Testimony for Public Hearings

Development Services

Voicing your opinion at land use hearings is an effective way to influence public decisions. Carefully prepared testimony gives public officials a chance to hear directly from citizens. Testimony becomes part of the public record, which allows the person who testified to participate in later appeals. Hearings are often covered by media, and offer another way to get a message out to the public.

A Resource for Jackson County Residents

One of the most important ways for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process is by testifying at local land use hearings. It is our primary goal to encourage citizen involvement in all phases of the planning process.

This brochure is designed to help citizens to effectively prepare and deliver testimony at meetings of the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, the Jackson County Planning Commission, the White City Planning Commission or before a Hearings Officer.

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Development Services

How to Prepare and Testify at Land Use Hearings

—A Resource for Jackson County Residents—



Preparing Testimony for Public Hearings

Know Your Issue

Support opinions with facts. Review the land use file on the case. Read any media reports on it and talk with elected officials, staff and neighbors. Be knowledgeable about the opposition's arguments and be prepared to counter them. The Internet can be a useful tool to research planning issues.

Know The Land Use Record, and Local and State Standards and Criteria

Review the staff report for the hearings body. The staff report is a key document that will inform your testimony. Refer to the state and local standards and criteria that the hearings body must use.

Prepare an Outline of Your Testimony to Use While Speaking

- Develop a full written statement and bring multiple copies to leave with the body you are addressing. This should be no more than two concise pages of testimony and should not include handouts or other pre-printed materials. If you are copying materials from websites, simply providing the web links in a letter is preferred.
- Address the full hearings body. (i.e.: "Chair and Commissioners…")
- Indicate if you are representing a group or yourself, and give a brief description of your interest.
- Stick to the facts.

If Members of a Group Are Testifying

Group members should cover different topics, so testimony is not repetitious.

Know When, Where and Before Whom You Will Testify

Be sure you know the facts about the public event. Check on when testimony will be taken, where the venue is and research the responsibilities of the hearings body you will be addressing. Be prepared to limit your testimony to 3-5 minutes.

Be Familiar With The Group's Process

If possible, attend one of the group's meetings in advance of the hearing at which you will be testifying to observe procedures and the arrangement of the room. Schedules can change at the last minute, so it is wise to verify with staff or the agency on the day of the meeting. Find out how many copies of your testimony are recommended for the particular meeting. Two copies should always be provided to staff for the record.

Rehearse Your Testimony

Practice giving testimony in front of friends and get suggestions for improvement. Make sure your main points will be covered in the time allowed.

Anticipate Questions

Compile a list of possible questions you may be asked from the public body and how you would respond.

General Tips

- Be polite and project a positive image.
- Maintain eye contact if possible.
- Arrive early to sign up to testify. This will also allow you to listen to testimony from others and avoid repeating their points.
- Dress appropriately for a public meeting.

Giving Testimony

at Public Hearings

Limit Oral Testimony to 3-5 Minutes

- State your name and address for the record.
- Begin by saying you support or oppose a particular agenda item, and briefly explain why.
- Use facts to verify your statements.
- Describe how this issue affects you personally, what you suggest as a solution and then summarize.
- Be sure to tell the reviewing body exactly what you wish them to do. If you are opposing, your testimony should discuss why the proposal is inconsistent with the controlling law, rules or ordinances.
- Do not repeat yourself or get off-topic; keep your argument concise.

Appeal to Your Audience

Emphasize your commonalities with the public body and act respectfully to those with whom you disagree. The more you know about your audience, the more you can tailor your message to them.

Control Your Feelings

Try to relax and keep your emotions in check when testifying. While you want to speak from the heart, you do not want your feelings to overshadow the content and reason of your message. This is not the format for personal attacks or staff reviews.

Thank The Group

When you are finished testifying, thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.