Planning Commission Public Hearings

Introduction

When attending a Planning Commission Hearing you will be taking part in your Alamosa County Land Use Development process. We want to hear from you and hope the following information is helpful.

Planning Commissions Role

The Planning Commission is a voluntary citizens group appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. Planning Commission members don’t represent specific geographic areas of the county or specific disciplines. However, the group usually includes members from a range of communities and back grounds. While the planning commissioners bring a variety of experience to their roles, they all have a common interest in the public planning process.

For certain matters that relate to the Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission is the final decision maker. In all other matters, the Planning Commission serves as an advisory board to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). The BOCC, at another public hearing following the planning Commission hearings, makes a final (binding) decision.

The Alamosa County Board of Commissioners, are elected by the voters in Alamosa County and, as a legislative body of the County, are charged with making land use decisions.

County Staff's Role

During the public hearing the staff will present findings as to whether the proposal meets the requirements of the Land Use Development Code, and any other applicable regulations. In making this determination, all of the information submitted in the application is reviewed and the site is visited. In conducting this work, the staff is impartial and objective, and is neither an advocate for the applicant or for anyone in opposition. The Planning Commission re-lies on, but is not bound by the professional opinion of the staff. The Planning Staff or Administrator will present an overview of the case, analysis, evaluations, and recommendations. Usually they are limited to 20 minutes.
Preparing an effective Presentation

Before the Hearing You Should…

If you have questions about an item on the agenda, your application or about procedures, feel free to contact the Land Use Department prior to the hearing. Knowing the answers to some of your questions prior to the hearing may help you prepare your response.

Plan your presentation. It is not necessary, but if you have hand outs or a long document, you may save time by making it available to the Land Use Department staff at least 7 days before the public hearing. This way it can be made available to members of the Planning Commission in their packets, which they read prior to the hearings. If you have slides, overhead visuals or power point presentations let the staff know in advance.

Determine if others will be addressing the same issues. If so, try to coordinate your presentation before the hearing to avoid duplication.

Sign the speaker guest list at the table outside of the hearing room.

At the Hearing You Should…

Be present at the start of the hearing. If you cannot make the hearing a notorized letter must be submitted to the clerk of the hearing authorizing someone to represent you. Everyone present usually will have an opportunity to speak, but sometimes, because of large turnouts, this is not possible. However, there is no requirement to speak; but you may choose only to observe the process.

Plan on introducing yourself, giving your name, address and whether you are in favor or against the proposal. If you are officially representing a group such as the homeowner’s association, Chamber of Commerce or others, please state that for the record as well.

For the sake of efficiency, you may want to make a statement such as “I agree with the previous speaker(s),” and then elaborate on any new or additional information you want to provide.

Part of the official record of the hearing is a taped recording, and to ensure that you are adequately heard, please adjust the microphone to your height and speak directly into it.

After you have spoken, and if you later find that you object or need clarification of any testimony, you may request permission to readdress the commission.
Decorum…

The Planning Commission understands that hearings about plans that could impact your property and your way-of-life can be very emotional. However, a hearing should be a civil proceeding where it is inappropriate to cheer, boo, or applaud while a speaker has the floor. Citizens of Alamosa County will not always agree on an issue, but can make an effort to respect the public hearing process, where all viewpoints can be heard.

All comments should be addressed to the Chairperson. Questioning and arguing between individuals in the audience are not only inappropriate but are not an effective way to make a case to support your views on an issue.

Please refrain from reading long documents that can be easily submitted in advance and made a part of the record. Summarize your comments whenever possible and avoid repeating prior testimony.

Conduct of Public Hearings

The following hearing procedures are guidelines, which can be expected to generally govern hearings before the Planning Commission. The Chairperson has the discretion to enforce or alter the following procedures as necessary to ensure that meetings are conducted in an efficient manner while observing principles of fundamental fairness with respect to all interested parties.

1. The public is encouraged to participate in the hearing process. An agenda item is first introduced by the Planning Commission Chairperson, followed by a presentation by the Planning staff describing the project in detail. As part of the project presentation, question and answers between Commission members and staff is included for additional information and clarification. The chairperson will then hear a presentation by the applicant. The hearing will then be opened to the public for comments on any issues relevant to the hearing. Following the testimony of the project proponents and supporters, project opponents are given an equal opportunity to present testimony regarding the project.

2. After the opponents have finished testifying, the project proponent and project opponent are given time to offer rebuttal.

3. At the conclusion of the testimonies received, the Commission Chairperson will close the hearing and limit discussion to Commission members. Thereafter, the public will not be permitted to speak while the matter is under discussion by Commission members. During this discussion, Commission members may individually ask questions of the project proponent, opponent, or planning staff, at the convenience of the Commission.

4. It is requested that all presentations be limited to a maximum of five (5) minutes so that all interested parties will have an opportunity to address the Commission.
5. In all cases, in order to obtain and maintain an accurate record of the proceedings, address the Commission directly, and clearly introduce yourself with your full name and address.

6. The Planning Commission is not the final decision maker, but makes a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. Sometimes a case may be continued for further testimony and/or decision. A decision may be an approval, denial, or approval with conditions.

If you are going to testify, either “for”, “concerned”, or “against”, please try to use these guidelines:

1) Do not repeat previous testimony. It is OK to simply say “I agree with the previous speaker.”
2) Please address the Chairperson and Commissioners at all times, not the applicant or the case manager.
3) Be factual; not hearsay.
4) Do not make personal attacks.
5) Document your testimony using visual aids, reports, maps, or photos that may become part of the recorded case files.
6) If you have questions of the applicant, direct them to the Commission.
7) Please give the applicant and the Commissioners the same courtesy which you expect from them.

**Submitting Materials**

Please remember that any reports, maps, photos, or other information you provide during the public hearing becomes part of the public record and cannot be returned unless arrangements are made to duplicate the material at your expense. We request that copies be limited to 11” x 17” max, but 8-1/2” x 11” is preferred.

At all times you will find the planning staff willing to answer your questions and concerns and help in any way they can. We encourage you to contact the Land Use Department staff and Administrator at 719-589-3812 to get information about any special use plat, land use or other zoning information before the public hearing. This will help you to prepare factual testimony which supports your position.