

SIDNEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

PUBLIC HEARINGS 101

Public Hearings are an important feature of government at the municipal level. Any member of the public who believes his or her interest is affected must be given a reasonable opportunity to speak and/or submit written comments. This is very different from the Public Participation period at the beginning of each Council meeting where everyone is limited to 3 minutes.

Things to Know if you are Speaking at a Public Hearing

- It's not hard to do. Public Hearings are for concerned residents as well as technical experts. Just get up, go to the microphone, say your name and address and whether you are for or against the bylaw and why. Being well organized and brief helps a lot.
- There is no set order of speakers. The Mayor simply asks if anyone wishes to speak, and people come forward to the microphone. Representatives of the developer or landowner often speak toward the end of the Hearing to reply to any issues raised by the public. Once everyone has had a chance to speak once, the Mayor usually asks if anyone wishes to speak a second time, then a third time.
- Everybody is entitled to feel safe and respected for speaking up. This is why applause and heckling are discouraged or prohibited. Disrespectful comments about individuals or groups (including Council, the Developer, and people who disagree with you) are not well received and may do more harm than good. Give reasons why you think the way you do about the proposal, but do not attack or belittle the people involved.
- The Public Hearing is a semi-judicial event, governed by the Local Government Act. Council and staff cannot get into discussions or answer questions during the hearing.

Here is a link to a [Fact Sheet from the Union of BC Municipalities](#) which gives detailed information about the law governing Public Hearings.

The **Town of Sidney** publishes the following Guidelines with the Agenda whenever a Public Hearing is scheduled,

“Those who believe that their interest in property is affected shall be afforded a reasonable opportunity to be heard or to present written submissions. The public shall become familiar with the facts prior to the hearing. The hearing is an opportunity to express opinions pertaining to the facts, not to ask questions.

Council during the Public Hearing Will:

- listen to all representatives;
- have an open mind;
- give an opportunity for the public to present all views; and
- ask questions for clarification.

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Council during the Public Hearing Will Not:

- make its own views known;
- disclose its deliberations;
- debate the merits or otherwise; and
- respond to questions.

Council Following the Public Hearing Will:

- debate the issue; and
- disclose its deliberations when the bylaw is brought forward for consideration. “

We hope this information helps Sidney residents and neighbours feel better informed and confident expressing your views at Public Hearings.