

MCPB 7/24/25
Item 8 - Correspondence

From: [MCP-Chair](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: Re: Question about rules of procedure
Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2025 2:04:23 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Saturday, July 12, 2025 12:11 PM
To: Vaias, Emily <Emily.Vaias@mncppc.org>
Subject: Re: Question about rules of procedure

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Hi Emily,

I hope you're keeping cool.

I see that a review of the Rules of Procedure are on the agenda for the Planning Board's July 24th meeting.

On June 26, 2024, the Board voted 3-1 to change the witness signup deadline from noon on the day before to noon 2 days before a hearing.

Are you able to quantify the number of timely witness signups before this change vs since?

Since the change, on how many instances was testimony received after the deadline and allowed with chair's discretion vs. denied?

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

On Wed, Jun 26, 2024 at 6:12 PM [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]> wrote:

Thanks Emily.

The Montgomery County Sierra Club wrote to the Planning Board in opposition to this change. I am a member of their Executive Committee.

On Mon, Jun 24, 2024 at 5:06 PM Vaias, Emily <Emily.Vaias@mncppc.org> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED] – We are staying near the ac, that is for sure. Hope you are well.

Thanks for your question. The Planning Board reviews its Rules of Procedure each year to see if changes are needed. These proposed changes reflect our collective experience with operations and how best to serve the public and be efficient with staff resources. In particular and in response to your question, requiring sign-ups and written materials by noon 2 days in advance instead of one day allows the Commissioners' Office Staff and IT Staff, if needed, to work with those not familiar with the Teams platform but wishing to participate virtually. They will have the opportunity to receive training to ensure they are able to fully share their perspective with the Board. There are many times when Staff is behind the scenes contacting people who wish to speak and need assistance the day of the hearing because they could not be reached Wednesday afternoon. Having one more day for this outreach and training could help everyone. It also allows Staff to address any concerns those wishing to testify may have which may include: their method of testimony (in-person or virtual), confirmation that their form or sign-up was received, questions regarding representation or time to speak, and inclusion of written testimony, etc. Staff has found that with the permanent switch to hybrid hearings, having only a few hours to address all of these issues is not sufficient to serve the public fully and properly.

In addition, the Board would like additional time to read written testimony in advance of the weekly hearings. Lastly, this would align us with the Prince George's County Planning Board which also requires 2 days for sign-ups and testimony.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please let me know. – Emily

Emily J. Vaias

Principal Counsel

Emily.Vaias@mncppc.org

301.495.4648

301.495.2173(fax)



From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Saturday, June 22, 2024 10:52 AM
To: Vaias, Emily <Emily.Vaias@mncppc.org>
Subject: Question about rules of procedure

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Hi Emily,

Hope you are staying cool.

What is the rationale behind the proposal to change the public participation deadline from noon on the day before a hearing to noon 2 days before?

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: [Unger, Darian](#)
To: [MCP-Chair](#)
Subject: Sierra Club comments for Item 8 on July 24, 2025
Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2025 12:06:18 AM
Attachments: [25-7 Darian Unger - Sierra Club testimony to Planning Board .pdf](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Exercise caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding.

Dear Planning Board Members and Staff,

Please see the attached letter from the Sierra Club regarding Planning Board rules (meeting item 8 on Thursday, July 24, 2025), to complement our in-person testimony that day.

Thank you very much,

-Darian Unger

Chair, Montgomery County Sierra Club



July 22, 2025

Dear Chairman Harris and Planning Board Members:

The Sierra Club Montgomery County Group offers the following comments on the Planning Board's Rules of Procedure, scheduled to be discussed on July 24, 2025.

We ask that the Planning Board restore the witness signup deadline to noon on the day before a hearing.

On June 27, 2024 the Planning Board voted 3-1 (Ms. Pedoeem opposed) to change the witness signup deadline from noon on the day before to noon two days before. Cited reasons included the need for more time to assist witnesses with virtual testimony and the desire of commissioners to have more time to review witness testimony. Sierra Montgomery County Group testified against this change. Staff argued that the change was consistent with the practices of the Prince George's County planning board. This change was not a recommendation of the Development Review Process Workgroup.

The witness signup deadline for the Montgomery County Planning Board had been set at noon on the day before the hearing for many years. This rule worked well for the public. Land use matters are complex. There is only a short window of time between when agendas are posted, staff reports are made public and the witness signup deadline. Changing the witness signup deadline to two days before the hearing shortened the amount of time for the public to digest this information and compose written testimony or decide whether to testify virtually or in-person.

As a volunteer group focused on environmental protection, this change has reduced our ability to participate meaningfully in land use matters. We operate by consensus so a shortened window makes it more difficult for us to collaborate and compose testimony by the deadline. We imagine this change has had a similarly chilling effect on participation by other groups and individuals.

Besides reducing public participation, this change also reduced appeal rights enshrined in state law.

Please reverse the earlier, unfortunate decision that reduced opportunities for public input. Restore the witness signup deadline to noon on the day before hearings.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Unger", written over a light gray rectangular background.

Darian Unger
Chair, Montgomery County Sierra Club

