

Wisconsin Open Meetings Law

Regarding Public Comment

Wisconsin Open Meetings Law (found in Wis. Stat. § 19.8) states that all meetings of governmental bodies, such as town boards, shall be held publicly and be open to citizens at all times unless otherwise expressly provided for by law (such as in closed sessions, which are strictly governed by Wis. Stat. § 19.85). However, open meetings law **does not** require a governmental body to allow members of the public to speak or actively participate in meetings. The law only grants citizens the right to attend and observe meetings.

The law does allow the town board to provide a portion of the meeting for public comment if it so wishes. If a public comment period will be included in the meeting, it must appear in the meeting notice.

Unless another statute specifically applies, any governmental body has wide discretion over any public comment period it chooses to permit. For example, a governmental body can limit how much time it gives each citizen to speak, and it may limit the length of the entire public comment session.