

Guidelines for Respectful Discourse

Amberley Village welcomes everyone. The Village encourages residents to share their ideas and opinions at Council and Committee meetings. Engaging with diverse perspectives and voices is vital for effective governance and a vibrant community. Council members, staff, and the public are all expected to use respectful discourse when conducting Village business, especially when opinions and perspectives differ.

It is important that each person express themselves without stereotyping other people (by race, religion, sexual orientation, or other parameters of difference). All are asked to avoid language or behaviors that overtly or subtly denigrate or negatively characterize other opinions, individuals, or groups of people.

- Speak for yourself and use “I” sentences. Do not refer to “them” or “those people.” For example:
 - YES: “I prefer...” “I support...”
 - NO: “They think...” “They should...”

- Focus on the issue and not on other peoples’ perceived character. For example:
 - YES: “I support the ordinance limiting the height of grass because I believe that well-attended yards enhance the value of housing on the block.”
 - NO: “The people across from me don’t take care of their property. They don’t care what their house looks like. Their yard is like a jungle. We’ve been here for decades; it was so nice before they moved in. They are ruining the neighborhood.”

Endorsed by the Human Rights Commission

Code of Conduct for Amberley Village Council Members

Amberley Village Council has created this Code of Conduct to describe how Council members should treat one another and the public while carrying out their elected role. This Code helps define more clearly the behavior, manners, and courtesies that align with the Village's Guidelines for Respectful Discourse.

Council members may experience stress in making decisions that impact the lives of residents. At times, the impacts of the entire community must be weighed against the impact of only a few. Despite these pressures, elected officials are always called upon to exhibit respect for everyone through their words and actions.

Amberley Village Council seeks to:

- Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the community.
- Inspire public confidence in Amberley Village's government.
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement.

Council Conduct with One Another

Council is composed of individuals with a variety of backgrounds, personalities, and opinions who have chosen to serve in public office in order to preserve and protect the present and the future of the community. To work with one another effectively, Council members are expected to:

- Participate in Village Council meetings and Committee meetings while demonstrating dignity, respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to all.
- Prepare in advance of meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda. Advance materials should be reviewed and read prior to the meeting.
- Address issues needing clarification with the Village Manager as needed prior to the meeting.
- Stay focused and act efficiently during Council and Committee meetings.
- Practice civility, professionalism, and decorum in discussions and debate.
- Honor the role of Mayor or the Committee Chair in maintaining order.
- Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches.
- Be punctual and keep comments relative to topics discussed.

Conduct with the Public

Amberley Village Council recognizes that engaging with the public in open meetings is a critical element of the democratic process. To foster an environment that is welcoming to all, Council members are expected to:

- Treat speakers with care and compassion, realizing that speaking in public can be difficult for some people and that issues at hand may be personal and emotional.
- Be fair and equitable in allocating public time to individual speakers. The Mayor or Committee Chair will announce the limit on speakers at the start of the meeting.
- Practice active listening and show attentiveness through facial expression and other body language.
- Ask questions to seek clarification or to expand information of a speaker while avoiding debate and argument with the public.

Residents Seeking to Address Council

The public is invited to attend and observe all public meetings of the Council and its committees as provided by Ohio's open meetings laws. Opportunities to speak will vary and may require advance sign-up, depending on the type of meeting:

- "Citizens to speak" portion of a Council agenda
- "Public hearing" portion of a Council agenda
- Committee meetings

In any meeting setting, residents are asked to follow the Guidelines for Respectful Discourse.

"Citizens to Speak" Portion of a Council Agenda

This typically occurs early in the meeting agenda following the Finance report.

- Citizens must sign up to address Council at a regular meeting by contacting the Village Manager or Clerk no later than 12:00 pm on the day of the meeting. Citizens may call the Municipal Building or email the Clerk (include resident address and topic in the message). For special Council meetings, the request must be made prior to the start of the meeting.
- All requests to address Council must include the person's name, address, and a general statement of the subject matter on which the person desires to speak.
- Generally, three (3) minutes are allocated for each person requesting to speak.
- Upon being recognized at a Council meeting, the individual should approach the microphone, and state their name and address and deliver remarks on the topic provided to the Clerk.
- The three (3) minute time limit does not apply, 1) to persons invited by the Council to speak, or 2) to the extent said person is responding to a question posed by a Council member.
- At meetings with unusually large attendance, the Mayor may impose such additional rules or time limitations as are deemed appropriate from time to time based on business before the Council and the number of persons wishing to speak.
- If a person makes a proper request to address Council on a particular matter being considered by the Council at that meeting, said person shall be allowed to speak before Council takes a final vote or other dispositive action on the matter.
- While this portion of the meeting is a time for the public to be heard by Council as a body, Council members generally will not engage in dialogue or debate with individuals who speak, unless permitted to do so by the Mayor.

“Public Hearing” Portion of a Council Agenda

Generally, the Mayor will indicate the amount of time allotted for public hearing comments, generally three (3) minutes.

- A citizen does not need to register in advance to speak during a public hearing but may speak after acknowledgement from the Mayor.
- The time for citizen comments during a public hearing will be announced by the Mayor after the item (ordinance) has been introduced. The Mayor will open the public hearing and allow testimony from citizens.
- The Mayor has the responsibility to run an efficient public meeting and has the discretion to modify the public hearing process to make the meeting run smoothly. If many speakers are anticipated, the Mayor may shorten the time limit and/or ask speakers to limit themselves to new information and points of view not already covered by previous speakers.
- Council Members will withhold comment during the public hearing portion of the meeting until the conclusion of the public’s portion of the hearing.
- When all the testimony has concluded, the Mayor will close the public hearing. After the close of any public hearing, no more public testimony will be accepted unless the Mayor reopens the public hearing for a limited and specific purpose.
- The Mayor will announce it is time for Council Members to ask questions or make comments.

Committee Meetings

Committees of Council meet on a regular basis and are an excellent way for residents to participate in the deliberative process.

- Committee meetings are typically less formal than Council meetings, often allowing active participation by all present.
- No advance sign-up to speak is required. The Committee Chair will establish the process for participation at the beginning of the meeting.
- Typically, discussion occurs among the Committee members and then input from others present is invited.
- Depending on the subject and number of people present, additional rules may be necessary.

Meeting Disruptions

- A person in attendance at a meeting of Council or its committees who behaves in any manner that substantially interferes with or obstructs the due conduct of the meeting is subject to removal from the meeting.
- Any recording devices that are used may not interfere with the meeting process.