

# Guide to Speaking at Land Use Meetings and 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 and meetings held by the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners. Public hearings and meetings are streamed live and an audio recording is usually available within 24 hours after the hearing.

Land use items are officially scheduled on an agenda which can be viewed on the County's website the Friday before the meeting or 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 or meeting begins with a staff and applicant presentation. Public testimony will then be opened by the Chair.

The Planning Commission reviews and makes recommendations to the Board for land use applications. The Commission's Land Use Meetings and Public Hearings are generally held on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

The Board of County Commissioners makes the final decision on most land use applications. The Board's Land Use Meetings and Public Hearings are generally held on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month, beginning at 2:30 p.m.

## ATTENDING AND PROVIDING PUBLIC TESTIMONY

### How do I find out what is going to be heard, or what is on the agenda?

- You can find the agendas for each meeting and hearing at [douglas.co.us/government/commissioners/meetings-and-agendas/](http://douglas.co.us/government/commissioners/meetings-and-agendas/).
- 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 Board or 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 Board or Commission.
- Please note that Board or Commission members 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. The Board of County Commissioners may allow for longer testimony times.
- Ceding or transference of time to another individual is generally not allowed.
- If you wish to provide testimony using a PowerPoint presentation or other presentation involving multiple individuals, please check with Planning Services in advance. Each Board and Commission has its own policy regarding presentations.
- You may submit written materials to the Board or Commission with your testimony. These will be formally entered into the public record.
- Once public testimony is closed, audience members may no longer address the Board or Commission.

### What is proper protocol and courtesy at a public meeting or hearing?

- Speakers should address the Chair and members of the Board or Commission in a respectful manner.
- Speak to the Board or 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.
- Turn cell phones off as they can still interfere with broadcasting signals.
- 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](http://douglas.co.us/pro).
- Focus on approval standards applicable to the item being heard. Standards can be found in the Zoning or Subdivision Resolution, or 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 Board or Commission sufficient time to review.

### How do my questions or testimony get addressed?

- Following public testimony, the Board or Commission may ask the staff or applicant to answer specific questions raised by the public.
- Before the Board or Commission makes its final deliberations and motion, the applicant is allowed to make final comments.
- The Board or 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 Dru Campbell, Douglas County Administration, at [dcampbel@douglas.co.us](mailto:dcampbel@douglas.co.us) or at 303-660-7408.