

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR TESTIFYING AT PUBLIC HEARINGS**

From time to time you and your neighbors may become concerned enough about a problem in your neighborhood, or some other matter, to speak up about it in public.

Many decisions concerning land use, zoning, budgeting, the enactment or change of laws, and other matters are required to go through a public hearing. Notices of hearings are published in a section of the newspaper devoted to that purpose.

So when you are motivated to speak up about something, do so. The opportunity of a hearing is provided for just that purpose. BUT - don't waste your testimony. These suggestions included here are to help you make the most of your opportunity to get the attention of decision makers at a public hearing, whether they are a Planning & Zoning Commission, City Council, or other group.

### **1. REMEMBER YOUR OBJECTIVE:**

You are trying to assist decision makers. Using inflammatory, angry, or accusatory language is far less effective than thoughtful, civil, fact-based testimony.

### **2. KNOW THE LAW:**

Officials are not likely to make decisions in violation of city or state codes. The purpose of the hearing is to gather all information necessary to make an informed decision regarding whether the proposal complies with the City's comprehensive plan and local ordinances. Planning Division staff will assist you in finding the local plans and ordinances. These documents can also be found on the City of Idaho Falls website.

### **3. SPEAK TO THE POINT:**

Many neighborhood groups have organized their testimony by having one or a few people speak on behalf of the group. This helps reduce repetitive testimony and focuses on the relevant points. Public officials have heard hundreds of people give testimony. They are grateful when the testimony is pertinent, well organized, and directly regards the matter at hand. They also appreciate when new points are presented rather than hearing the same issue raised repeatedly

### **4. STATE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Don't leave the decision makers wondering just what it was you wanted them to do. Don't be intimidated because you aren't an engineer, technician, or even a very good writer. If you have an idea worth considering then make a specific recommendation.

### **6. BE INFORMED:**

Read up or interview people on the subject at hand before you plan your testimony. Get a copy of the plan being heard, the staff report, the proposed ordinance, or other pertinent material. Plans, plats, and applications are usually in the files of the Planning Division about ten days prior to the hearing. Staff reports will be available a few days prior to the hearing. If possible, read these materials before you prepare your comments.

### **7. IF YOU DON'T WISH TO SPEAK, THEN WRITE:**

At most hearings, all testimony is reviewed by the decision making body with some staff assistance. If written testimony is specific, to the point, and concise, it will be given just as much attention as oral testimony. By necessity, oral testimony has time limits so that more people can speak, but written testimony has no length limitations. It may be effective to summarize your testimony orally in 3-5 minutes and then submit the details in writing. To assure your written comments are in the record, you should submit them at least seven days before the hearing.

### **8. BE REASONABLE:**

Decision makers must balance all views, interests, laws and proposals being made and find the best course for serving the overall public good. While it is your obligation to present your own interests, remember that there are other legitimate interests and views. Be prepared to compromise.

# HEARING PROCEDURES

1. The Chair shall announce the purpose and subject of the hearing.
2. The Chair shall ask the staff to present its report on the proposal being considered.
3. Following the staff report, the Chair shall entertain questions to the staff from the Commission.
4. After the staff report has been presented, the Chair will ask the applicant to present the proposal. The Chair shall call for questions from the Commission to the applicant.
5. The Chair will then ask for statements from others in the audience. After each statement has been given, the Chair shall call for questions from the Commission to be directed to the person presenting the statement. Questions from Commissioners shall be answered before the next statement is taken.
6. When all statements have been given, the Chair shall allow the applicant to speak in rebuttal or to clarify their statement. New statements or information shall not be permitted.
7. After this public hearing portion is closed, the Chair shall call for discussion among the Commission. That discussion shall lead to action on the matter being considered.

**Please note:** *Public Testimony is time reserved for individuals to share their support or concerns, not to ask the Review Body questions.*

## ADA COMPLIANCE

City of Idaho Falls will make all reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all of its programs, services, and activities.

Anyone who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a program, service, or activity of City of Idaho Falls, should contact the department sponsoring the event or the City's ADA/Section 504 Coordinator. The request should be made as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the scheduled event.

Anyone requiring an auxiliary aid or service for a City Council Meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at (208)384-3817 as soon as possible, but no later than 48 hours before the start of the meeting.

The ADA does not require the City of Idaho Falls to take any action that would fundamentally alter the nature of its programs or services, or impose an undue financial or administrative burden. Complaints that a program, service, or activity of the City of Idaho Falls is not accessible to persons with disabilities should be directed to the City's ADA Coordinator:

**ADA/Section 504 Coordinator, Lisa Farris,**  
**Email: [Lfarris@idahofallsidaho.gov](mailto:Lfarris@idahofallsidaho.gov)**  
**680 Park Avenue Idaho Falls, ID 83402**  
**(208) 612-8323 or Fax: (208) 612-8520 TTY:**  
**(800) 377-3529 or Idaho Relay 711.**

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT**  
**680 PARK AVENUE**  
**IDAHO FALLS, ID 83402**  
**208/612-8276**  
**[www.idahofallsidaho.gov](http://www.idahofallsidaho.gov)**



## PUBLIC HEARINGS:

### How to Testify

