

- Coordinate efforts with others. Do others on your street, in your neighborhood or in your community agree with your opinions?

Second Step: Write draft statements

- Address the governmental body.
- State your name and address.
- Say if you are testifying for yourself or a group.
- Explain your circumstances and how the issue affects your everyday life.
- Explain what it is about the issue that you like and do not like.
- Back your opinion with facts.
- Ask value questions: Are these changes good? What's really important here?
- Define what you want.
- Summarize important points.
- Keep the statement as short as possible.

Third Step: Evaluate draft statements.

- Let others read and comment on the draft statement.
- Consider visual aids. Posters, charts, fact sheets, fliers, and brochures can emphasize your points.
- Write up final copy.
- Make copies of testimony.

Fourth Step: Give Testimony

- Arrive early.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Thank them for the opportunity to speak.
- Provide copies of your testimony.

Information in this brochure was gathered from these sources every citizen has a responsibility to keep our

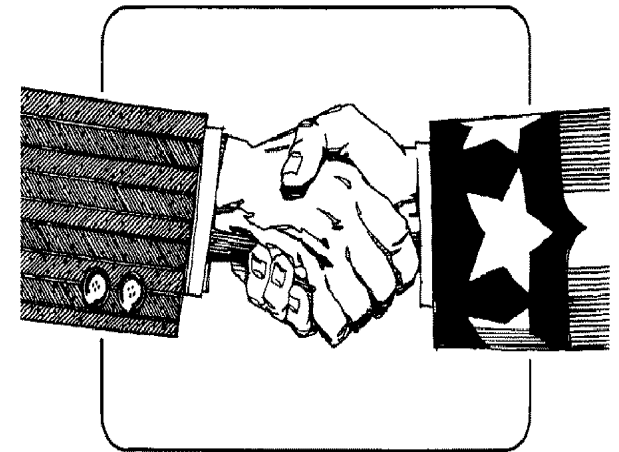
residential neighborhoods clean and attractive. This brochure highlights some of the major provisions of the city's property maintenance ordinances. Please use this brochure to help you recognize potential violation on your property an take corrective action to preserve your property value and the character of your neighborhood.

- Community Tool Box, <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/>
Salem, Oregon Neighborhood Handbook

Working with Local Government

Neighborhood Preservation

Guidelines for Neighborhoods



July 2000
Planning and Development Services
Neighborhood Preservation
6300 West 87th St., Overland Park, KS 66212
Ph. 913/895-6370 Fax 913/895-6371
neighborhoods@opkansas.org
<http://www.opkansas.org>



Working with Local Government

Inevitably, a local government decision or policy will effect you, your neighbors and your community. If you are going to be effected, shouldn't you take the opportunity to express your opinions and point of view? If you decide to take that opportunity, shouldn't it be the best it can be?

Working with local government can be a rewarding experience if the right approach is applied. Complaining to government staff and officials often offends and results in a negative response. However, presenting your opinions in a manner that shows that you fully understand the issue and by supporting your opinions with facts, you will be received more positively resulting in better lines of communication.

Here are some tips for effectively working with local government staff and officials.

General Principles

- Set goals; what do you want to achieve?
- Understand the issue.
- Know structure and purpose of local government.
- Understand the decision making process.
- Get to know your elected officials.
- Keep public officials informed. Do not surprise officials with unexpected actions.
- Work on all levels. Start with the person most directly responsible for your concern then work up to officials.
- Never threaten staff or elected officials.
- Be realistic.
- Involve members in different roles.
- Make it clear if you represent a group. Identify the name of your group and its purpose.
- Keep the neighborhood informed. Provide updated information in a neighborhood newsletter.

- Get solid answers. Ask specific information – dates, places, and times.
- Be open to suggestions. Take suggestions seriously and follow up on them.
- Follow up. Prepare a follow-up memo summarizing the discussion and the outcome. Check to see if whatever has been agreed to is being done.

Understand the Issue

Why should you have a good understanding of the issue?

- You will need to persuade allies to join your cause.
- You need to know why your opponents are taking the opposite position.
- You will know better what needs to be done to correct a situation.
- You will have facts and answers if confronted by the opponent.

To begin to understand the issue, find the answers to these questions:

- What is the history?
- Who is effected by the issue?
- How do people feel about the issue?
- How does the issue link or divide different segments of the community?
- What are the consequences of the issue?
- What is the economic impact?
- What is the social impact?
- What are the barriers?
- What are the resources?

Gather Information

To better understand the issue, research might be required. If so, try these places.

- Local media
- Libraries
- The Internet
- Interviews with community leaders and residents
- Annual reports

- Archival records
- Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
- Almanacs and Yearbooks
- Indexes and Surveys

Government officials and staff can provide additional background information about an issue.

Elected officials. They are a source of information and advocates for policy change. The City Council is made up of ten Council members. The governing body of Overland Park, consists of a mayor and two council members from each five wards. To reach an Overland Park elected official, call 913/895-6102.

Committees. Council committees are comprised of two council members and city staff with professional training in that particular area. They are often an advisory level of government. This is where the work leading up to the decision is conducted. To find out more about Overland Park committees, call 913/895-6000.

City staff. They can make small decisions, but generally cannot make policy decisions. The City Manager's Office, Police, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Planning and Development Services departments in Overland Park can help you find relevant information. To reach Overland Park city staff, call 913/895-6000.

Give Public Testimony

Giving personal testimony at a public hearing is one opportunity to express your opinions and concerns. Your personal testimony describes to decision-makers how the issue at hand impacts your life. To be the most effective, public testimony should be well presented and supported by factual information.

First Step: Prepare

- Know the time frame. Find out how much time you have to prepare. When, where and before who will a hearing take place?
- Be familiar with the process.
- Know your audience.