

*From time to time you and your neighbors may become concerned enough about an issue in your neighborhood, or some other matter, to speak up about it in public. In McMinnville, and throughout Oregon, most public decisions concerning land use, zoning, budgeting, the enactment or change of laws, and many other matters are required to go through a “public hearing.” Notice of public hearings are published in the newspaper, and in the case of some land use and zoning decisions, individual property owners in the area are notified by a mailed notice. So, when you finally get motivated to speak up about something, do so. The opportunity provided by the public hearing is just for that purpose. **But don’t waste your testimony!** The following are some suggestions for making the most of your opportunity to get the attention of decision makers at a public hearing for the Planning Commission, Historic Landmarks Committee or City Council.*

### **REMEMBER YOUR OBJECTIVE**

You want to persuade the decision makers to vote or decide in favor of your side of the issue. It usually does not do your cause any good to anger, alienate, or antagonize the group you are standing in front of.

### **KNOW THE LAW**

Officials are not likely to make decisions in violation of city or state codes. No amount of passion, exhortation, petitions, or pleading by citizens will accomplish this. (However, laws can be changed. If there is a bad law, organize to have it amended in the future.) Land use and zoning decisions must be based on specific criteria applied to relevant facts. This is what the decision makers will base their decision on. A copy of the criteria is included in a mailed hearing notice and is also available from the Planning Department or at the hearing. Rules of procedure for such decisions also restrict personal contact with decision makers prior to the hearing. The McMinnville City Code and Zoning Ordinance are available at the Planning Department.

### **BE INFORMED**

Read up or interview people on the subject at hand before you plan your testimony. Visit the City’s Planning Department to get a copy of the application proposal, the staff report, the relevant criteria, or whatever pertinent material is available. Then read it and plan your comments. The final materials are published one week prior to the meeting and are available at [www.mcminnvilleoregon.gov](http://www.mcminnvilleoregon.gov), in the Planning Department section under Government.

### **BE PREPARED**

Plan to arrive before the meeting begins. Although there may be other hearings on the agenda, there is no telling how much time they will take. Go ahead and sign in.

### **SHOW YOUR STRENGTH**

Many neighborhood groups have organized their testimony by having one or a few people speak on behalf of the group. The leader may ask those in the audience supporting the testimony to stand or raise a hand in an orderly manner. This conveys to the decision makers the seriousness with which the issue must be dealt.

### **SPEAK TO THE POINT**

Public officials have heard hundreds of people give testimony. They are grateful and appreciative when the testimony is pertinent, well organized, and directed specifically to the matter at hand. Long stories, anecdotes, abstract complaints about generalities are usually a poor use of the citizen’s time, since the immediate problem is for the decision makers to decide what course of action to take on a specific question.

### **STATE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS**

Don’t leave the decision makers wondering just what it was that you wanted them to do.

### **BE SPECIFIC**

Make clear-cut recommendations. If you think something should be added, write up some proposed language and present it. If you think something should be deleted or changed, say what page it is on and what sections should be adjusted and how.

### **BE BOLD**

Don't be held back because you aren't an engineer or technician, or even a very good writer. If you think you have an idea worth considering, chances are it is. The decision makers have staff assistance to help polish up suitable ideas or rearrange words to fit something in.

### **IF YOU DON'T WISH TO SPEAK, WRITE**

What happens at most hearings is that testimony is reviewed by the decision making body with some assistance from their staff. If written testimony is specific, to the point, and persuasive, it will be given just as much attention as oral testimony. By necessity, oral testimony is limited in time to three - five minutes determined by the chairperson, so that more people can speak, but written testimony has no length limitation. It may be effective to summarize your testimony orally in 3 to 5 minutes and submit the details in writing. Written materials are most effective if submitted at least 10 days prior to the hearing, allowing ample time for the decision-making body to review them.

### **BE REASONABLE**

Put yourself in the shoes of the decision makers. They are in the difficult position of balancing all the views, interests, and proposals being made and finding the best course for serving the overall public good. While it is your obligation to present your own interests, remember that you have legitimate competition. Be prepared occasionally to compromise.

For more information, contact the Planning Department:

**CITY OF MCMINNVILLE  
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*"McMinnville's mission is to be a collaborative and caring city inspiring an exceptional quality of life."*

*"The Planning Department achieves this by providing excellent customer service, public engagement, and proactive planning programs to promote McMinnville as the most livable and prosperous city in the state of Oregon now and into the future."*

City of McMinnville

**HOW TO  
TESTIFY  
AT A  
PUBLIC  
HEARING  
AND  
MAKE  
IT  
COUNT!**

