

Rules for Public Hearings – Mills County Texas

To avoid the potential spread of infectious disease, Mills County will hold public hearings via technology until Governor Abbot's declared Emergency related to COVID-19 has ended.

Mills County Officials will be present via Zoom and/or in person in Commissioners Court.

The entire public hearing will be streamed live via YouTube and also available for viewing via the Mills County Court You Tube Channel after the fact at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUZ5tgRpJIS1evoh7eogJnw>.

The URL for the event will be included in the notices and agendas for the hearing and included in the Agenda, Public Notices & News calendar of meetings on the Mills County website ([www.co.mills.tx.us](http://www.co.mills.tx.us)).

Any materials to be presented during the hearing, will be available through Mills County's website for public viewing and/or download in advance and/or available for pickup in the County Judge's office. Any materials that are presented during the hearing must be submitted to the County Judges office by noon on the workday preceding the hearing to permit their dissemination to all possibly interested participants. Besides being available on the County Website the material may be shared with the public via screen share feature in Zoom (also viewable via Youtube). Commissioners Court will also reserve the right to not accept materials not provided without enough time to make them publicly available.

The public may participate in the hearing via telephone if internet access is unavailable. A telephone number for dial in access will be provided on the meeting notice for those without access to the internet.

Rules adopted by Mills County Commissioners Court for public hearings will be available on the Mills County Website. These rules are in addition to the adopted rules for Commissioners Court regular and special meetings.

The County Judge (in his absence, the Judge ProTem) will preside over the public hearing and is empowered to commence the hearing, end the hearing and enforce applicable rules. A bailiff will be present and a moderator for on-line and telephone participants.

- Public participants wishing to speak at the hearing will be requested to register in advance:
  - Complete speaker forms (available on website, Judge's office or from Clerk's office) and return physically or scanned/faxed to Clerk or Judges Office at least 60(?) minutes prior to hearing to permit the Zoom set up for each speaker.
  - If more than 6 sign up to speak on any side of the issue, they will be encouraged to select common spokespeople to represent a group input.
  - Speakers are limited to 5 minutes each
  - All speakers must register in advance (in person, internet (Zoom) and phone.) Due to limited seating available during the pandemic, only 8 people will be allowed in the Commissioners' courtroom. It is recommended that all speakers "arrive" (phone, internet – Zoom, or in person) at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the hearing.
  - Any physical presence for Court hearings must follow the COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Mills County Judiciary (posted on website). Mask, social distancing and screening will be required to enter courthouse

Written questions are encouraged but must be signed with a legible name and contact information and should be submitted to County Clerk or County Judge's office at least 24 hours in advance of the hearing. Questions will be read on camera and answered or otherwise acknowledged in the course of the hearing. Written comments and questions will not be read and may be disregarded if they are unsigned, do not relate to the published subject for the public hearing or violate the rules established for the meeting.

Public participation will generally be grouped into three categories

- Specific Questions
- Statements in support of the topic of the hearing
- Statements in opposition of the topic of the hearing

Questions or statements unrelated to the topic of the hearing may be omitted or deferred to address later

The purpose of the public hearing is for the Commissioners Court to receive public input and, when applicable, for the public to hear from an applicant about a proposed project in advance of County decision making. It is not appropriate for the governing body to engage in argument with the public. If there is a specific question that can be answered in the hearing – providing that answer to the public is appropriate but if official action is sought it should be deferred to be published as an agenda item in a regular meeting of the Commissioners' Court – or directed to a specific elected official if it is not a Commissioners' Court matter.

The general order of business in a public hearing should be:

- Convene the Public Hearing including an explanation of the purpose of the public hearing
- Summarize the rules for the hearing
- Invite the applicant to make a presentation (if hearing is over tax abatement) . If the hearing is over Budget or Tax Rate the Judge and or Treasurer will make the initial presentation
- Open the floor to Public
- Moderate Q&A between Public and third party applicator or Commissioners Court
- Enforce of time limitations and protocol violations
- Close hearing either at conclusion of public comment or expiration of allocated time

Following a public hearing, Commissioners Court may reconvene a properly scheduled and noticed meeting if applicable.