

Effective Advocacy – Public Comment

How to Write a Persuasive Public Comment

For Keep Tahoe Blue members and supporters

You can shape your community's future. We encourage you to voice your opinion on important public issues during public meetings or comment periods in a persuasive manner.

Decision makers - city councils, commissions, and boards of directors - look to their constituents for guidance on important public issues. That gives you the opportunity to make a difference.

Providing spoken remarks during a public meeting makes the biggest impact, but public speaking is not for everyone. Concise, compelling, fact-based comment letters provide another opportunity for you to speak out, be heard and make change.

This simple guide is a resource for how to write an effective public comment letter or provide oral comments at a public meeting.

Written Comments

Written comments are generally longer, more detailed and submitted as far in advance of the relevant meeting or decision as possible.

- **Don't feel intimidated!** An action as simple as sending an email with a few sentences about something you care about makes a difference. Few people take the time to contact their elected officials. When it does happen, those letters have an impact.
- **Create an outline.** Read and review the information provided on your issue, taking notes on the areas you have an opinion, including page numbers.
- **Lead with your most important point - the one that sums up your argument.** Don't bury your main point at the bottom of your letter. If you're stating your support or opposition, start with that, then explain why. Make it easy for the reader to understand what you want right up front
- **Be concise.** Try to make your point as efficiently as possible. The most memorable ideas are short and direct.
- **Offer solutions.** Craft your comment so it covers what the project or plan is lacking or how it could improve, and provide suggestions for how to solve these problems.
- **Facts are your friends.** Complaints and unfounded opinions will hurt more than help. If there are documents or reports associated with the issue you're commenting on, refer to their content to support your points. Make sure your references are from reputable, citable sources (i.e. not Wikipedia, casual conversations, or opinion pieces).
- **Let your personality shine.** Make your fact-based comments memorable. Share who you are and how this issue affects you by telling a short story. Stories are remembered more than lists or rants. It's okay to use emotion, but don't let it overpower your argument.

- **Be respectful.** Elected officials and other decision makers are people too. If they feel offended, they're far less likely to agree with you or take your suggestions.
- **Be persuasive:** Your goal is to persuade the decision maker to take some sort of action on an issue that is important to you. Do not spend a lot of time telling the history of a dispute if it does not help achieve your goal. Avoid simply complaining about an issue or what has occurred so far, instead provide solutions.
- **Mind the details.** Proof-read your letter before sending it in; errors distract from your main point. Know the procedure for sending in your letter on-time and to the right person/people. A beautiful letter is for nothing if it is submitted too late or to the wrong person.

Oral Comments

Oral comments give the public and decision makers the opportunity to hear and understand concerns you may have on a plan or project in real-time. Oral comments give you the chance to highlight major concerns that have already been discussed in written comment letters or to provide new or clarified information that may arise after submitting written comments.

- **Be consistent.** Create oral comments based on your or others' written comments.
- **Be succinct.** Your audience will likely only remember a couple of things that you say. Focus on your top one or two points. Facts are crucial to support your argument, but getting into details can distract from your main points.
- **Connect with the audience.** Start by introducing yourself, and share a fact that shows your ties to the community and why the issue is important to you.
- **Be polite.** Thank your audience for the opportunity to comment. Being passionate is okay, but always be cordial and polite
- **Eye contact is important.** Make eye contact as much as possible; avoid staring at a sheet of notes.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Discuss and practice oral comments with family or friends to get feedback and make sure you can deliver them in the time allowed. Reading your prepared comments out loud can sound robotic - try to familiarize yourself with your comments and just use your notes for reference.

An example of successful advocacy using a persuasive comment letter. The League successfully advocated against the City of South Lake Tahoe's proposal to replace a bike lane with car parking in 2019 using [this letter](#).

The League is here to help. If you need help researching your comment letter, please reach out to our team at the League for resources.

