



## LETTERS TO A PUBLIC HEARING BODY

Members of the City Commission, the Planning Commission and the Historic Review Board emphasize that letters are very important to them as they make decisions. A well-written letter can be as influential as the Staff Report.

### **Preparation**

- Read the staff report and other background materials.
- Confer with your neighbors.
- Know the decision-making criteria .
- Brainstorm a list of the points you wish to make. If you represent a group,ask other people for ideas and add their points to the list.

### **Writing your Letter Part I**

#### *State the Facts*

- Include your name, address, or email.
- State your interest in the case and who you represent (If you are speaking for yourself, say that).
- What you want/don't want the hearing body to do (one or two sentences)
- Cite specific, measurable impacts.
- Try to avoid hearsay or prophetic ("chicken little"} statements.
- Provide information,if you can, that reveals gaps or errors in the staff 's findings and conclusions, or introduce new information.

### **Writing your Letter Part II**

#### *Organization*

- In the heading, identify the subject and state if you are in favor or opposed.
- Indicate if you are you are speaking for yourself or on behalf of an organization
- Organize your letter similarly to the Staff Report.
- Provide evidence for why the hearing body should make a particular decision.
- Relate evidence directly to the decision-making criteria from the Staff Report.
- Provide reference to page numbers in the Staff Report.
- Use bullet points or numbered lists to outline your points.
- Keep it short ( one or two pages).

### **Writing your Letter Part III Common Mistakes**

- Forgetting to put your name on the letter.
- Straying from the facts in the case.
- Addressing issues that are not related to the decision at hand.
- Addressing issues that are outside the influence/responsibility of the hearing body.
- Stating inaccurate facts.
- Disorganized, spelling errors.
- Making assumptions.
- Too much emotional language. (Be personal without letting your emotions drive the letter} .
- Forgetting to include your address or email ..
- Not acknowledging whom you represent.
- Writing too much.
- Relying on rumors.

Advice from those who have written before: From citizens:

*"Write the letter and put it away for a few days. Reread it, and if you still feel the same way, send it."*

*"Don't save the letter-writing only for objections. Praise helps city staff know what they are doing right as well."*

From a City Commissionperson:

*"It is especially helpful if the writer has information that is unique or has a point that is unlikely to be covered by others."*

*Decision-making criteria: These are the applicable standards and criteria that the hearing body must use when they make a decision. The decision-making or applicable criteria are outlined in the staff report. If you can't find the criteria or have questions, call the staff person who wrote the report for help. This information can be found on the front page of the Staff Report.*

### **Where to find the Staff Report?**

Case files for planning applications that go to the Planning Commission, City Commission or the Historic Review Board can be found linked to the agenda at <https://www.orcity.org/meetings> or on the land use project page at <https://www.orcity.org/projects>

### **Writing Alone Or Writing For A Group:**

The first question you might want to ask yourself is, am I speaking just for myself or for others as well?

Advantages/Disadvantages " As a group:

- Different perspectives in addition to your own.
- Power in numbers.
- Requires coordination to rally support.

As an individual:

- One person's opinion might be biased in some way.
- You may have an important perspective.
- Less coordination required.

Suggestions for writing as a group

- Cite the broadest base of support you have for your position such as a petition or letter signed by neighbors, an approved neighborhood plan, or an annual neighborhood opinion survey.
- If you have approval (as defined in your Association's by-laws) to represent your Neighborhood Association, use Neighborhood Association letterhead.

Suggestions for writing as an individual

- Remain objective and avoid emotional language.
- Making your case in one sentence: *Your case will be conveyed most powerfully if you can make it in one short and succinct statement. Most of us can't write a great statement like this the first time. Try this technique for developing one:*
- Write down everything in your head. Focus on "what" you want the hearing body to understand (you will address the "why" later) .
- Set that aside.
- With a new sheet of paper, write down your main point again.
- Examine what you have written and identify the most important point. Eliminate repetition.
- Repeat until you have reduced your statement to one or two sentences.