

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 15, 2025 9:00 AM
To: Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org>
Cc: Distrib- City Clerk <city.clerk@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Re: Public Comment for Inclusion in the December 15 City Council Meeting

FOR INCLUSION IN THE PUBLIC RECORD - December 15 City Council Meeting

Dear Mayor Kate

Thank you for your recent letter and for explaining your reasoning behind the current public comment structure. I respectfully and wholeheartedly disagree with you however, as your approach prioritizes what you perceive as efficiency over what best practices show is essential to meaningful democratic participation.

Across California — and especially in Marin and Sonoma counties, the Cities of Sausalito, Mill Valley, Tiburon, San Anselmo, Fairfax, Novato, Sonoma, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Healdsburg, Cloverdale and the County of Marin all place non-agenda public comment at the beginning of meetings. Some Cities allow up to 30 minutes initially with additional public comment at the end of the meeting if needed.

This is a widely recognized best practice. Cities adopt this approach not because they must, but because experience shows it improves access, equity, and the quality of deliberation.

Public comment during meetings serves a role that emails, private conversations, and staff outreach cannot replace. It is public, collective, and **ON THE RECORD**. It allows residents to hear one another, to surface shared concerns, and to speak in the same forum where policy direction is discussed. When non-agenda comment is placed at the end of meetings, participation predictably declines among the electorate who often have limited time, family responsibilities, or long commutes. This has the effect of “chilling” public participation and speech.

Structure sends signals. When public voice comes first, it communicates that community concerns are foundational to the Council’s work, not something accommodated after business is complete. Hearing from residents early also strengthens decision-making by giving councilmembers context before discussions and positions harden.

You Mayor Kate and the Councilmembers report to the electorate. The people who elected you should have the opportunity early and often to express their concerns and priorities in the most open and equitable forum available. Public participation is not an obstacle to good governance. It is one of its clearest measures.

I respectfully request **NOW FOR THE SECOND TIME**, that you move the Public Comment period back to the beginning of the Agenda where it used to be until you moved it on October 2, 2023.

Sincerely

Ken Dickinson
San Rafael Meadows

On Monday, December 8, 2025 at 03:00:59 PM PST, Mayor Kate <kate.colin@cityofsanrafael.org> wrote:

Hi Mr. Dickinson - Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about public comment during last week's meeting. I always appreciate hearing from residents who care deeply about how our public processes work, and I wanted to follow up with a bit more context about why "open time for public expression" is placed at the end of our City Council meetings.

At its core, the regular City Council meeting is a business meeting where both the Council and the community work through a posted agenda. The agenda structure is designed so residents know when specific items will be heard and can plan their time accordingly. Years ago, after many evenings where large groups came to speak on issues unrelated to the agenda, often delaying the residents who were waiting for a specific item, we made the decision to place general public expression at the end. For those individuals who had arranged their evening around a particular agenda topic, it was deeply frustrating to sometimes miss their opportunity to speak because earlier non-agenda comments went long.

Over the more than three years since this change, I've also observed an unexpected but positive outcome: people who come for open time often choose to speak on posted agenda items as well. Many begin with, "I wasn't planning on speaking, but...", and their spontaneous input frequently enriches the discussion for everyone.

I also want to emphasize that community input is never limited to the meeting itself.

Councilmembers are always available for conversations outside chambers, and we read every email submitted on any topic. As you've experienced, our city staff is also accessible and engaged, and they welcome hearing from residents throughout the week.

In any case, I wanted to make sure you had the reasoning behind the decision and to reiterate my appreciation for your engagement with our civic process.

Kate Colin (she/her/hers)
Mayor, City of San Rafael



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