisfied.
- **Notice to Public.** The clerk also must post written notice of the date, time, place, and purpose of the special meeting on the City's principal bulletin board at least three days before the meeting. A principal bulletin board must be located in a place reasonably accessible to the public. If the City does not have a principal bulletin board, the notice must be posted on the door of its usual meeting room.

5. What is an Emergency City Council Meeting?

An emergency meeting is a special meeting called by the Council due to circumstances that, in its judgment, require immediate Council consideration. The Council must make a good faith effort to provide notice of the emergency meeting to all media that have filed a written request for notice. Notice must be by telephone or by any other method used to notify Councilmembers. The notice must include the subject of the meeting. A published or posted notice is not necessary.

If matters not directly related to the emergency are discussed or acted upon an emergency meeting, the meeting minutes must include a specific description of them.

6. What is a Closed City Council Meeting?

A closed meeting is a meeting of a public body that the public is not allowed to attend.

A meeting of a public body may only be closed to the public if it meets the requirements of one of the specific exceptions listed in the open meeting law that authorizes such closure. The same notice requirements that apply to open meetings also apply to closed meetings. For example, if a closed meeting takes place at a regular meeting, the notice requirements for a regular meeting apply. Likewise, if a closed meeting takes place at a special meeting, the notice requirements for a special meeting apply.

7. What are Public Hearings?

A public hearing is a meeting that is held where members of the hearing can express their opinions. The Council is there to regulate the hearing and make sure that people who want to speak get the opportunity to do so. The Council does not deliberate or discuss matters during the public-hearing portion of this type of meeting; instead, it listens to the public.

There are two types of public hearings, those that are discretionary and those are required by a specific statute, ordinance, or charter provision.

- **Discretionary Public Hearings.** Many Councils will hold public hearings even when they are not legally required to do so. Generally, hearings of this type allow the public to comment on a specific issue. Such hearings can be helpful in raising concerns about an issue that the Council may not have considered. If a discretionary public hearing takes place at a time or place that is different from a regularly scheduled meeting, notice for a special meeting must be provided.
- **Required Public Hearings.** When a specific statute, ordinance, or provision requires a Council to hold a public hearing, the notice requirements must be followed carefully. Often, there are special notice requirements that are more substantial than the notice that must be provided for a special meeting. Some actions that require public hearings are:
 - Street vacation.
 - Annexation by ordinance.
 - Local improvement projects that will be paid for with special assessments.
 - When special assessments are made to property.
 - Purchase and improvement of waterworks, sewers, drains, and storm sewers by storm sewer improvement districts.
 - Adoption of a house redevelopment authority enabling resolution.
 - Adoption of an economic development authority (EDA) enabling resolution.
 - Sale of port authority land.
 - Sale of EDA land.
 - Increase of levy for an EDA.
 - Continuation of a municipal liquor store after a net loss for two of three consecutive years.
 - Truth-in-Taxation.
 - Adoption or amendment of a zoning ordinance.
 - Subdivision applications.
 - Granting of a conditional use permit.
 - Adoption of a charter amendment by ordinance.
 - Certain interim ordinances.

There are other situations that may require public hearings.