

NEWS

Fort Collins mayor ends council meeting after demonstrators disrupt it, chant about Gaza

3 women cited after gluing their hands to wall

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Watch Fort Collins City Council meeting end as soon as it started Tuesday
A demonstration in which three women glued themselves to a wall prompted Fort Collins City Council to end its meeting early.

Fort Collins City Council members abruptly ended their meeting Tuesday night when dozens of people seeking a local resolution supporting a cease-fire in Gaza began shouting inside the council chambers at the start of the meeting.

After the meeting ended and the crowd dispersed, three women who had glued their hands to the wall of the chambers in protest were issued citations.

The demonstration was loud and heated but did not turn violent.

Dozens of people had gathered for the meeting, which began at 6 p.m. and included only one discussion item on the agenda: a vote on whether to approve a metropolitan district for a proposed residential development.

As Mayor Jeni Arndt was making remarks about conduct during public comment, a person in the chambers shouted: "This meeting will not come to order," which was part of a statement the three women had given to audience members to read aloud once they had glued their hands.

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Claire Kopp, Hania Sakkal and Cheryl Distaso stand along the wall that they glued their hands to in protest Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at Fort Collins City Hall. They were protesting City Council's declining to bring a resolution forward in support of a cease-fire in Gaza. *Rebecca Powell/The Coloradoan*

Arndt interrupted, warned that the comments were out of order and said individuals could be removed from the chamber for disrupting the meeting. The individual resumed making the statement.

Arndt asked for the person to be removed, but they continued making the statement, so she gaveled into a recess.

The council members left their seats, with the exception of council member Kelly Ohlson, who remained in his seat for a few minutes before leaving it.

For 20 minutes, the crowd chanted several refrains, including "cease-fire now!" and "let Gaza live!" They sang protest songs, including, "City Council you can't hide, you're ignoring genocide."

Then, a member of the group addressed the crowd and urged them to allow the meeting to proceed as long as council returned. Sabrina, who declined to share her last name with the Coloradoan, said she didn't want council members to be able to use the disorder as an excuse to not listen to what the people gathered had to say.

City Manager Kelly DiMartino addressed the crowd, saying council wanted to resume the meeting, which includes a public comment portion.

But demonstrators in the chambers shouted at her, saying council didn't listen to them even when they did follow the formal process.

With council members still not present at the dais, people took to the podiums to make their comments.

Eventually, the microphones were disabled, and members of the crowd shouted their displeasure, calling council members cowards.

When a group of people left the chambers, including one person who was displaying an American flag and an Israel flag, some individuals seemed to taunt them by waving and shouting goodbye. One person could be heard telling them to go home and watch Al Jazeera. Some chanted "Judaism yes, Zionism no."

After another round of chants, council members came back into the chambers at 6:42. They took a vote to suspend the rules so they could address the disturbance, and Arndt declared the meeting over.

Ginny Sawyer, project and policy manager in the city manager's office, told the Coloradoan it's protocol to go into recess when there is a disturbance in the chambers.

In an interview with the Coloradoan after the meeting, Arndt said she adjourned because the disruption made it impossible for council to carry on with its business.

She said it was important to keep calm.

"We didn't want the police pulling people out," Arndt said.

The demonstration followed [two consecutive council meetings where more than 200 people collectively showed up to urge City Council to form and approve a resolution expressing support for a cease fire between Israel and Hamas.](#)

More: [Crowd urges Fort Collins City Council to support cease-fire in Gaza](#)

The Human Relations Commission discussed the possibility at a meeting last month and recommended council pass a resolution. Council opted not to act on a resolution at its Feb. 20 meeting.

Women glue hands to walls of council chambers

Three women glued their hands to the wall as the meeting was starting, while the crowd recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Fort Collins residents Cheryl Distaso, Claire Kopp and Hania Sakkal used Gorilla glue to affix their hands to the brick wall where people line up for public comment.

After the meeting was adjourned, the crowd was asked to leave the chambers and was told the building was closing. A few opted to remain in a sign of solidarity with the women.

The remnants of that crowd left the building only after a woman who identified herself as their attorney told them it was time to go and that she would remain there with them while first responders worked to free them.

After a crew from Poudre Fire Authority freed them, the women came out of the building carrying their citations, which included obstructing a legal assembly, disrupting a legal assembly and tampering.

The women said they knew going in that there would be legal consequences for carrying out their plans.

Kopp said they felt they had exhausted all the options available to them.

"They refused to even put it on the agenda for discussion," she said. "We feel just in good conscience that we can't sit by week after week after week watching people be massacred and our city just ignoring it and moving on, like you know, 'We're just going to talk about pickleball now.'"

Distaso said council didn't even acknowledge the Human Relations Commission's recommendation to move forward with the resolution.

Sakkal said as a Lebanese American whose country has been bombed by Israel, "to be forced to pay for the massacre of my own people is unconscionable."

"We've tried every avenue that we possibly can, and nobody cares to listen to our concerns," she said. "What is it that we're supposed to be doing at this point? Just walk away and say, 'It's OK?' It's never going to be OK."

In an interview after the meeting Tuesday, Arndt responded to a question about her reasons for not taking up a resolution by referring to the comments she made at the Feb. 20 meeting, when she thanked the public for showing up to speak on the topic.

In that statement, she said she heard love, compassion, commitment to peace, freedom of expression and freedom of religion, all bedrock values of the city and the country.

"Islamophobia and antisemitism on the rise, and it's my sincere desire that we see each other in Fort Collins as friends and as neighbors, as community members as we live work and play together. That we celebrate what brings us together and embrace our differences, that we care for each other and live in peace and understanding."

As for what happened Tuesday, Arndt said council's business will resume.

"This is part of our public discourse, and we're going to work it out."

This story may be updated.

