

Strategies for Good Public Comment

Public comment means written or verbal feedback during a regular committee or commission meeting aiming to inform the members on issues relevant to the purpose of the committee or commission. Most committees or commissions have a regular public comment period on meeting agenda, and anyone is welcome to sign up to comment. Please note, public comment is different than testimony, which is formal statements provided during the open record on a matter under consideration for action.

Step 1 – Follow the Rules

You will be required to sign up to provide comments, and you will need to provide your full name. Everyone will have the same time limit, typically 3 minutes, to speak – practice, practice, practice. The members are just listening, not responding, so do not ask them direct questions. Disruptive or irrelevant comments may be stopped by the Chair.

Step 2 – Relevance

Your comments do not need to be related to a topic on the agenda, but comments should be relevant to the purpose of the committee or commission. If you are providing comments to a committee on local agriculture and you are talking about access to county swimming pools, it is not relevant because that committee cannot address your issues. Double check the webpage or bylaws to make sure you are addressing the correct committee or commission.

Step 3 – Get to the Point

Agendas are often full and members are interested in moving through items efficiently. You want to grab their attention without taking too much time. Script out exactly what you plan to say to ensure you are making your point(s) well and in the time provided. Be courteous because members are likely unpaid volunteers just trying to make a difference in the community.

- A. Start with your full name and the topic you are speaking about.
- B. Highlight three main points.
- C. End with what action you would like the commission or committee to take
- D. Thank them for their time.

Step 4 – Follow Up in Writing

Usually, you can provide written comments before, during or after the meeting by handing or sending them to the Clerk or Chair. If you provide written comments during the meeting, print enough for all members and ask permission to hand the copies to the Clerk before your time starts. The Clerk will distribute the copies. Never approach the bench without permission.

Example – Public Comment

Committee: Agency on Aging Advisory Committee

Purpose: To provide support for older adults, adults living with disabilities and their families.

Public Comment: "My name is Jane Smith and I have provided written comments to the Clerk to distribute. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I am concerned with the hours of the Senior Center in my neighborhood, which is currently only open Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10am to 2pm. While I understand there are limited resources for staff to keep the facility open seven days a week, the Senior Center is critical for mental and physical health in our community.

Mental health of seniors is often overlooked. Social isolation is linked to increased risk of depression, cognitive decline, cardiovascular disease and a weakened immune system. The State Department of Health recommends that seniors engage in regular, appropriate physical activities, and social interactions. The Senior Center provides fitness classes, like gentle yoga, and social activities, like Bingo.

Malnutrition is a significant and widespread issue for seniors. Malnutrition leads to increased risk of diabetes and heart disease. The Senior Center provides healthy lunches, and many seniors may go without meals if not for the Senior Center.

Our community has a higher-than-average percentage of adults over the age of 60. The state average is 18% and our community is 24%. This makes us even more vulnerable to social isolation and lack of access to critical resources.

I am asking for you to recommend to the City Council that they adjust the City budget to ensure that the Senior Center is open seven days a week from 10am to 2pm, and that they provide lunch every day. This will help our community support seniors enjoying a full, healthy and active life. Thank you for your time."