

Guide to Civic Engagement

Our region's rapid growth is a popular and sometimes contentious topic in our community. Given the role real estate agents play in the growth discussion, it can be challenging knowing how to properly share your personal or professional views in a public forum. Here are seven tips to take when sharing your thoughts publicly.

1 DO YOUR RESEARCH

-  Search local and state news sources to ensure you are aware of the latest developments on the issue.
-  If persons or organizations are part of the issue, don't be afraid to politely reach out and ask questions, so you know the facts before taking a position for/against something.
-  Two key resources for REALTORS® for conducting in-depth research are realtorparty.realtor and nar.realtor/political-advocacy.

2 IDENTIFY THE PROPER PUBLIC FORUM

-  It's important that you know the proper level of government to work with, depending on the issue you have in mind.
-  Start a conversation by writing opinion articles and letters to the editor, or organize an in-person or conference call meeting between stakeholders to discuss questions and explain concerns or other ideas.

3 PREPARE TO PARTICIPATE

-  Understand your "WHY" for getting involved in this issue. Write down a list of reasons why this issue is important to you personally.
-  Reach out to the appropriate city or county office and request a time to speak at an upcoming meeting. Let them know the issue you'd like to discuss or present on and be willing to work with any time allotment they may give you. Be ready to sum up your message in a few minutes!
-  Know your audience. Make sure you understand who will be present besides the elected officials (other community members and organizations on the agenda). This may impact the response you receive from the officials and other attendees.
-  If you are going as a group, be sure to share ideas and collaborate on who will discuss what, and avoid saying the same things.

4 PLAN & ORGANIZE YOUR MAIN POINTS

-  Focus on the most important items and have them listed in order of importance in case you don't get through them all (you may get interrupted or asked questions while speaking, so keep track of where you are at in your presentation so you can pick up where you left off).
-  Ask the event organizer (city/county if applicable) if they will allow for submission of pictures or PowerPoint presentations, if you feel this is helpful to your speaking part.
-  After you present your case, be prepared for other questions or critiques of your position.

5 LOOK THE PART, ACT THE PART

-  Dress professionally to be taken seriously (business or business casual is recommended).
-  Even if you are passionate about your view, remain calm and respectful while speaking or addressing questions/criticism.
-  When presenting, be sure to keep slides or handouts clean, organized and professional.
-  If you are going as a group, ask them to follow simple rules of etiquette and appearance too. You don't want someone to be a distraction to your presentation.

6 MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

-  You may feel like your speaking time went too quickly and you didn't get to say everything you wanted to. Know that simply showing up and taking a side or offering insight is very important to the civic process.
-  Always be respectful in victory and defeat (there are good people on both sides of an issue).
-  Sometimes you don't get the response or action you seek; but don't give up on the process or future opportunities to present your thoughts and opinions in a public setting.

7 PLAN FOR AFTERWARDS

-  Have a thoughtful plan for how to handle the outcome. If defeated, you could voice your disappointment in a letter to the editor, or if you succeed, thank and recognize all parties involved, even those on the opposite side of you.
-  There may be subsequent meetings or discussions where you can follow up on your efforts and continue to follow/influence the issue.
-  If you didn't get enough time to share your full presentation, reach out to the applicable parties and ask them if you can do a follow-up conversation or send them your materials for review.

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