

# Outspoken About `Silence'

September 15 2004

I am very troubled by the move to squelch public discussion during Rocky Hill Town Council meetings [Connecticut section, Sept. 13, "Imposed Silence Creates Confusion"]. Rocky Hill's tradition of open government is in jeopardy.

Recently, town fathers have ignored a long-standing historical precedent by restricting public comment on town council action (or inaction). Adhering to a strict interpretation of Robert's Rules of Order limits participation by the public to a two-minute period before debate begins among council members.

When Rocky Hill abandoned the purest form of democracy - the town meeting - and adopted the council-manager form of government, it was able to maintain the finest elements of the town meeting by allowing public comment on agenda items after the council debated the items.

This tradition of open discussion provided the public with the right to discuss agenda items (including those that might be added without notice) and gave residents a clear connection to decisions that impact their lives.

When first elected as a public official, I thought I was endowed with some special insight to know and understand the needs of constituents. It didn't take me long to learn that I didn't have all the answers.

I learned daily from my constituents and was able to call on their expertise and opinions when formulating public policy.

Current town leaders have stated that "this is not a town meeting." That, however, does not restrict us from welcoming all residents into the decision-making arena. Participation is the lifeblood of democracy. I urge the council to rethink its position.

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