

How to speak up at public meetings

It's not always easy to be a YIMBY. Public meetings about new developments usually attract the most vocal opponents, even if most people are happy to welcome their new neighbours.

However, your courageous voice can have a huge impact at public meetings.

When you speak up you:

- welcome disadvantaged people into your neighbourhood – people that are often openly insulted and abused at rancorous public meetings
- enable city planning staff to put forward a balanced report to Council Committees or other decision-makers
- give your ward councillor the courage to “do the right thing”
- curb the most extreme opponents, and give them something to think about
- encourage other supporters to speak up too.

Some tips for speaking at public meetings

- **Start by making yourself known** to the organization making the development proposal. The organization may have information to help you strengthen your remarks. They will certainly be glad to hear from you.

To make contact, first check any public meeting notices. They often include the name and contact information for the developer or sponsoring organization. If the information is not there, contact HomeComing. We will try to find the information for you.

- **Invite your friends and colleagues.** At public meetings, numbers count. You will also welcome the company of others at these sometimes difficult meetings.
- **Come as you are, and speak from the heart.** You do not need to be an expert on housing or city planning issues to speak up. Just speak about what you know.

- If you are an **immediate neighbour**, describe how the proposal will improve the property or contribute to the neighbourhood.
- If you are a **business owner**, you might describe how the new development can revitalize the local economy. Low-income people may not have much money, but they spend it all locally.
- If you have a **family member or a friend who has been homeless**, or is on a housing waiting list, talk about what it is like to wait for years for a decent home and proper supports.
- If you are a **member of a congregation in the area**, speak up for social justice, or for members of your own congregation who need a place to live.
- If you are a volunteer in an **Out of the Cold** program or another **agency**, or are a **doctor, nurse, social worker or other social service professional**, talk about the need for shelter, permanent housing and supports, drawing on your own observations.
- **Try to speak early in the meeting.** Your positive voice can encourage other supporters and temper the more extreme opponents. But if you miss your moment, take advantage of the delay. Use your remarks to address some of the concerns raised earlier in the meeting.
- **Don't get into arguments.** If others try to argue or heckle while you are speaking, appeal to the chairperson for order.
- **At the end of the meeting**, try to speak to the city councillor or city staff. Ask them whether there will be other opportunities to support the development.

AFTER THE MEETING

Send a letter, summing up the points you made at the meeting (and all the good ideas you had after you left!) to your councillor and the city staff person responsible for the meeting. Don't forget to send a copy to the sponsoring organization.

Don't have their address? They are often on the meeting notice. If not, ask HomeComing.