

**QUASI-JUDICIAL HEARING PROCEDURES  
AND RULES FOR EX-PARTE COMMUNICATIONS**

**I. Scope and Applicability.** These procedures shall apply to all quasi-judicial hearings held by the City Commission or by any Board or Committee (hereinafter referred to as "Boards") which holds quasi-judicial hearings. The City Attorney shall determine which matters are quasi-judicial in nature and shall direct the City Clerk or Board liaison to designate specially such matters on the agenda.

**II. Proceedings.** Mayor, Vice Mayor or other presiding officer (hereafter, the "Presiding Officer") shall conduct the proceedings and maintain order. The City Attorney or legal advisor shall represent the City Commission or Board, rule on all evidentiary and procedural issues and objections, and advise the City Commission or Board as to the applicable law and necessary factual findings. Hearings shall be conducted informally, but with decorum. Formal rules of procedure shall not apply except as set forth herein; however, fundamental due process shall be accorded.

**III. Unauthorized Communications.** In all quasi-judicial hearings, all rulings must be based only upon the evidence presented at the hearing. In accordance with Section 286.0115(1), Florida Statutes, ex parte communications with City Commissioners or Board members in quasi-judicial matters is permissible and the adherence to the following procedures shall remove the presumption of prejudice arising from ex parte communications with City Commissioners or Board members:

1. The substance of any ex parte communication with a City Commissioner or Board member which relates to a quasi-judicial action pending before the Commission or Board is not presumed prejudicial to the action if the subject of the communication and the identity of the person, group, or entity with whom the communication took place is disclosed and made a part of the record before the final action on the matter.

2. A City Commissioner or Board member may read a written communication from any person. However, a written communication that relates to a quasi-judicial action pending before the Commission or Board shall not be presumed prejudicial to the action, and such written communication shall be made a part of the record before final action on the matter.

3. City Commissioners or Board members may conduct investigations and site visits and may receive expert opinions regarding quasi-judicial action pending before them. Such activities shall not be presumed prejudicial to the action if the existence of the investigation, site visit, or expert opinion is made a part of the record before final action on the matter.

4. Disclosure made pursuant to subparagraphs 1, 2 and 3 must be made before or during the public meeting at which a vote is taken on such matters, so that persons who have opinions contrary to those expressed in the ex parte communication are given a reasonable opportunity to refute or respond to the communication.

**IV. Witnesses and Supporting Materials.** At least eight City business days before a quasi-judicial hearing.

A. Staff shall prepare a report, recommendation and supporting materials, a copy of which shall be available to the applicant, appellant and to the public at the City Clerk's Office. Included in the supporting materials will be copies of all exhibits and documents upon which staff's recommendation is based.

B. The Applicant and the Appellant, if applicable, shall submit a detailed outline of the argument in support of their application, copies of all exhibits which will be presented at hearing and the names and addresses of all witnesses who will be called to testify in support of the application (including resumes for any witness the party intends to qualify as an expert).

C. The eight City business day deadline is necessary to ensure the Commission or Board members are given sufficient opportunity to review the written submissions prior to the hearing, and shall be strictly observed. Should the ~~eight-day~~ City business day deadline be missed by either staff or the Applicant, the item may be continued at the discretion of the City Commission or Board to the next available agenda.

**V. Party Intervenors.**

The City Attorney may allow a person to intervene as a Party Intervenor if they meet the following requirements:

A. The person must have an interest in the application, which is different than the public at large.

B. At least ~~eight~~ three days prior to the hearing, the person shall submit a written request to intervene including: a detailed outline of their interest in the application and argument in favor or against it, copies of all exhibits which will be presented at the hearing and the names and addresses of all witnesses who will be called to testify on their behalf (including resumes for any witness the person intends to qualify as an expert).

## **VI. Conduct of Hearing.**

A. The Presiding Officer shall call the proceeding to order and announce that the hearing has begun.

B. The Presiding Officer, City Attorney or legal advisor shall inquire whether all parties, members of the public and Commission or Board members agree to waiving the quasi-judicial hearing.

C. When the quasi-judicial hearing is not waived, the City Attorney, legal advisor or Presiding Officer shall explain the rules concerning procedure, testimony, and admission of evidence.

D. When the quasi-judicial hearing is not waived, the City Clerk or staff liaison shall swear in all witnesses who are to testify at the hearing.

E. The order of proof shall be as follows:

1. A representative of the City's staff (or outside counsel) shall briefly describe the Applicant's request, introduce and review all relevant exhibits and evidence, report staff's recommendation, and present any testimony in support of staff's recommendation. Staff shall have a maximum of 30 minutes to make their full presentation, including opening statement and all direct presentation by witnesses, but excluding any cross-examination or questions from the Commission or a Board member.

2. The Appellant, if applicable, (or his/her representative or counsel) shall present evidence and testimony in support of the application. Appellant shall have a maximum of 30 minutes to make its full presentation, including opening statement and all direct presentation by witnesses, but excluding any cross-examination or questions from the Commission or a Board member.

3. Any Party Intervenor (or his/her representative or counsel) shall present evidence and testimony in support of or opposed to the application. A Party Intervenor shall have a maximum of 30 minutes to make his/her full presentation, including opening statement and all direct presentation by witnesses, but excluding any cross-examination or questions from the Commission or a Board Member.

4. The Applicant (or his/her representative or counsel) shall present evidence and testimony in support of the application. Applicant shall have a maximum of 30 minutes to make his/her full presentation, including opening statement and all direct presentation by witnesses, but excluding any cross-examination or questions from the Commission or a Board member.

5. Any other persons present who wish to submit relevant information to the City Commission or Board shall speak next for a maximum of three minutes each (excluding any cross-examination or questions from the Commission or a Board member). Members of the public will be permitted to present their non-expert opinions, but the Commission or board will be expressly advised that public sentiment is not relevant to the decision, which must be based only upon competent and substantial evidence.

6. The Appellant will be permitted to make final comments, if any (maximum of five minutes).

7. The Applicant will be permitted to make final comments, if any (maximum of five minutes).

8. The Party Intervenor will be permitted to make final comments, if any (maximum of five minutes).

9. The City's staff will make final comments, if any (maximum of five minutes).

10. At the discretion of the Presiding Officer, the Applicant may be permitted to respond to the final Party Intervenor and staff comments and recommendations (maximum of three minutes).

G. The City Attorney or legal advisor will advise the City Commission or Board as to the applicable law and the factual findings that must be made to approve or deny the application.

H. The City Commission or Board will conduct open deliberation of the application. The Presiding Officer shall have the discretion to reopen the proceeding for additional testimony or argument by the parties when an outcome substantially different than either the granting or denial of the application is being considered. After deliberations, a vote shall be taken to approve, approve with conditions or deny the application.

#### **VII. Examination by Commissioners and City Attorney or Legal Advisor.**

Commissioners, Board members and the City Attorney or Legal Advisor may ask questions of persons presenting testimony or evidence at any time during the proceedings until commencement of deliberation.

**VIII. Cross-Examination of Witnesses.** After each witness testifies, the City staff representative, the Applicant's representative, Appellant's representative, and/or the Party Intervenor's representative shall be permitted to question the witness, but such cross-examination shall be limited to matters about which the witness testified and shall be limited to five minutes per side. Members of the public will not be permitted to cross-examine witnesses. Cross-examination shall be permitted only as would be permitted in a Florida court of law.

## **IX. Rules of Evidence.**

A. All evidence of a type commonly relied upon by reasonably prudent persons in the conduct of their affairs shall be admissible, whether or not such evidence would be admissible in a court of law in Florida. Irrelevant, immaterial, harassing, defamatory or unduly repetitive evidence shall be excluded.

B. Hearsay evidence may be used for the purposes of supplementing or explaining other evidence, but it shall not be sufficient by itself to support a finding unless it would be admissible over objection in a civil action.

C. Documentary evidence may be presented in the form of a copy or the original. Upon request, parties shall be given an opportunity to compare the copy with the original.

**X. Statements of Counsel.** Statements of counsel, or any non-attorney representative, shall only be considered as argument and not testimony unless counsel or the representative is sworn in and the testimony is based on actual personal knowledge of the matters which are the subject of the statements.

**XI. Continuances and Deferrals.** The City Commission or Board shall consider requests for continuances made by City staff, the Applicant, the Appellant or a Party Intervenor and may grant continuances in its sole discretion. If, in the opinion of the City Commission or Board, any testimony or documentary evidence or information presented at the hearing justifies allowing additional research or review in order to properly determine the issue presented, then the City Commission or Board may continue the matter to a time certain to allow for such research or review.

## **XII. Transcription of hearing.**

A. The City Clerk or staff liaison shall preserve the official transcript of the hearing through tape recording and/or video recording.

B. The Applicant, Appellant or Party Intervenor may arrange, at its own expense, for a court reporter to transcribe the hearing.

C. The Applicant, Appellant or Party Intervenor may request that all or a part of the transcript of a hearing be transcribed into verbatim, written form. In such case, the Applicant, Appellant or Party Intervenor requesting the transcript shall be responsible for the cost of production of the transcription and the transcription shall become the official transcript.

**XIII. Maintenance of Evidence and Other Documents.** The Office of the City Clerk or staff liaison shall retain all of the evidence and documents presented at the hearing unless any such evidence is too large to be stored by the City Clerk or staff liaison. In that event, such evidence will be stored in the Community Planning and Development Department.

**XIV. False Testimony.** Any willful false swearing on the part of any witness or person giving evidence before the Commission or Board as to any material fact in the proceedings shall be deemed to be perjury and shall be punished in the manner prescribed by law for such offense.

**XV. Failure of Applicant to Appear.** If the Applicant, the Appellant or Party Intervenor or their representative fails to appear at the time fixed for the hearing, and such absence is not excused by the Commission or Board, the Commission or Board may proceed to hear the evidence and render a decision thereon *in absentia*.

**XVI. Subpoena Power.** The Applicant, the Appellant or Party Intervenor or City's staff shall be entitled to compel the attendance of witnesses through the use of subpoenas. All such subpoenas shall be issued by the City Clerk at the request of the Applicant, Appellant or City's staff.