January 20, 2026

Honorable Mayor and City Council members
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Ave
San Rafael, CA

Re: Comments for City Council meeting on 1/20/26, agenda item ***"OPEN TIME FOR PUBLIC EXPRESSION 10 MINUTES"***

Rather than trying to limit the amount of time for Public Comments to 10 minutes at the beginning of the meeting or deferring public comments to the end of the agenda, I suggest you consider the following.

I looked at public comments at City Council meetings beginning in 2021, after Mayor Kate Colin's election, and thru December 2025. Here is what I found.

In general, special meetings tend to have lower numbers of public comments so I focused on the regular City Council meetings. On average, 2 or 3 people provide comments during open time for public comments at regular City Council meetings. Occasionally, there will be 5 or 6 people and less frequently as many as 7 people providing comments on different topics during open time. When the number is higher than 7, it usually involves a group of people commenting on the same issue.

Over the period of time I looked at (2021 - 2025), issues that frequently involved larger numbers of people commenting on the same issue at City Council meetings included the following topics, with the number of council meetings in parentheses:

- Employee labor negotiations (5 meetings)
- Dominican Valley development (3 meetings)
- High utilities/Rent protection in Canal (3 meetings)
- Prostitution in the Canal
- Sinkhole at Rotary Manor
- Police use of Force (comments lasted over 3 hours)
- West End Block Party complaints
- Lowering speed limit on Fourth Street
- Ordinance 2040 Homeless camping
- Bicyclist fatality in Terra Linda

There was an increase in public comments in 2023 with the Dominican development project being commented on more than other topics during Open Time for Public Expression.

Beginning October 2, 2023, public comments were moved to the end of the agenda and since that time there has been a steady decline in people commenting during Open Time for Public Expression, with a

27% decline in 2024 and another 24% decline in 2025, showing something many of us already knew, that moving the public comment period to the end of the agenda discourages public participation.

Generally, people attend a City Council meeting to bring an issue to the attention of their elected representatives when they have not been able to resolve it any other way. The City may want to consider other ways to receive input or proactively seek input before issues are brought to a City Council meeting for resolution.

The City may want to agendize or schedule special meetings for controversial development issues or for significant events, such as police use of force and the bicyclist fatality in Terra Linda. The Mayor may want to resume monthly meetings with the Federation of San Rafael neighborhoods to improve outreach to the many neighborhoods represented by the Federation.

The City may also encourage those organized with 5 or more people commenting on the same issue to contact the City Clerk to have their issue placed on the agenda. By responding to large group comments, time allowed for other comments will be minimal and won't need time restrictions, as is currently proposed, and can be placed at the beginning of the meeting, as is standard practice for other municipalities and governmental organizations.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

Victoria DeWitt