



# Citizens' Guide to Effective Communication

## Tips for participating in the development review process

### AN INTRODUCTION TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ANN ARBOR

As a citizen, you can take an active role in shaping Ann Arbor by participating in the planning and development process. Described below are several ways to become involved, as well as tips for effective communication when attending meetings and conversing with planning staff, planning commissioners, developers, and fellow residents.

### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION ORDINANCE

Ann Arbor's Citizen Participation Ordinance facilitates effective citizen participation early on in the project development process. City Code ensures that citizens and neighborhood groups are notified of proposed development projects in their community, depending on the size of the project:

- For large projects, citizens within 1,000 feet of the site are notified by postcard and invited to attend a citizen participation meeting where they can ask the developer questions and comment upon the project. Citizen feedback will be recorded and assembled into a report for the City Planning Commission and City Council.
- For small projects, citizens within 500 feet of the site are notified by postcard and given the petitioner's contact information so they can ask questions and comment upon the petition if interested.

### WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

- If a project is planned to occur in Ann Arbor, contact the developer, or if applicable, attend the citizen participation meeting for the project.
- Work with your neighborhood association to express your shared views. If you want to know more about neighborhood associations in Ann Arbor, visit [www.a2gov.org/neighborhoods](http://www.a2gov.org/neighborhoods).
- Call a Planning staff member, or, email or write a letter to the City Planning Commission.
- Attend a City Planning Commission and/or City Council meeting. Individuals will be invited to speak for up to 3 minutes during the public hearing portion of the meeting.

### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Successful planning relies on effective communication. When attending a public meeting or citizen participation meeting, or even when speaking or writing to planning staff or Planning Commissioners, it is best to follow the guidelines explained below:

#### Be Informed

Be sure of the facts and details of the particular project or issue at hand. Your statement will have more impact if you are accurate, informed, and objective.

#### Do Your Homework

Find out in advance what, if any, the speaking limit will be. Prepare your statement ahead of time to ensure it fits within the allotted time.

#### Explain Why

The most constructive comments relate to City Code, the Master Plan, or specific ways a project will affect your community. Simply being for or against a project without saying *why* does not provide useful information.

#### Be Courteous

Avoid personal attacks. Be civil, courteous, and respectful. Testimony will not be persuasive if it antagonizes and alienates others.

#### Stay on Point

Be clear, concise and to the point. Try to communicate with facts rather than relying on rhetoric.

#### Have an Open Mind

Attend meetings with an open mind. Try to be receptive, ready to learn, and open to perspectives different than your own.

Remember, you don't need to be an expert or an experienced public speaker to participate. Simply become informed about the issues, get involved, and share your thoughts. We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information about citizen participation in the City of Ann Arbor, visit the Planning & Development Services website, [a2gov.org/planning](http://a2gov.org/planning), or contact staff at (734) 794-6265, or [planning@a2gov.org](mailto:planning@a2gov.org).