

## **MANHATTAN BEACH CIVILITY POLICY AND RULES OF DECORUM**

WHEREAS, a majority of Americans believe that our society is increasingly uncivil and that this problem is particularly acute and particularly detrimental in national, state and local political arenas where it threatens government's ability to function democratically and effectively;

WHEREAS, across the nation many groups have adopted policies and rules to enhance civility at public meetings and in interactions with the public including the United States Conference of Mayors which adopted a Civility Accord;

WHEREAS, in keeping with this national trend many cities have approved policies to promote civility at local public meetings and at the workplace;

WHEREAS, the defining characteristics of the City of Manhattan Beach include its commitment to the democratic process, individual rights of expression, robust debate and tolerance for disparate views;

WHEREAS, the Manhattan Beach City Council, the City's boards and commissions, other public bodies and various community groups all convene public meetings to address controversial issues that engender passionate and often conflicting opinions;

WHEREAS, an atmosphere of incivility and disrespect at these meetings can stifle participation and debate, threaten the quality of decisions and undermine the local democratic process; and

WHEREAS, adopting principles of civility applicable to all public meetings and in all interactions in the workplace will help ensure that civic engagement and local democracy continue to flourish in Manhattan Beach.

BASED UPON THE FOREGOING, the Manhattan Beach City Council adopted, by Resolution No. 15-0048 and Resolution No. 15-0065, the following Civility Policy and Rules of Decorum:

### **CIVILITY POLICY**

A. Manhattan Beach elected officials and employees will treat members of the public with respect and expect the same in return. The City is committed to maintaining orderly administrative processes in keeping City Council meetings and City administrative offices free from disruptions.

B. This policy promotes mutual respect, civility and orderly conduct among City employees, elected officials, and the public. This policy is not intended to deprive any person of his/her right to freedom of expression, but only to maintain, to the extent possible and reasonable, a safe, harassment-free workplace for our staff. The City encourages positive communication and discourages volatile, hostile or aggressive actions. The City seeks public cooperation with this endeavor.

- All interactions between City staff, City elected officials and members of the public will be conducted in a respectful manner.

- Threats of violence will not be tolerated.
- Loud, insulting, demeaning, or offensive communications will not be tolerated.
- The City will not tolerate any individual who disrupts or threatens to disrupt City government operations, threatens the health and safety of staff or councilmembers, willfully causes property damage, uses loud and/or offensive written or oral language which could provoke a violent reaction; or who has otherwise established a continued pattern of uncivil behavior.

C. Safety and Security Steps for City Property.

The City will take the following steps to promote compliance with the Civility Policy. Internally, the City will provide a safety and/or crisis intervention techniques program in order to raise awareness on how to deal with these situations if and when they occur, and how to document each incident.

1. Official Warning

If a member of the public begins to act abusively towards a City employee, staff will issue an oral warning before taking further action in response to the abuse, and provide that person with this policy. This warning, which should clearly identify both the offending behavior and the potential consequences that will arise if such behavior persists, will provide the abusive member of the public with an opportunity to improve his or her behavior before the City takes more serious action, such as removal from the premises. A warning from City staff will often be sufficient to halt any abusive treatment.

2. Suspension from the Government Building for a Short Period

If an abusive member of the public does not improve his or her behavior in response to an official warning, the City will request the abusive individual leave the premises for a short period of time (e.g., the remainder of the day). This temporary suspension from City property provides the abusive member of the public with an opportunity to “cool down” and reflect on his or her treatment of City staff.

3. Cease and Desist Letter

If an abusive member of the public does not improve his or her behavior in response to an official warning or brief suspension, the City will respond by sending a “cease-and-desist” letter. The letter will identify both the prohibited conduct and the City’s potential remedies. A “cease-and-desist” letter will put the abusive member of the public on notice of the potentially serious consequences of his or her conduct.

4. Further Measures

Nothing in this policy precludes additional action if the above measures are not effective.

## RULES OF DECORUM AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

### A. General Guidelines

The City has numerous public meetings such as City Council meetings, Commission meetings, Board meetings, etc. (hereinafter “Public Meetings”). In order to safeguard participatory democracy in Manhattan Beach, all persons attending Public Meetings in Manhattan Beach should strive to:

- Treat everyone courteously
- Listen to others respectfully
- Exercise self-control
- Give open-minded consideration to all viewpoints
- Focus on the issues and avoid personalizing debate
- Embrace respectful disagreement and dissent as democratic rights that are inherent components of an inclusive public process and tools for forging sound decisions.

### B. Rules of Decorum

1. No person attending a Public Meetings shall engage in disorderly or boisterous conduct, including but not limited to applause, whistling, stamping of feet, booing, or making any loud, threatening, profane, abusive, personal, impertinent, or slanderous utterance—that disturbs, disrupts, or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting.

2. All remarks by members of the public shall be addressed to the Mayor or the Chair (hereinafter “Presiding Officer”) and not to any other member of the public or to any single Council, Board or Commission Member unless in response to a question from that Member.

3. Signs, placards, banners, or other similar items shall not be permitted in the audience during a Public Meeting if the presence of such item disturbs, disrupts or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting.

4. All persons attending a Public Meeting shall remain seated in the seats provided, unless addressing the body at the podium or entering or leaving the meeting.

5. All persons attending a Public Meeting shall obey any lawful order of the Presiding Officer to enforce the Rules of Decorum.

C. Enforcement of the Rules of Decorum

1. The Presiding Officer shall be responsible for maintaining the decorum at the Public Meeting and uniformly enforcing the Rules of Decorum.

2. In the event that any person breaches the Rules of Decorum in a manner that disturbs, disrupts, or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting, the Presiding Officer shall order that person to cease the offending conduct.

3. If any person continues to breach the Rules of Decorum in a manner that disturbs, disrupts, or otherwise impedes the orderly conduct of the meeting following an order from the Presiding Officer to cease the offending conduct, the Presiding Officer may order that person to leave the Public Meeting.

4. If any person refuses to leave the Public Meeting following an order from the Presiding Officer to do so, the Presiding Officer may order any law enforcement officer on duty to remove that person from the Public Meeting.

The City Council, all City Boards and Commissions and City staff shall promote the use of and adherence to these guidelines for behavior at all public meetings within the City.