

# How to Testify at a Public Hearing

## The Public Hearing Process

All major zoning and development applications are required to go through a public hearing. The hearing process is designed to alert city leaders to public concerns and to encourage citizen participation in government issues. Planning & Development Services regularly presents information before the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Design Review Committee and the City Council, among others.

Your input is vital to the decision making process. If you have concerns about a project in your neighborhood or want to show your support for a particular item, get involved! You don't need to be a polished public speaker, or even a great writer to be heard. Following the points below will help you organize your ideas and enhance your testimony.

### Remember Your Objective

Your goal is to persuade the decision makers to decide in favor of your side of an issue. Angering, alienating or antagonizing the group you want to influence will not help your cause. The best way to present your ideas is with testimony that is clear and informed.

### Know the Law

Officials are not likely to make decisions that violate state or city codes. No amount of passion, exhortation or pleading by citizens will accomplish this. However, laws can be

changed. If you believe there is a law that needs to be changed, organize to have it amended.

### Show Your Strength

Many groups organize their testimony by having a few people speak on behalf of the group. The leader should ask the chair permission to have those in the audience supporting the testimony to stand. This conveys the extent of public concern with the issue.

### Speak to the Point

Public officials have heard testimony from hundreds of people. They're grateful when testimony is pertinent, well organized and directly regards the matter at hand.

Long stories, lectures on philosophy, or abstract complaints about generalities are usually a poor use of time, since the immediate problem is for the decision makers to choose a course of action to take on a specific question.

### State Your Recommendations

When you testify, be sure to include your recommendations for resolving the situation. Be specific: don't leave officials guessing about what it was you wanted them to do.

### Be Informed

Your testimony gains credibility if it is well researched. Get a copy of the staff report (or the plan, proposed ordinance or other available pertinent materials) for the project, and read it before planning your testimony.

If you have questions or need clarification on an issue, contact Planning & Development Services at 384-3830 and ask to speak with the analyst working on the project.

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### Be Bold

You don't need to be an architect, engineer or planning professional to provide insightful testimony. Don't worry if you're not a great writer or public speaker; just become informed, get involved, and express your opinion.

### Be Heard

Testimony can be either presented orally or in writing. Each method is given attention by officials. Written testimony has no length limitations, so you can explain your concerns or recommendations in detail. Oral testimony presented at the hearing has time limitations, so that everyone concerned has a chance to speak. Written testimony should be submitted to staff one week prior to the hearing to allow time for the public officials to review it.

## **Be Reasonable**

Public officials must balance the views, interests and proposals of all parties involved, and find the best course for serving the overall public good.

While it is your obligation to present your own interests, remember that you have legitimate competition. Be prepared to occasionally compromise.

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## **A Guide to Preparing Effective Testimony**

