

ARTICLE III. QUASI-JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS¹

Sec. 2-79. Intent.

It is the intent of the city commission to provide an equitable and efficient method for the commission, as well as certain city boards, committees, and authorities, to hear matters which are considered quasi-judicial in nature. These procedures shall be utilized by the city in regard to hearings on quasi-judicial matters.

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015)

Sec. 2-80. Definitions.

For the purpose of this section, the following definitions shall apply unless the context clearly indicates or requires a different meaning.

Aggrieved or adversely affected person. Any person who will suffer a negative effect to a protected interest as a result of the quasi-judicial action sought by the applicant. The alleged adverse interest may be shared in common with other members of the community at large, but shall exceed in degree the general interest in the community.

Applicant. Any person, corporation or other legal entity who files with the department responsible for land development an application for an action which has been determined by city staff to be quasi-judicial in nature as reflected on the agenda and within the agenda packet for that commission meeting at which said matter will be heard.

Clerk. For any proceeding before the city commission, the clerk is the city clerk. For any other board, the clerk will be the clerk or secretary designated for the respective board, committee, agency, authority, or hearing officer.

Competent substantial evidence. Evidence that is sufficiently relevant and material that a reasonable mind would accept it as adequate to support the conclusion reached.

Ex parte communication. Any verbal or written expression made to a local public official which is outside of the presence of all interested parties and is not made during a public hearing or meeting to consider matters involving the exercise of quasi-judicial decision making.

Local public official. Any elected or appointed public official of the City of North Port who recommends or takes quasi-judicial action as a member of a quasi-judicial body.

Party or parties. The applicant, the city, and any aggrieved or adversely affected person who has complied with the notice provisions set forth in section 2-81 below.

¹Editor's note(s)—Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, adopted July 27, 2015, repealed the former article III, §§ 2-79—2-83, and enacted a new article III as set out herein. The former article III pertained to ex parte communications and derived from Code 1990, §§ 115-1—115-5.

State law reference(s)—Access to local public officials; quasi-judicial proceedings on local government land use matters, F.S. § 286.0115 .

Presider. For any proceeding before the city commission, the mayor or, in his/her absence, the vice-mayor is the presider. For any proceeding before a hearing officer, the hearing officer is the presider. For any proceeding before any other quasi-judicial body, the chair or, in his/her absence, the vice-chair is the presider.

Quasi-judicial body. The city commission sitting in its quasi-judicial capacity, or any other city board, committee, authority, or hearing officer sitting in its quasi-judicial capacity.

Quasi-judicial in nature. The application of a general rule or policy to specific individuals, interests, or activities by the quasi-judicial body, as more specifically set forth in section 2-82 below.

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015; Ord. No. 2018-12, § 2(2.01), 6-12-2018)

Sec. 2-81. Notice procedures for aggrieved or adversely affected persons.

- (a) *Generally.* All parties, including the aggrieved or adversely affected persons, are entitled to a fair and impartial hearing, notice of the hearing, and an opportunity to be heard.
- (b) *Notice required.* Any aggrieved or adversely affected person desiring to become a party in the quasi-judicial proceeding must provide written notice to the city clerk.
 - (1) *Contents.* The aggrieved or adversely affected person's notice must include:
 - a. The person's name, address, email, and telephone number;
 - b. A description of the effect that the decision will have on the person and their particular interests, such that the person meets the definition of "aggrieved or adversely affected person" in section 2-80;
 - c. A statement whether the person is in favor of or opposed to the application; and
 - d. A statement whether the person requests notice of any special magistrate proceedings subsequent to the city commission's determination.
 - (2) *Filing deadline.* The city clerk must receive the required notice no later than 5:00 p.m. on the eighth calendar day before the hearing. Delivery of the notice to the city clerk will be deemed notice of the aggrieved or adversely affected person's intent to appear at all applicable quasi-judicial proceedings to present testimony and evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and participate as described in the procedures for quasi-judicial proceedings. The city clerk will include the notice of an aggrieved or adversely affected person with the agenda for the hearing(s).
 - (3) *One notice requirement.* Unless challenged by another party pursuant to subsection (c), an aggrieved or adversely affected party's notice that complies with this subsection shall be deemed proper notice for all quasi-judicial proceedings held on the matter.
- (c) *Quasi-judicial body review.* Upon the request of any other party to a proceeding, the quasi-judicial body must determine whether the aggrieved or adversely affected person's notice complies with this section. In making its determination, the quasi-judicial body may consider only the content of the notice and may not consider any additional evidence. If the quasi-judicial body finds that the request is not in compliance, then the person requesting to be recognized as an aggrieved or adversely affected party may only provide public comment in the hearing. The determination by a quasi-judicial body will not disqualify the aggrieved or adversely affected person's notice in any other quasi-judicial proceeding on the same application.

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015; Ord. No. 2018-12, § 2(2.01), 6-12-2018; Ord. No. 2021-11, § 2.01, 2-9-2021)

Sec. 2-82. Quasi-judicial matters.

- (a) Matters that are quasi-judicial in nature involve the actions of public officials who are required to investigate facts, or ascertain the existence of facts, hold hearings, weigh evidence and draw conclusions from such facts, as a basis for their official action, and to exercise discretion of a judicial nature and any other decision involving the implementation, rather than formation, of city policy. Quasi-judicial matters include, but may not necessarily be limited to the following:
- (1) Site-specific rezoning of land which rezoning will have an impact on a limited number of persons or property owners where the decision is contingent on fact(s) arrived at from distinct alternatives presented at a hearing and where the decision can be functionally viewed as policy application rather than policy setting;
 - (2) Applications for special exceptions or amendments thereto;
 - (3) Hearings on code enforcement violations by the code enforcement board or hearing officer;
 - (4) Applications for preliminary and final plats;
 - (5) Variances from the application of the land development code;
 - (6) Appeals from an administrative determination by the director of development services or any city official interpreting the provisions of the land development code;
 - (7) Hearings on applications for disability or service retirements before the board of trustees of the North Port Police Officers and Firefighters Pension Fund; and
 - (8) Vacation of easements.
- (b) For all quasi-judicial matters which require more than one reading, the first reading shall constitute the quasi-judicial proceeding. Once a decision is rendered to grant or grant with conditions the relief sought by the applicant, then the second reading shall be procedural in nature with the quasi-judicial body ratifying and affirming its prior decision. If new evidence is introduced which, if brought to the attention of the quasi-judicial body at the first reading, would have had a material impact on its decision, the quasi-judicial body may reopen the quasi-judicial hearing. If the quasi-judicial body reopens the quasi-judicial hearing, it shall be scheduled for a date and time certain and provide notice to all parties.

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015; Ord. No. 2018-12, § 2(2.01), 6-12-2018)

Sec. 2-83. Procedures for quasi-judicial proceedings.

- (a) The following is a guideline for conducting quasi-judicial hearings:
- (1) *Introduction.* The presider will introduce the case and if appropriate, defer to the clerk for the reading of the ordinance or resolution caption.
 - (2) *Swearing in.* All persons wishing to speak on a quasi-judicial matter shall take an oath to tell the truth. This includes attorneys representing parties, as well as members of the public providing comment.
 - (3) *Ex parte disclosures.* The presider shall call for disclosure of ex parte communications by the members of the quasi-judicial body. Such disclosures shall be made in accordance with this article.
 - (4) *Presentation of evidence.* The presider shall have the option of determining the order to expedite the proceedings. However, all parties shall be provided the opportunity to present their case. The general order of the presentation of evidence shall be as follows:

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- a. *Presentations.* The applicant, city staff, and any aggrieved or adversely affected person, in that order, shall each have 20 minutes to make an initial presentation.
 - b. *Rebuttal.* The applicant, city staff, and any aggrieved or adversely affected person, in that order, shall each have five minutes for rebuttal. During this time, the parties may present rebuttal testimony, cross-examine opposing witnesses, impeach witnesses, and rebut evidence.
 - c. *Public comment.* Any person who did not speak during presentations and rebuttals may speak for not more than three minutes. Prior to being heard, each speaker must take an oath to tell the truth and must state his/her name and address for the record. The quasi-judicial body may by motion extend the time for an individual speaker, provided that all other speakers are allowed the same time extension.
 - d. *Questions.* The presider and quasi-judicial body may ask questions of any party, witness, or person providing public comment.
 - e. *Closing argument.* Any aggrieved or adversely affected person, city staff, and the applicant, in that order, shall each have five minutes for closing argument.
- (5) *Action by the quasi-judicial body.*
- a. At the conclusion of the presentation of the evidence and testimony, the quasi-judicial body shall close the public hearing. The presider shall entertain any motions, and the quasi-judicial body shall proceed to deliberate and vote on the motion(s). The quasi-judicial body shall make its determination based upon competent substantial evidence.
 - b. If after notice of hearing, a party does not appear, the hearing may be conducted and an order entered in the absence of the party.
 - c. If during the deliberations a question arises which the quasi-judicial body desires to ask, it shall reopen the public hearing, pose the question and allow each party the opportunity to respond to the question posed prior to closing the public hearing again and resuming deliberations.
- (b) *Representation of parties.*
- (1) *Attorney.* Any natural person or party may represent himself/herself or may be represented by an attorney. If the party chooses to be represented by an attorney, a notice of representation, signed by the attorney, shall be filed with the clerk prior to the hearing.
 - (2) *Non-attorney.* In the event any party (other than a corporation or the city) chooses to be represented by a non-attorney, such party shall file a written, notarized power of attorney with the clerk prior to the hearing stating that the person appearing has the full power and authority to act on behalf of the party in the matter.
 - (3) *Business representative.* A corporation or limited liability company may appear through a representative who is listed with the Florida Department of State as a current officer or manager of an active corporation or limited liability company entity. The representative must identify himself/herself in that business capacity.
- (c) *Evidence.*
- (1) All relevant evidence shall be admitted. The quasi-judicial body may exclude irrelevant, immaterial, or unduly repetitious evidence.
 - (2) Hearsay evidence may be accepted for the purpose of either supplementing or explaining any direct evidence, provided it is not offered to prove the truth of the matter asserted, but such hearsay evidence shall not, in and of itself, be considered sufficient to support a finding or decision unless the

evidence would be admissible over objections in any civil litigation proceeding in a state or federal court in Florida.

- (3) Except as provided herein, neither the Federal Rules of Evidence nor the Florida Evidence Code shall apply, but fundamental due process shall be observed and shall govern said proceedings at all times.
- (d) *Orders.*
 - (1) If the quasi-judicial body denies relief to the applicant, the quasi-judicial body's legal counsel shall issue a subsequent written order setting forth the reasons therefor.
 - (2) The quasi-judicial body shall have the authority to issue any and all orders to afford the proper relief, and this authority shall include the authority to grant continuances to a date certain upon good cause shown.
- (e) *Hearing record.* The clerk shall maintain custody of all recordings of testimony, evidence, and documents submitted into evidence at the hearing. This shall include the official file in the matter, as well as any document presented at the hearing or demonstrative exhibit seen by the quasi-judicial body while making its decision. Nothing herein shall be deemed to prohibit any party from providing a court reporter for the proceedings. Any party wishing to appeal the decision of a quasi-judicial body shall have the responsibility to ensure compliance with F.S. § 286.0105 .

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015; Ord. No. 2018-12 , § 2(2.01), 6-12-2018)

Sec. 2-84. Ex parte communication.

- (a) Any person not otherwise prohibited by statute, charter provision or ordinance may discuss with any local public official the merits of any matter on which action may be taken by any board or commission on which the local public official is a member. The provisions of this article shall be followed for all such communications.
- (b) The following process is hereby established for ex parte communications with any local public official:
 - (1) *Disclosure.* Pursuant to F.S. § 286.0115 , the substance of any ex parte communication with a local public official which relates to quasi-judicial action pending before the official is not presumed to be prejudicial to the action if the subject of the communication and the identity of the person, group or entity with whom the communication took place is disclosed and made a part of the record before final action on the matter.
 - (2) *Written communications.* A local public official may read a written communication from any person. However, a written communication that relates to quasi-judicial action pending before a local public official shall not be presumed prejudicial to the action, and such written communication shall be made a part of the record before final action on the matter.
 - (3) *Investigations and site visits.* Local public officials may conduct investigations and site visits and may receive expert opinions regarding quasi-judicial action pending before them. Such activities shall not be presumed prejudicial to the action if the existence of the investigation, site visit or expert opinion is made a part of the record before final action on the matter.
 - (4) *Timing of disclosure.* Disclosure made pursuant to subsections (1)—(3) must be before or during the public meeting at which a vote is taken on such matters, so that persons who have opinions contrary to those expressed in the ex parte communication are given a reasonable opportunity to refute or respond to the communication.

(Ord. No. 2015-30, § 1, 7-27-2015; Ord. No. 2018-12 , § 2(2.01), 6-12-2018)

Secs. 2-85—2-109. Reserved.