

# Putting Your Best Foot Forward at Public Hearings

*A Publication of the City of Meridian*

## Get Involved!

You have received notice from the City of Meridian that they will conduct a public hearing on a decision that may impact your property.

The hearing process is designed to alert City leaders to public concerns. We encourage you to attend this public hearing or submit written testimony.

At the hearing you will have the opportunity to:

1. Listen
2. Ask questions and/or
3. Testify either in favor of or in opposition to the project.



### ***Important!***

*If you decide to ask questions or testify, you will have **three minutes** to do so.*

Don't worry if you're not a great speaker—just come and express your opinion and concerns. Relax!

You may find the suggestions on the reverse side of this page helpful as you organize your ideas and prepare to share your opinion at the upcoming meeting.

## How to Contact Us . . .

Regarding presentations to the Meridian City Council:  
Contact the City Clerk's Office at (208) 888-4433

Regarding presentations to the Meridian Planning &  
Zoning Commission: Contact the Planning Department  
at (208) 884-5533

Visit us online at: [www.meridiacity.org](http://www.meridiacity.org)

## What to Expect During the Public Hearing

The Meridian City Council or Planning and Zoning Commission (decision makers) are conducting a public hearing on a development application that may affect you. We encourage you to testify at that hearing. The purpose of this sheet is to let you know what to expect during the public hearing.

- ◆ The Mayor or Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission will open the public hearing for the project.
- ◆ The Planning Staff will present the project.
- ◆ The decision makers may question staff to clarify their understanding of the project.
- ◆ The applicant will present their proposal and respond to questions from the decision makers.
- ◆ The decision makers will take testimony in favor of, and in opposition to, the application. They will also accept any general comments or questions pertaining to the application. The Mayor or Chair must recognize anyone wishing to speak or testify.
- ◆ Once the public has testified, the applicant will respond to that testimony and summarize their request.
- ◆ The Staff may present additional information and may respond to additional questions from the decision makers.
- ◆ The decision makers will close the public hearing.
- ◆ The decision makers discuss the application and make a motion on the hearing item.
- ◆ The decision makers vote on the motion.



## Suggestions for Making an Effective Presentation

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*Speaking in public is always a bit nerve-wracking, especially in front of a panel such as the City Council or Planning & Zoning Commission, but with some advanced preparation, you can put your best foot forward.*

**Be Prompt.** Although your item of concern may be late on the agenda, it is important to be at the meeting when it begins. Sometimes, the order of items on the agenda gets changed at the beginning of the hearing and everyone needs to be ready.

**Speak to the Point.** Public officials are grateful when testimony is pertinent, well organized and directly relates to the matter at hand. Long stories, lectures on philosophy or abstract complaints are usually a poor use of your time. Also, angering, alienating or antagonizing the decision makers will not help your cause. Be sure to include your recommendations for resolving the situation; don't leave officials guessing what it was you want them to do. Remember, you only have three minutes to testify; be concise!

**Know the Law.** Officials cannot make decisions in violation of city or state codes. No amount of passion or pleading by citizens will accomplish this. However, laws can be changed. If there is a bad law, organize to have it changed.

**Show your Strength.** Many groups organize their testimony by having one person speak on behalf of the group. If you are appearing on behalf of a group, you may be allowed up to ten minutes to testify. The group speaker should ask permission to have those in the audience supporting the testimony to stand; this conveys the extent of public concern with the issue.

**Be Informed.** Your testimony gains credibility if it is well-researched. Get a copy of the staff report (or the plan, proposed ordinance or other available pertinent materials) for the project, and read it before planning your testimony. If you have questions or need clarification on an issue, contact the Planning Department at (208) 884-5533 and ask to speak with the planner working on the project.

**Be heard.** Testimony can be either presented orally or in writing. Each method is given attention by officials. Written testimony has no length limitations, so you can explain your concerns or recommendations in detail. Oral testimony presented at the hearing has time limitations, so that everyone concerned has a chance to speak. Orally presenting the main points and submitting the details in writing is a particularly effective method of testimony. If you choose to submit written testimony, please provide it to the City Clerk as far in advance of the hearing as possible.

**Be visual.** It is often very useful to have photographs, charts, drawings, etc. to illustrate your point. The City Clerk must keep a copy of any materials used in the public hearing. If you want to keep your originals, you must provide a copy for the City Clerk. We recommend the following presentation options:



- ◆ We strongly encourage simplified site plans in color. These are the easiest to read on our projector. We prefer to get electronic versions, but we can also display color photographs or drawings that you bring to the hearing.
- ◆ You may ask staff to display an image from the staff presentation.
- ◆ Staff can run a PowerPoint Presentation for you. Please bring a CD or thumb drive with your presentation on it.
- ◆ We highly discourage the use of large presentation boards because they are not easily visible to other members of the audience or the decision makers. If you choose this option, you MUST also bring a reduced (up to 10" x 14") version of the display.

**Be reasonable.** Public officials and decision makers must balance the views, interests and proposals of all parties involved, and then find 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 to compromise.

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