

# PUBLIC HEARINGS

## A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATING IN CITY MEETINGS



### ***What is a public hearing?***

A public hearing is the formal process by which decision makers (e.g. City Council or Planning Commission) review an application, take testimony, and make decisions. Public hearings are often required by law and can be held on a variety of topics including zone changes, subdivisions, or code amendments. Public hearings are often just one part of the agenda for a public meeting (see below).

### ***What can I expect?***

City Council and Planning Commission meetings generally follow a similar format. Printed agendas are available at the back of the room and are always available online at [www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar](http://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar) (select the day/meeting event and “download agenda”). A typical agenda for a public meeting looks like this:

#### Sample Agenda

1. Call the meeting to order, roll call, pledge of allegiance
2. Approval of agenda and past meeting minutes
3. Citizen’s right to speak/public forum – This is the time when any person may speak on any subject not appearing on the agenda. Comments are limited to three (3) minutes per person.
4. Consent agenda (City Council only) – This is used to streamline Council meetings by grouping routine, noncontroversial topics into a single agenda item that can be discussed and passed with a single motion and vote.
5. Public hearings – The public hearing is a formal process that mimics a judicial proceeding. Often an agenda will include several public hearing items, and all steps will be repeated for each public hearing.
  - a. Open the public hearing
  - b. Staff presentation
  - c. Decision makers ask questions of staff
  - d. Applicant presentation
  - e. Decision makers ask questions of applicant
  - f. Public comment (see tips at top right)
  - g. Close public comment
  - h. Applicant and/or staff respond to questions from public, as requested by decision makers
  - i. Close public hearing
  - j. Decision maker discussion and motion
  - k. Decision maker vote

### ***Tips for public comment...***

- Sign up on the roster sheet in the back of the room (there is a different sheet for each agenda item).
- If you intend to speak on a property-specific item, you will be sworn in when the public hearing is opened by the presiding officer (item 5a at left). You will be asked to stand (at the same time as staff and the applicant), to raise your right hand, and to answer this kind of question: “Do you swear to tell the truth in this matter as you know it?” An appropriate response would be “yes.”
- Wait to be called to the podium.
- At the podium, state your name and address and spell your last name before you make your comments.
- Address your comments to the decision makers.
- If you have questions for staff or the applicant, they will be answered after all public testimony is heard (see 5h).
- Comments may be time limited at the discretion of the presiding officer, generally to three (3) minutes.
- Try to stick to your point; concise comments are often most effective.

### ***What if I can’t be there in person?***

If you can’t be at a meeting or hearing in person, you can:

1. Comment in advance: Send written comments to the staff or department who is managing the agenda item, so your comments can be included in the public record and shared with decision makers. (In January 2020, comments will be accepted online through “Wheat Ridge Speaks”—more details are coming soon!)
2. View live or later: Public meetings are recorded and can be viewed live or later on Channel 8 or YouTube: [www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/view](http://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/view)

### ***What about study sessions?***

Council usually meets in study session on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of the month. Planning Commission has less frequent study sessions. A study session is a public meeting used to inform decision makers or to seek policy direction; no formal decisions are made. A typical agenda for a study session includes:

1. Citizen comment – Must be related to agenda items
2. Staff presentation of agenda items
3. Decision maker discussion

### ***When are public meetings/hearings?***

City Council has regular business meetings (including public hearings) on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month at 7 p.m. Planning Commission has regular business meetings on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month at 7 p.m. Meetings may be cancelled if there are no scheduled agenda items or public hearings; check the City’s online calendar to confirm: [www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar](http://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar).