

FOIPub Meeting Ready

Livingston City Commission - what to expect, how to prepare, and a practical rights reference

Use this as a preparation guide, not a confrontation guide.

Most meetings are formal but predictable. Check the current agenda and City guidance before relying on any detail.

What to expect when you arrive

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early. Find the Community Room, open or pick up the agenda, and look for any public-comment sign-up sheet.
- Wait until the Chair calls for comment and recognizes you before speaking.
- Livingston's published handbook directs recognized speakers to the podium. Other public bodies may use a floor microphone or a microphone at your seat.
- Be ready to state your name and address for the record and identify any organization you represent, as Livingston's handbook requests.
- The Chair may limit public speakers to four minutes. Put your main point first.
- Direct comments through the Chair. A written copy of prepared remarks may be given to the City Clerk for the record.

Ways to participate

Attend in person

Regular Commission meetings are generally first and third Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room unless the City states otherwise.

Join virtually

The City says a virtual option is available. Use the Zoom link in the agenda for the specific meeting.

Submit written comment

Identify the agenda item or item number. The City currently asks that comments arrive before noon on meeting day for distribution before the final vote.

Request scheduled public comment

The City publishes a separate advance scheduling process through the City Manager and City Clerk. Check the current Commission page for deadlines.

How to prepare

- Write your first sentence before you arrive: what do you want the Commission to know or do?
- Use the agenda item number if your comment concerns a listed item.
- Bring the source you plan to cite and a short written copy of your remarks.
- Practice a 2-3 minute version even if the maximum is four minutes.
- Assume your comments may be recorded and become part of the public record.
- If you are unsure where your comment fits, ask City staff before the meeting rather than guessing at the microphone.

Practice the clock

FOIPub's web planner estimates speaking time at about 130 words per minute. Four minutes is roughly 520 words, but pauses and a slower pace reduce that number.

Typical agenda flow

- 1 Call to order
- 2 Roll call
- 3 Public comment
- 4 Consent items
- 5 Public hearings
- 6 Ordinances and resolutions
- 7 Action items
- 8 City Manager and Commission comments
- 9 Adjournment

Montana participation baseline

MCA §2-3-103 requires public-participation procedures and an agenda item for public comment on non-agenda public matters within the agency's jurisdiction. The exact meeting procedure is still governed by the body's current rules and applicable law.

Quick rule of thumb

Use the meeting process, stay within the recognized comment period and time limit, keep your conduct non-disruptive, and preserve any disagreement for the record rather than escalating it in the room.

Know your basic rights and limits

These are practical reference points, not a prediction of how a court would rule in a particular situation. Facts and local rules matter.

Strong protection	Speaking during a recognized public-comment period, subject to reasonable time, subject-matter and procedure rules.
Strong protection	Criticizing an official during permitted comment. Viewpoint-based suppression is constitutionally suspect; actual disruption still matters.
Limited	Continuing after your allotted time expires or interrupting another speaker. Reasonable order and time rules can be enforced.
Conditional	Calmly objecting to an official or officer. Verbal challenge receives substantial protection, but do not physically interfere or create a safety risk.
Don't do this	Physically resisting removal or arrest. Montana law says unlawfulness of an arrest is not a defense to resisting when the officer acts under color of authority.

If a situation becomes tense

State your position calmly. If an official or officer gives a direct order, do not turn a legal disagreement into a physical confrontation. A short objection is easier to document later than a prolonged argument.

"I intend to comply with your order, but I respectfully object."	"Am I being ordered to leave?"
"What meeting rule am I alleged to have violated?"	"Am I being detained, or am I free to leave?"
"I do not consent to a search."	"I will comply, but I do not waive my rights."
"May I have your name and badge number?"	

Montana rule:	You may say you believe an order or arrest is unlawful, but do not physically resist. MCA §45-7-301 says unlawfulness of an arrest is not a defense to resisting arrest when the officer acts under color of official authority.
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Authorities worth knowing

MCA §2-3-103

Public-participation procedures and comment on non-agenda public

If something goes wrong