

Guide to Speaking at Planning Commission Hearings

Introduction

Public testimony is a vital part of the land use process in Douglas County. The public is encouraged to attend and provide testimony at public hearings held by the Planning Commission. Public hearings are streamed live and a recording is usually available within 24 hours after the hearing.

Land use items are officially scheduled on an agenda which is generally available on the County's website one week prior to the hearing. Occasionally an agenda item may need to be continued or rescheduled. Please check the website for updates.

For each land use item, the general format of a hearing begins with a staff and applicant presentation. Public testimony will then be opened by the Chair.

The Planning Commission makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners on regulations and many types of land use applications. For other matters, such as the Comprehensive Master Plan or the Location and Extent of public facilities and utilities, the Planning Commission is the final decision-making body. The Commission's Public Hearings are generally held on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month, beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Attending and Providing Public Testimony

How do I find out what is on the agenda?

- You can find the agendas for each hearing at douglas.co.us by searching for "meetings and agendas". You will be redirected to a website with a drop down menu on the left hand side of the page where you can scroll down to various meetings. Select Planning Commission from the drop down menu.
- Some agenda items may be continued or rescheduled. Please check the agendas frequently for any updates or changes. Circumstances may occasionally prevent staff from knowing about changes in advance.

As a member of the public, when am I allowed to provide testimony?

- Sign-up sheets may be provided for items where a large public attendance is expected. While you are encouraged to sign up to give testimony, it is not required.
- During the discussion of a scheduled agenda item, the Chair will open public testimony. This is the point at which members of the public can come to the podium and address the Commission.
- **You will be asked to state your name, spell your last name, and provide your address before you begin speaking.** You do not have to be a resident of Douglas County in order to speak.
- If speaking on behalf of an organization you may provide your organization's name and address.
- Once public testimony is closed, audience members may not address the Commission.
- Please note that commissioners may not communicate with the public regarding a land use item outside of the public hearing process.

How long can I speak and what materials can I present?

- The time limit for speaking before the Planning Commission is generally 3 minutes for individuals and 6 minutes for a referral agency or homeowners association.
- Ceding or transference of time to another individual is generally not allowed.
- You may submit written materials to the Commission with your testimony. These will be formally entered into the public record. Please bring at least 12 copies of the materials so they may be provided to the commissioners and staff.
- Once public testimony is closed, audience members may no longer address the Commission.

What is proper protocol and courtesy at a public hearing?

- Speakers should address the Chair and members of the Commission in a respectful manner.
- Speak to the Commission, not to the audience.
- In the interest of time, especially for large hearings, state agreement with previous testimony if you have similar comments.
- Testimony should be based on your own knowledge or experience and should be factual. Avoid personal attacks.
- When in the audience, please silence your cell phone. When at the podium, please turn it off, as it can interfere with the signal from the microphone.
- Applauding, cheering, booing, gesturing, holding up signs, or other disruptions are not allowed.

How can my testimony be most effective?

- Testimony should be relevant to the specified agenda item. The project details and documents may be found by entering the Project Number in the Planning Project site at douglas.co.us/pro.
- Focus on approval standards applicable to the item being heard. Standards can be found in the Zoning and Subdivision Resolutions, or the staff report, and are often displayed on the screen during the hearing.
- Submit written comments in advance of the hearing to the staff member assigned to the specific project allowing the Commission sufficient time to review.

How do my questions or testimony get addressed?

- Following public testimony, the Commission may ask the staff or applicant to answer specific questions raised by the public.
- Before the Commission makes its final deliberations and motion, the applicant is allowed to make final comments.
- The Commission reviews applications using adopted approval standards. Many projects must go through several stages or processes to reach full approval. Certain public concerns may be addressed during a subsequent land use process.

Was this information helpful?

Provide comments or ask questions by contacting Planning Services at planning@douglas.co.us or at 303-660-7460.