

TIPS FOR SUBMITTING PUBLIC COMMENTS ON LAND USE APPLICATIONS

The City of Oregon City strongly supports and encourages public involvement in the land use planning process. Members of the public can submit written comments before a staff decision, before a hearing, or testify at a hearing. Read below for tips and reminders on how to write effective public comments. We know that these can be confusing so you are encouraged to contact the City planning staff if you have any questions about an application, the approval process, or the Oregon City Municipal Code.

When considering your comments, you should understand that the Planning Commission, City Commission and Historic Review Board decisions are based on how well the proposal meets the requirements in the city code. The decision making body can only consider testimony that speaks to the relevant criteria. Decision makers and elected leaders rely on citizens to broaden their knowledge about neighborhood and community-wide issues. Still, testifying at a public hearing can be challenging, especially if you've never attended one.

1. Check the public notice for the comment deadline and/or hearing date.
<https://www.orcity.org/projects>.
2. Talk to the planner reviewing the application if you have questions.
3. Read the application, staff report and other background materials. Files for all Type II, Type III, and Type IV land use applications can be found on the web at: <https://oregon-city.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx> The staff report is available a week before the hearing and provided as a link in the meeting agenda.
4. Know the decision-making criteria. These are the applicable standards and criteria that the hearing body must use when they make a decision. The decision-making criteria are outlined in the public notice and staff report, and can be found through the www.orcity.org website and [https://library.municode.com/or/oregon city/codes/code of ordinances](https://library.municode.com/or/oregon%20city/codes/code%20of%20ordinances)
5. Brainstorm a list of the points you wish to make. If you represent a group, ask other people for ideas and add their points to the list.

Letter Content

- Include your name, address and phone number and/or email.
- State your interest in the case and who you represent (If you are speaking for yourself, say that).
- What you want/don't want the hearing body to do (one or two sentences if you can).
- Cite specific, measurable impacts.
- Try to avoid hearsay or prophetic ("chicken little") statements.
- Provide information, if you can, that reveals gaps or errors in the staff's findings and conclusions, or introduce new information.

Letter Organization

- In the heading, identify the subject and state if you are in favor or opposed.
- Provide evidence for why the hearing body should make a particular decision.
- Relate evidence directly to the decision-making criteria.
- Provide reference to page numbers in the Staff Report or Application.
- Use bullet points or numbered lists to outline your points.
- Keep it short (one or two pages).

Submitting the Letter

You can submit a letter by mail, email, or drop it off at the office. Check the public notice for the correct contact information. Letters can also be submitted at a public hearing.

When testifying at a public hearing, if a speaker wishes to give an electronic presentation, the presentation must be delivered to City staff, preferably via electronic mail, 48 hours prior to the meeting.

Giving Verbal Public Testimony

Here are a few quick reminders for effective testimony.

- Speakers should address the commission or board, not the public.
- The more carefully you prepare, the more effective your testimony will be: study the application and back up your opinion with facts, purely emotional arguments won't carry much weight. However, tempered emotion with concrete examples of how the decision will affect you personally is acceptable and often persuasive.
- Speak slowly and clearly and stay focused on 2 or 3 well thought out arguments.
- You'll be more convincing if you are familiar with the comprehensive plan and ordinances since those documents govern local decision-making.
- The most effective testimony is that which addresses the criteria that the decision makers must apply in order to make a legal decision
- 6 rules of verbal testimony
 - 1. Be courteous
 - 2. Be brief
 - 3. Focus on primary issues
 - 4. Supply meaningful facts
 - 5. Respect others
 - 6. Avoid repeating prior testimony

Advice from your fellow citizens

From citizens:

"Write the letter and put it away for a few days. Reread it, and if you still feel the same way, send it."

"Don't save the letter writing only for objections. Praise helps city staff know what they are doing right as well."

From a City Commissioner:

"It is especially helpful if the writer has information that is unique or has a point that is unlikely to be covered by others."

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