

# How to Participate in the Public Review Process

Participating in a public review process can be confusing and intimidating for those who haven't done it before. Our Conservation Committee and Subcommittees are happy to work with you and your team to offer advice and help you strategize about which meetings you should be attending, which decision makers you should prioritize, and how to make public comment. Below is a summary of how the public review process is typically structured for development proposals, and how best to have an impact with your comments.

1. Watch your city's website for potential new projects; attend first meetings when the city is advertising for bids on land development.
2. Obtain site description and check back to see which developers are submitting proposals.
3. Background material is usually available if you ask.
4. Attend selection meetings, you may find that one developer comes with great "green credentials" while the others don't.
5. If you have time to study past projects, comment on them as an individual.
6. After the developer is selected there probably will be public meetings showing variations of conceptual plans that the city and developer are pursuing for site – they want public input.
7. Preliminary development agreements between city and developer are made and a timeline is agreed upon (may be amended).
8. Continue to try to meet with them as the project proceeds thru the timeline. Do not be a pest – but intervene when you feel it is necessary to offer input.
9. Arrange Community Outreach Meeting(s) to receive input and feedback on conceptual plans
10. Revised Site Plan and proposed financial terms are considered by Council.
11. Negotiation and submittal of final Development Agreement.
12. Scoping Meeting: Stakeholders and public can submit facts and findings that the Draft Environmental Impact Review must study. (IMPORTANT MEETING to attend– submit what you want in DEIR)
13. Public Hearing on environmental review and project entitlements.
14. DEIR Submitted to Planning Commission & Council (study period of 1-3 months). (IMPORTANT MEETING: Submit written comments and appear at public meetings.)
15. Planning Commission Answers to Public Comments made
16. Planning Commission and Council meetings to review DEIR
17. Follow the same process through the final plans.

## Developing a Comment Letter

A comment letter is a formal letter sent to decision-makers (such as the city council), describing the chapter's position on a project plan. For a sample of a comment letter, refer to the index on page 29. Below is an outline of what the letter must contain:

- **Introduction:** Begin with a formal salutation. State the project/plan that you are going to discuss, and thank the Council for their work on the project.

- **Overview of Project As-Is:** Briefly review the positive aspects of the project, and then transition to whether the chapter supports or opposes the project.
- **Recommend Improvements:** Introduce how the project could be improved. List each change that you would like to see happen, and describe what the developer/City Council can do to make the change (numbering your points can be helpful).
- **Conclusion:** State how the Sierra Club wants to partner with the City Council and developer. Give your signature with your full name, title and contact information

## Making Public Comment

Once you have a position on an issue, be it on behalf of the Chapter or as an individual, you should make it known by your local decision makers well before they vote. It is recommended that you send your position in a letter and/or E-mail, forward your letter to local media, request a follow-up meeting with individual decision makers to discuss your recommendations, and make your position known during the public comment at meetings where the item is on the agenda. When you attend public meetings, introduce yourself to the developer, architect, and city staff person in charge of this project. Let them know the Sierra Club is interested in the project and would appreciate meeting with them to discuss features that we would like to see in the project. Work with Sustainable Land Use Committee to prepare for this meeting and potentially attend with you.

Making comment at public meetings is a citizen's right. Elected officials have an obligation to hear their constituents on matters that affect them. There's usually a specific time during open meetings of the city council for comments from individuals from the community, as well as a time limit for speaking (Usually 1-3 minutes)

### Tips on preparing your public comment

1. Make an outline beforehand to help you cover the points you want to make and ease the nervousness of speaking in public.
2. Ask others who share your views to attend the meeting when you speak.
3. Having a sympathetic group behind you will strengthen your position and give you confidence when speaking. There is strength in numbers.
4. Step up to the microphone when the council invites public comment. State your full name, city, affiliation, and address.
5. You are speaking on public record and identifying yourself is requirement for making public comment.
6. Speak clearly, confidently and respectfully.
7. Avoid personal attacks on council members.
8. Make eye contact with each of the council members as you speak.
9. Be succinct, realizing you will usually have a time limit, but cover all the points you want to make, using your outline.