

## 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 Community Developer Director, 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 maker 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.

### HOW DO I LEARN ABOUT DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS IN THE CITY?

For those interested in keeping up with the latest development applications in the city, there are two great ways to get the information.

- Click on the development tab at the bottom of [www.orcity.org](http://www.orcity.org). This action will take you to a page that lists all noticed land use applications and city capital improvement projects. They are sorted by year ([www.orcity.org/projects](http://www.orcity.org/projects))
- Subscribe to a weekly land use notice list at <https://www.orcity.org/subscribe>. (Under Community/Public Information on Main Page) Enter your email, and you will receive a weekly roundup of all land use applications noticed or with updated information on the project page that week. The neighborhood box at the bottom is for city projects and land use applications that are located within a specific neighborhood association boundary.

### TAKE TIME TO REVIEW THE APPLICATION MATERIALS

- Read the application, staff report and other background materials. All land use applications that require a notice can be found on the web at: [www.orcity.org/projects](http://www.orcity.org/projects).
- Check the public notice for the comment deadline and/or hearing date. This is very important! If you are late submitting your comments, they cannot be entered the record.
- Talk to the planner reviewing the application if you have questions. You can find their name and contact information on the land use notice.
- Know the decision-making criteria. These are the applicable standards and criteria that the decision maker must use when they make a decision. The decision-making criteria are outlined in the public notice and staff report, and can be found at [www.orcity.org](http://www.orcity.org)

### HOW TO MAKE EFFECTIVE COMMENTS

- 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.
- If the application requires a public hearing, the staff report is available a week before the hearing and linked in the meeting agenda which can be found at [www.orcity.org/meetings](http://www.orcity.org/meetings). Review the report to see if your concerns or comments have been addressed, if you have questions about staff's recommendations, contact the planner assigned to the case to ask for clarification.

## WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PUBLIC COMMENTS

- 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 decision maker to allow (one or two sentences if you can).
- Cite specific, measurable impacts.
- Identify, if you can, the specific criterion/criteria that the applicant is or is not meeting.
- 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 email, 24 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.
- 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."