

# How to Testify at Land Use Hearings

Goal 1 of Oregon’s Statewide Planning Goals recognizes the importance of citizen involvement “in all phases of the planning process.” One of the principal ways for citizens to be involved is by testifying at local land use hearings.

Various public bodies including the Crook County Planning Commission, County Court, and other government agencies conduct public hearings on land use matters. Voicing your opinion at these hearings is a way to influence public decisions. Carefully prepared testimony gives public officials a chance to hear directly from citizens. It also becomes part of the public record, and it allows a person that participates by providing either “written” or “verbal” testimony, to participate in the appeal process.

## **HOW TO PREPARE TESTIMONY FOR A CROOK COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING**

### **1) KNOW YOUR ISSUE & THE LAND USE RECORD AND REGULATIONS**

Support opinions with “facts.” Review the land use file on the case. (The “**Staff Report**” and “**Final Decisions**” are available from the Crook County Community Development Department – Website: [www.co.crook.or.us](http://www.co.crook.or.us)). On the home page, scroll down to the bottom of the page where the county departments are listed. Click Community Development. Under the “Community Development” page, you’ll find the “Planning Commission” information: Staff Reports, Agenda’s, Final Decisions, Audio of the previous meeting, etc.

Review the “Staff Report.” The “**Staff Report**” is a key document that will summarize the request and applicable criteria. The “Staff Report” is normally available seven (7) days prior to the scheduled hearing date. Learn about the requirements for zone changes, conditional use permits, and other land use actions. Refer to the code requirements and other regulations, and criteria that the Planning Commission members must utilize when making a decision.

Be knowledgeable about the opposition and proponent arguments, and be prepared to counter them. The Web may be a helpful or useful tool to research planning issues.

### **2) PREPARE BEFORE PRESENTING YOUR TESTIMONY**

- ✓ Arrive early to sign up to testify. This will also allow you to listen to testimony from others and avoid repeating their points.
- ✓ Prepare an outline; it may be helpful with your presentation.
- ✓ Prepare a full written statement to leave with the “hearing body” you are addressing.
- ✓ Address the hearing body (as “Planning Commission Chair and members of the commission”)
- ✓ State your name and address for the record when you begin your “verbal” testimony.

- ✓ Indicate if you are representing a group or yourself, and give a brief description of your interest.
- ✓ Keep your statement short. Begin by saying you either “support” or “oppose” a particular agenda item, and briefly explain why. Use facts to verify your statements. Describe how this issue affects you personally, plus what you would suggest as a solution and then summarize your testimony.
- ✓ Tell the “Planning Commission” 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 and ordinances. Don’t repeat yourself or ramble; keep your argument concise.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact if possible. Prepare an outline so you do not have to read your testimony. Be polite and project a positive image.
- ✓ 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; it is wise to verify with staff or the agency on the day of the meeting on the hearing time.
- ✓ Find out how many copies of your testimony are recommended for the particular meeting and how much time you will have to speak.
- ✓ Be sure you know the facts about the public hearing. Check on when testimony will be taken, where the public hearing will be held.
- ✓ Control your feelings. Try to keep your emotion in check when testifying. You do not want your feelings to overshadow the content and reason of your message.
- ✓ Anticipate questions from the “hearing body”: Try to anticipate questions you may receive from the hearing body and how you would answer them.
- ✓ Thank the Group! When you are finished testifying, thank the hearing board members for their time, and offer to answer any of the questions they may have.

### **IF MEMBERS OF A GROUP ARE TESTIFYING**

Group members should cover different topics, so testimony is not repetitious. Rather than having every member of your group say the same thing, some members can say they support previous testimony on a topic.

**If you should have further questions, please don’t hesitate to contact the Crook County Community Development Department at 541-447-8156.**

**PLEASE REMEMBER, THE CROOK COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS “VOLUNTEER” THEIR TIME TO SERVE ON THIS BOARD. PLEASE GIVE THEM YOUR UTMOST COURTESY.**