

COMMISSIONERS COURT AMENDED AND RESTATED RULES OF
PROCEDURES, CONDUCT AND DECORUM OF COURT MEETINGS AND OPEN
FORUM

- I. All Regular, Special, Emergency and Executive Session Meetings of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court will be called and conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act, Chapter 551, Government Code.
- II. Regular, Special and Emergency Meetings of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court are open to the public and to representatives of the press and media. Executive Sessions of the Commissioners Court are not open to the public, the press or the media and only those individuals expressly requested or ordered to be present are allowed to attend Executive Session.
- III. The Hidalgo County Commissioners Court meets in Regular Session on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 2:00 p.m. and Special Meetings are also held on Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. unless otherwise designated. In order for a matter or issue to appear as an agenda item on the Agenda of any Regular/Special Meeting of the Commissioners Court, a request must be filed with and approved by at least one member of the Commissioners Court and/or the County Judge by 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday two weeks prior to the next Regular/Special Meeting of the Commissioners Court.
- IV. The business of Hidalgo County is conducted by and between the members of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court and by those members of the County staff, elected officials, department heads, consultants, experts and/or members of the public requested to be present and participate. While the public is invited to attend all meetings of the Commissioners Court (except Executive Sessions) the public's participation therein is limited to that of observers unless a member (or members) of the public is requested to address the Commissioners Court on a particular issue (or issues) or unless the member (or members) of the public completes a Public Participation Form and submits same to the Court Administrator prior to the commencement of the particular meeting of Commissioners Court. A sample of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court Public Participation Form is attached hereto as Exhibit "A".
- V. It is the intention of the Court to provide an open access to the citizens of Hidalgo County to address the Commissioners Court and express themselves on issues of County Government. A limited amount of time of no longer than thirty (30) minutes will be set aside during each regular or special meeting of the Commissioners Court for Open Forum to allow individuals or groups of individuals who are not listed on the agenda of Commissioners Court to address the Commissioners Court. A member of the public who desires to address the Commissioners Court regarding an item on an agenda for an open meeting must indicate the agenda item number on his or her Public Participation Form.

Members of the public shall be recognized when the agenda item is called, and shall be limited to a maximum of two (2) minutes to make his/her remarks. A member of the public who addresses the body through a translator shall be given a maximum of four (4) minutes to make his/her remarks.

- A. For Open Forum, each member of the public who appears before the Commissioners Court shall be limited to a maximum of three (3) minutes to make his/her remarks. Time for each speaker shall be maintained by the County Clerk or such other designated representative of the Commissioners Court
- B. Maximum discussion during Open Forum, regardless of the number of members of the public wishing to address the Commissioners Court, shall be limited to thirty (30) minutes. In the event that more than ten (10) members of the public wish to address the Commissioners Court during Open Forum, then only the first ten (10) speakers will be recognized. Delegations of five (5) or more speakers may be asked to appoint one person to present their views before the Commissioners Court.
- C. In matters of exceptional interest, the Court may, by the majority consensus of the members of the Court in attendance at the meeting, either shorten or lengthen the time allocated for a particular member of the public and/or all members of the public.
- D. Members of the public are reminded that the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court is a Constitutional Court, with both judicial and legislative powers, created under Article V, Section 1 and Section 18 of the Texas Constitution. As a Constitutional Court, the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court also possesses the power to issue a Contempt of Court Citation under Section 81.024 of the Texas Local Government Code. Accordingly, members of the public in attendance at any Regular, Special and/or Emergency Meeting of the Court shall conduct themselves with proper respect and decorum in speaking to, and/or addressing the Court; in participating in public discussions before the Court; and in all actions in the presence of the Court. Proper attire for men, women and children is mandatory. Those members of the public who are inappropriately attired and/or who do not conduct themselves in an orderly and appropriate manner will be ordered to leave the meeting. Refusal to abide by the Court's Order and/or continued disruption of the meeting may result in a Contempt of Court citation.
- E. It is not the intention of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court to provide a public forum for the demeaning of any individual or group. Neither is it the intention of the Court to allow a member (or members) of the public to insult the honesty and/or integrity of the Court, as a body, or any member or members of the Court, individually or collectively. Accordingly, profane,

insulting or threatening language directed toward the Court and/or any person in the Court's presence and/or racial, ethnic, or gender slurs or epithets will not be tolerated. Violation of these rules may result in the following sanctions:

1. cancellation of a speaker's remaining time;
2. removal from the Commissioners Courtroom;
3. a Contempt Citation; and/or
4. such other civil and/or criminal sanctions as may be authorized under the Constitution, Statutes and Codes of the State of Texas.

VI. The County Judge is the presiding officer of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court and is a fully participating member thereof. In the event of the absence of the County Judge, the senior member of the Commissioners Court (in terms of total number of years as an elected representative) present at the Regular, Special, Emergency Meeting or Executive Session, shall serve as the Judge Pro-Tem of the Court. However, nothing herein shall prevent the senior member of this Commissioners Court from delegating this duty to another member of the Commissioners Court.

VII. The County Judge (or the designated Judge Pro-Tem of the Commissioners Court), as presiding officer of the Commissioners Court, is responsible for conducting all meetings and members of the public who have properly completed a Public Participation Form and submitted same to the Court Administrator must wait to be recognized before they will be allowed to address the Court.

VIII. Special Rules for the Press and Media:

- A. No media personnel or equipment, including lights, cameras or microphones will be located on the Commissioners Court bench no closer than seven feet 7') in front of the Commissioners Court bench.
- B. Reporters and media technicians are required to structure their movements, equipment set-up and take-down and adjustments, etc. in such a manner as to not disrupt the Commissioners Court deliberations or the ability of the public to see, hear, and participate in the proceedings.
- C. Interviews shall not be conducted inside the Commissioners Courtroom during the time the Court is in session.
- D. Media interviews which are conducted outside the Commissioners Courtroom should be conducted in such a manner that the interview does not disturb, impede or disrupt the proceedings of any Regular, Special, Emergency and/or Executive Session Meeting of the Court.

- IX. The Sheriff of Hidalgo County, Texas, or his designated deputy, shall serve as the Bailiff at all Regular, Special and Emergency Meetings of the Court. However, in the event of the absence of the Officer, or in the event that there exists a conflict of interest between the Officer, and the Commissioners Court, or in the event of an Executive Session of the Court in which the Officer is not an authorized participant, then in such event, the Court shall appoint such other commissioned peace officers to serve as Bailiff as may be necessary.

- X. From time to time, the Commissioners Court shall conduct community meetings and public hearings. These rules of procedure, conduct and decorum shall also apply to such community meetings and public hearings, however, the Commissioners Court may adopt such additional and supplemental rules for such meetings as may be necessary and appropriate to conduct such meetings in an orderly, efficient and proper manner.

- XI. These Rules of Procedure, Conduct and Decorum at Meetings of the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court shall be effective immediately upon adoption by the Court and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or repealed by a majority vote of the Commissioners Court.