

Keeping your plan commission & BZA meetings effective – Dick Whicker

- Start meetings on time
- Printed agenda – for public attendees too
- Try to have all members present if habitually absent – impress importance of regular attendance – suggest a replacement if necessary

At start of meeting #1

- State procedural rules of meeting
 1. petitioner present case
 2. commission & staff questions/comments
 3. public hearing
- Explain – action must be supported by affirmative votes from quorum – ie Hendricks Co – 4 for quorum of 7 member commission

At start of meeting #2

- Acknowledge: proposed land changes affect people's lives and cause distress
- But: must maintain civility & order during meeting
- State rules of conduct: no heckling, applauding, speaking out of turn etc
- Explain that disruptions: make it hard to hear presenters & remonstrators & commission wants to hear all comments
- Enforce the rules

Public hearing - Time limits

- Establish (in rules of procedure) time limits on citizen speakers
- Explain – if no limits meeting could go on for hours
- Can allow extended times (state in rules of procedure) for organized groups w/ a spokesperson
- Encourages organized, concise approach

Public hearing

- Sign up sheets for public speakers
- Call names in order of sign up
- Require speakers come to podium, state name & address

Three C's – clear, concise, courteous

- Be attentive to petitioners and public
- Be courteous & listen
- Avoid conduct side conversation w/ members or staff – can project wrong meaning:
 1. commission doesn't care
 2. project is already a done deal

Demonstrate an open & involved commission & process #1

- Speak openly & honestly to all concerned – petitioner & public
- No whispering or mumbling
- Ask questions of petitioner and public to assure understanding
- No political or opinionated statements that have no bearing on petition – don't preach to or demean any participant
- Be respectful, courteous & professional at all times

Demonstrate an open & involved commission & process #2

- Follow rules and ordinances – no arbitrary or capricious decisions for any reason
- Cite ordinance if needed – helps inform & educate why decision is made
- If contentiousness as result of decision – briefly explain citizen recourse, eg, civil suit
- Have open votes – no secret or quiet votes

No secrets or appearance of secrets

- Have open votes – petitioner and public deserve to know what commission thinks, feels & votes
- Be open and transparent in every action, discussion & decision
- Folks may not agree but will hopefully respect the process – less likely to seek retribution

Meeting aids

- Require/encourage petitioner to use visual aids – present so public can see too
- Use power sound system so all can hear
- Set meeting time limit, ie, no new cases will be heard after 10:30pm
- Continue them until next meeting or special meeting

BIG meetings

- If petition will require lots of time – consider special meeting
- At a facility large enough so all attendees can see & hear and be relatively comfortable
- Adequate sound system & other aids available

Petitioner/stakeholder interaction #1

- Require petitioners meet w/ stakeholders ahead of PC meeting
- Encourage understanding, participation & compromise
- Groups such as neighborhood associations, fire departments, law enforcement, schools, etc
- Helps build good will, provide advance information/avoid disinformation, confusion & anger

Petitioner/stakeholder interaction #2

- Allows time for petitioner to address citizen or agency concerns ahead of meeting – reduces hearing time

Continuances

- Discourage automatic or frequent continuance – both petitioner or citizen group
- Advance meetings will help reduce the number requests for continuance
- Insist – petitioner be prepared
- Usually a staff function – all document present & questions answered before meeting
- If habitual offender – PC insist on preparedness – perhaps continue case indefinitely until really prepared.

Questions???
