

Blaine County Land Use & Building Services

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Public Hearings: A Helpful Guide to Presenting your Views...

WHAT IS A PUBLIC HEARING?

A public hearing is an opportunity for the public to hear and respond to land use applications. Types of applications that require a public hearing include variances, conditional use permits, rezones, subdivisions, planned unit developments, zoning and subdivision ordinance text amendments, and Comprehensive Plan changes.

Such hearings are conducted in an established format, in accordance with the provisions of the Blaine County Code and the Local Land Use Planning Act of the Idaho Code. Depending upon the type of application(s) being considered, hearings may occur before the Hearing Examiner, Planning and Zoning Commission or the Board of County Commissioners. The hearing is usually a quasi-judicial proceeding, with decisions rendered in accordance with laws and standards.

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURE?

Public hearings *generally* proceed in the following manner:

- 1) Short introduction of agenda item by Chair;
- 2) Determination of adequate public notice procedures by presiding body;
- 3) Presentation by applicant and their technical representative(s);
- 4) Questions by presiding body of the staff and applicant;
- 5) Open public comment period;
- 6) Acknowledgement of written comments received;
- 7) Questions by the presiding body of applicant and technical representative(s);
- 8) Close public comment period;
- 9) Deliberation on the application by the presiding body based upon applicable standards;
- 10) Final decision or recommendation.

HOW DO I PARTICIPATE?

First of all, every citizen has a right to be heard. So, forget your fears and lack of experience speaking in public and communicate your concerns and questions. Make notes, and don't hesitate to read from them if necessary.

Become informed. Learn about the application being considered. Applications and associated documents may be reviewed in the Land Use Office at the Old County Courthouse in Hailey, Idaho, during normal business hours. Pertinent information that is typically available includes the application, a description of the proposal, site plans and drawings, environmental studies, etc. A copy of the staff report which includes a summary of the proposed action, applicable standards, and staff comments is available upon request. The County website at www.blainecounty.org may contain additional information concerning the meeting agenda and applications being heard.

You may participate in the public hearing process by either submitting written comments, testifying at the public hearing or both! You are encouraged to relate your written comments and oral testimony to the standards of evaluation pertinent to the application. Comments should be directed to the Chair and be concise. Where possible, solutions to potential problems should be offered. Written comments may be provided to the Land Use Office prior to the public hearing, either by fax or mail. Written comments are most effective when the members of the presiding body have time to thoroughly review them prior to the meeting, so you are encouraged to submit them as soon as possible. Written comments in excess of one (1) page, including attachments, are encouraged to be submitted at least one (1) week in advance of the meeting.

Attend the public hearing and provide oral testimony. If you are part of a larger group that supports the same point of view, consider designating one or two people to express the concerns of the group.

Keep in mind that the time allotted to individual oral comments during the hearing may be limited at the discretion of the Chair, taking into account the number of people wishing to testify and the available agenda time.

Comment cards are available at the meeting for those of you who wish to attend but may be a little uncomfortable about speaking in front of a group. Just fill it out with your thoughts, turn the card in to either the staff or Chair, and your comments will be read into the record for you.

Be sure to get your comments into the record before the public hearing is closed. Once the hearing closes, discussion by the presiding body is limited to the presiding body, staff and legal counsel. No further public participation can occur unless the public hearing is formally reopened by the chair.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE HEARING IS CLOSED?

The presiding body will deliberate upon the application and will either reach a decision, continue the application to another date, or table the application. In some situations, such as subdivisions, rezones and text amendment applications, the Commission will make a recommendation for approval or denial to the Board of County Commissioners. The application will then be scheduled for a public hearing before the Board, and the public will be given the opportunity to participate in the public hearing process at the Board level before the final decision is made.

KEEPING THE "PUBLIC" IN PUBLIC HEARINGS...

Your involvement in the public hearing process is much appreciated, and is critical to facilitating good public decisions that affect the future of Blaine County. The Board, Planning and Zoning Commission, Hearing Examiner, and Land Use Services staff thank you for getting involved!