Terra Lawson-Remer

Chair

Supervisor, Third District
San Diego County Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item

Date: **October 6, 2026** **12**

To: Board of Supervisors

Improve Fairness, Civility, Accessibility, and Efficiency at Board Meetings: Amending Rules for Public Participation (Districts: All)

Overview
To enhance the fairness, civility, accessibility, and efficiency of County meetings, I propose a series of amendments to the Board of Supervisors' Rules of Procedure. These recommendations focus on restructuring meeting schedules, streamlining the order of business, and clarifying procedures for Tuesday and Wednesday sessions. The significant changes would place all Consent Agenda items on Tuesday, schedule Closed Session for time certain, and place Land Use Discussion Items for Wednesday at 1 p.m., thereby enhancing participation.

The proposed reforms also address civility and disruptive conduct by establishing additional standards and sanctions for individuals who repeatedly violate the Board's Rules of Procedure. Recent meeting data indicate that a small number of frequent speakers account for a vastly disproportionate share of public comment time, limiting opportunities for broader community participation. To promote more equitable access, the revisions would allow individuals to speak on no more than three discussion items per meeting. Additional procedural changes would combine public comment for Closed Session with Non-Agenda Public Comment and provide the Chairperson with greater flexibility to manage disruptions.

Overall, these proposed amendments are intended to promote a more inclusive, productive, and respectful environment for conducting County business while preserving the public's right to engage with the Board and have their voices heard on County matters. If adopted, the revisions to the Rules of Procedure will take effect at the next Board meeting.

Recommendation by Chair Terra Lawson-Remer:
Adopt the proposed resolution entitled RESOLUTION AMENDING MEETING MANAGEMENT RULES IN THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Improve Fairness, Civility, Accessibility, and Efficiency at Board Meetings: Amending Rules for Public Participation (Districts: All)

Equity Impact Statement
The County of San Diego prioritizes transparency and accessibility to improve public understanding of how the County operates and participation in shaping future priorities. These efforts towards accessibility are particularly important to reach those communities that have been previously disconnected from the County civic process. It is anticipated that through these changes to the Rules of Procedure, the County will ensure that the diverse voices of the community can be heard in an equitable and civilized manner, and as such, can provide input that is vital to a healthy democratic institution.

Sustainability Impact Statement
The changes to the Rules of Procedure allow stakeholders to plan for community engagement and identify meaningful ways to continually seek input to foster inclusive and sustainable communities.

Fiscal Impact
There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

Business Impact Statement
N/A

Advisory Board Statement
N/A

Background
Public engagement is the cornerstone of transparent and accountable government, and Board of Supervisors meetings are one of the primary venues where all San Diegans can make their voices heard. To improve efficiency, accessibility, civility, and fairness at Board Meetings, I am proposing several changes to the Board's Rules of Procedure.

First, it is recommended that the meeting schedule and order of business be revised to improve efficiency and accessibility for the public and County staff. Specifically, the Rules should more clearly define the order of business for the Tuesday and Wednesday sessions. It is proposed that all Consent Agenda items be considered on Tuesday. On Wednesdays, the Land Use Discussion Items will be set at 1:00 p.m. Finally, Closed Session matters would be scheduled for a certain time on Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. or Wednesday at 11 a.m., depending on the volume of discussion items. The existing Rule 2(k)(4) dictates that the Chairperson shall coordinate scheduling and notification of Closed Session with all Board members and appropriate County staff. The set time for Closed Session will be noted in the published meeting agenda.

These adjustments would offer several benefits. First, scheduling all Consent Agenda items on Tuesday would enable the public to comment on them during a single session. Currently, Consent Agenda items are divided between Tuesday and Wednesday, which may make it difficult for the public to determine which agenda includes a particular topic.

Second, establishing a designated time for Closed Session matters would enable more efficient use of County Counsel and contract attorney resources by eliminating the need for staff to wait until the conclusion of Tuesday's session. Third, matters continued from Tuesday's General Legislative Session could be addressed Wednesday morning before the Land Use Legislative Session, thereby avoiding delays to Land Use Legislative Discussion items.

Finally, because many Land Use Legislative Discussion Items concern unincorporated areas, scheduling them for 1:00 p.m. would improve public access by reducing travel-related constraints and provide ample time for the use of public transportation.

The additional changes to the Rules pertain to improving civility and fairness at Board meetings. Unfortunately, civility at Board meetings has decreased in recent years, subjecting members of the public, County staff, and the Board to frequent rudeness, accusations, profanity, threats, and generally offensive language. These constant disruptive actions have led to delays, intimidation of other members of the public such that they will not come to Board meetings, and the need to increase security at the meetings. Indeed, many of those violating the Rules speak out of turn, interrupt others when they are speaking, raise their voices over others, constantly repeat their prepared speaking points regardless of the relevancy to any particular item on the agenda, and denigrate anyone who does not agree with their viewpoints. Instead of occasional problems with those who break the Rules and interrupt the meetings, it has become a regular aspect of each and every Board meeting.

While criticism of the County, the Board, and its employees is expected and welcome as part of a healthy and transparent public engagement process, the constant disruptions have not only made it difficult for the County to conduct its business at the Board meetings, but they have also deterred or made it difficult for other members of the public to attend and be heard.

The Board's attempts thus far to improve the situation have included warning speakers, taking breaks, ordering those disrupting the meeting to leave, and, in extreme circumstances, directing the Sheriff's deputies to arrest some members in order to control the meetings and discourage the breaking of the Rules. These efforts have not reduced or eliminated the problem. Therefore, these additional provisions are suggested to limit the incivility and redundant comments and to remove those who repeatedly break the Rules for extended periods of time if needed.

The Board of Supervisors regularly receives substantial public input across its General Legislative Session meetings. However, some members of the public use the opportunity to speak on every agenda item, often with little or no relevance to the item, as a tactic of disruption.

Between January and September 1, 2026, compiling data from the Tuesday General Legislative Sessions, the Board heard 1,668 separate public comments (i.e., speaking turns) from approximately 571 unique individuals, speaking on 101 agenda items. This reflects broad civic engagement; however, the analysis also shows that public comment time is disproportionately concentrated among a small number of repeat speakers. While most participants spoke only once, with 429 individuals providing a single comment, testimony volume is significantly shaped by a much smaller group of highly frequent speakers. The top five speakers alone accounted for 33% of all speaking turns, and the top 10 speakers contributed 44% of total testimony. The five most

frequent speakers, in particular, provided 559 speaking turns, representing nearly one-third of all public comment time.

This concentration means that although many residents participate, a limited cohort dominates the speaking time by offering comments on numerous agenda items at nearly every meeting, frequently repeating the same talking points at each item, regardless if they are relevant to the specific item. As a result, the Board's ability to hear from a wider and more diverse cross-section of the community is reduced, particularly on days with large-scale items that attract substantial public interest. Some agenda items drew more than 100 speakers, amplifying the impacts of repeat participation and making it more difficult for infrequent or first-time speakers to be heard. This disruptive commenting tactic makes for lengthy meetings, which impedes the Board's ability to conduct its business. And as a result, individuals wishing to be heard on an item must often spend a significant amount of time waiting for their turn to speak, with some having to leave for other commitments before their item is called. The public process does not benefit from these extended meetings and the inability to hear from all interested individuals.

While it is vital to protect the rights of individuals to speak at these public meetings, the County cannot allow the rights of others to be stifled. To ensure equitable access to public comment and to support broader participation, three changes to the Board's Rules of Procedure are proposed.

First, for the discussion calendar, it is proposed to implement a rule allowing individuals to speak on up to three discussion items at each session. This change preserves opportunities for meaningful input by all speakers while addressing the documented imbalance created when a small number of individuals dominate total comment time by taking speaking turns across numerous items. The rule is designed to better distribute speaking opportunities across all constituents who wish to participate, reduce barriers for less frequent speakers, and improve overall accessibility and fairness in public engagement. Additional methods for communicating to the Board on all items are still in place. People would continue to have the opportunity to comment by submitting letters, emails, or e-comments on all agenda items.

This adjustment aligns with the analysis indicating that modest guardrails can help prevent the disproportionate concentration of comment time by only a few individuals while still maintaining an open and inclusive public comment process. It provides a balanced approach that respects robust public participation while ensuring that more voices, not just the most frequent ones, have an opportunity to be heard by the Board. County staff are aware of several counties and cities that have similar rules, such as limiting the number of occasions to speak or having individual time limits for each meeting.

Second, the Board's public comment process would be streamlined by combining Closed Session public comment with Non-Agenda Public Comment. Closed Session public comment is currently heard at the end of the General Legislative Session, which generally has few comments from the public on items being discussed in Closed Session. Moving Closed Session public comment to the beginning of the meeting to be heard with Non-Agenda Public Comments would allow the opportunity for more people to comment on Closed Session. Additionally, public comment on Closed Session items tends to align with similar comments from the public made during Non-Agenda Public Comments.

Third, the proposed updates include several changes that provide options for the Chairperson and the Board to consider for addressing those that frequently disrupt, disturb or otherwise impede the Board meetings.

The goal of these changes is to provide more flexibility to the Chairperson and the Board for handling disruptive behavior. These changes would clarify for the public how their participation in Board meetings will be impacted if the rules are continuously violated. More importantly, the changes were prepared to encourage the public to be civil and productive in their engagement with the Board to ensure a respectful and productive environment.

Public comments are an essential and necessary aspect to Board meeting process. The public has every right to air grievances, criticize the County, and raise issues of concern to the Board that they may not be aware of. However, the purpose of the Board meetings is to conduct County business, which should be able to proceed without disruptions or threats to public officials, County employees or other members of the public.

If adopted, the changes to the Rules of Procedure would go into effect for the next Board meeting.

Linkage to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan
The proposed action supports the Strategic Initiative of Community Engagement in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by providing information, programs, public forums or other avenues that increase access for individuals or communities to use their voice, their vote, and their experience to impact change.

Respectfully submitted,



Terra Lawson-Remer
Supervisor, Third District

Attachment(s)
Attachment A – Resolution
Exhibit A