

# **Public Comment Policy**

Valley City Barnes County Public Library

Adopted August 21, 2025

In 2025, the 69th Legislative Assembly passed, and the governor signed Senate Bill 2180 which mandated “[e]very regular meeting of a governing body of a city, county township, school district, park district, or water resource district must include an opportunity for an individual to provide public comment.” SB 2180 also authorizes the governing body means of limiting individual public comments. The Valley City Barnes County Public Library Board of Directors welcomes this opportunity to receive comments from the public.

Two business days prior to providing public comment at a regularly scheduled Library Board of Directors meeting, the individual must call or email the Library Director to reserve the opportunity to speak. Required information includes name of speaker, address, and the topic they wish to address. Groups wishing to comment must select one representative to present their viewpoint.

An individual is limited to commenting on a topic that is on the meeting’s agenda or was on the agenda at a previous meeting of the current year.

An individual is limited to a speaking time of two minutes. A speaker may request more time by appealing to the board. The board may offer more time by a majority vote of the board members. Total speaking time is not to exceed 5 minutes.

Total time for individual commentary is limited to 15 minutes. At the discretion of the board, a majority vote may extend the commentary time.

An individual is limited to topics that are pertinent to the public entity. Other comments related to Library business and unrelated to the current or prior meeting’s agenda may be submitted in writing or email to the Library Director. If the topic is regarding an item or items in the library collection to be reconsidered, the policy for Reconsideration of Materials must be followed.

The speaker must respect and follow the orderly conduct of the meeting.

The comments the speaker presents may not be defamatory, abusive, harassing or unlawful and must be directed to the Board as a whole.

Comments may be prohibited or referred to an alternative procedure, if they include confidential or exempt information or if the comments are otherwise prohibited by law.

The board may place the time for individual public comment at a point in the meeting the board deems appropriate.

An individual may not yield any of their allotted time to another individual.

No board discussion or action will be taken during the public comment period.

**Public Comment as a Right:** The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees individuals the right to express their views freely, particularly in public forums like government meetings, even if those views are unpopular, critical, or controversial. In open meetings, public comment is a form of participation in the democratic process.

**Scope of Free Speech:** While the public has the right to express themselves, not all speech is protected under the First Amendment. For example, speech that incites violence or poses a danger is subject to restriction to ensure the safety, dignity, and functionality of the meeting. Restrictions on speech must be viewpoint-neutral and necessary to maintain an environment free of danger and physical harm. A government body cannot silence someone based on their opinion about a particular policy or topic.