

PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting Protocol and Tips for Effective Public Hearings

What is the Planning Commission?

The Planning Commission is composed of seven members, consisting of San Rafael residents who are volunteers and not City officials, appointed by the City Council to serve four-year terms. (SRMC Chapter 2.16)

What are the duties and responsibilities of the Planning Commission?

The Planning Commission function and duties are to prepare and adopt the comprehensive City General Plan, make decisions on many types of development and land use applications including subdivisions, design review permits, use permits, variances, and make recommendations to the City Council on specific types of applications including legislative actions, adoption of fees and entitlements and appeals that require approval by the City Council.

How often does the Planning Commission hold meetings?

The Planning Commission must meet at least once a month, unless there is no business to be conducted. Its regular meeting schedule is typically the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers. However, the first meeting of the month is always held the week following the first meeting of the City Council, which is regularly held on the first and third Monday of each month. Thus, if the first week of the month begins on a Tuesday, then the Planning Commission meeting schedule will begin the week *after* the first regular City Council meeting is held.

Conduct of the Meetings

The Agenda for the Planning Commission hearing will typically be published the Friday before the scheduled meeting. The Commission Agenda will include a Call to Order, the Pledge of Allegiance, Recording of Members Present, Approval of the Agenda Order, Notification of Meeting Procedures, opportunity for Urgent Communication by public (on items not on the agenda), a Consent Calendar for approval of minutes and items not requiring public hearing, Public Hearing items, Directors Report, Commission Communication, and Adjournment.

A Quorum is required in order for the Planning Commission to conduct a meeting. Four members constitute a quorum. A majority vote of the members present is required to take an action on an item on the agenda, except for recommendations on legislative items (i.e., zoning amendments) that require an affirmative vote of 4 members.

Public Hearing Format

The following outlines the process for conduct of a public hearing:

- Staff provides a written and oral report, summarizing the application and significant issues and answering questions from the Commission.
- The Chair opens the public hearing. To provide sufficient time for all agenda items and to allow time for Planning Commission deliberation, time limits will be imposed on all speakers.
- The Applicant makes a presentation, limited to 10 minutes, highlighting aspects of the proposal, response to staff or public concerns, or changes made to the project.
- For appeals, the Appellant's presentation would precede the Applicant's, again limited to 10 minutes, highlighting reasons for the appeal.
- The Chair will then call on members of the public requesting to speak. Representatives of community groups will typically be allowed up to 5 minutes and individuals 3 minutes to provide oral testimony.

- After all members of the public have had an opportunity to speak once, the Chair will close the public hearing.
- The Planning Commissioners may ask questions of staff, technical experts, the applicant, the appellant or others.
- Commissioners will deliberate and reach a decision, which could be:
 - ✓ Approval or denial of the application, or a recommendation on applications for which the City Council is the final decision-maker,
 - ✓ Continuance of the item to a future agenda, usually for more information or project revisions, or
 - ✓ Referral of the application to the Design Review Board for a recommendation on design issues.

Tips for Participating in Effective Public Hearings

Purpose: The purpose of the public hearing is to provide important information to the public and to members of the Planning Commission to assist them in their decision-making. Public hearings are not intended to be demonstrations or popularity contests. All participants are expected to conduct themselves in a civil and respectful manner.

Applicant's Presentations: Be prepared, succinct and to the point. Submit written and graphic material in complete form in time to be reviewed and included in the staff report. In oral presentations, limit the presentation to provide new information beyond that previously submitted in writing or to highlight the most important features of your application. Identify changes made to the project to respond to public, DRB or staff concerns or disagreements with the staff recommendation or proposed conditions of approval.

Public Presentations: Be prepared, succinct and to the point. Submit written and graphic material in complete form in time to be reviewed and included in the staff report. If you have sent the Commission a letter or e-mail, do not repeat the information or opinions in oral testimony. If another member of the public has made the same point you intended to, you need not repeat it, or may just state, when called to the podium, that you agree with the previous speaker.

Rules of Decorum

- Turn off cell phones, pagers or other electronic devices.
- Address the Planning Commission with all testimony. Address any questions through the Chair. Do not address the applicant, members of the public or staff.
- Wait to be recognized by the Chair before speaking. After speaking, please write down your name and contact information in the logbook to help assure accuracy in the meeting minutes.
- Be succinct, stay on topic and remain focused on the salient issues.
- Address issues, not individuals.
- Agree or disagree respectfully. Please, no applause, or booing or personal attacks. Support or oppose an applicant or appellant with respect and decorum.
- Please take personal discussions out of the chambers and into the lobby so as not to disturb others or disrupt the public hearing. At the conclusion of your item, please exit the chambers so other agenda items may be dealt with, without distraction.

Submittals to the Planning Commission

- The Planning Commissioners strongly encourages and appreciates the submittal of written information prior to the meeting date rather than at the hearing. Letters and e-mails received by the project planner or the Planning Commission Secretary by noon on Fridays prior to the meeting date will be delivered to the Commissioners as part of their packets. Material provided by noon on Mondays prior to the meeting date will be faxed to Commissioners if under six pages. Material submitted at the hearing may not be adequately considered by the Commissioners.
- Requests to meet with Planning Commissioners should be provided to staff, who will forward the request to the Commissioner(s).
- All correspondence to the Planning Commission should be submitted to the Planning Division, who will in turn keep copies for the file and distribute to the Planning Commission.

Availability of Staff Reports

- Staff reports are sent to the Planning Commissioners on Friday afternoon prior to a meeting. Copies of reports may be obtained after 3:00 p.m. at the Planning Division, 3rd floor of City Hall, 1400 Fifth Avenue, or can be viewed on-line at: <http://www.cityofsanrafael.org/meetings> and then clicking on the agenda for the appropriate Planning Commission meeting. Once the agenda is open, you can click on the appropriate link for the project you are interested in.