



HOW TO PARTICIPATE AS A NEIGHBOR – DESIGN REVIEW BOARD PLANNING DIVISION

505 Forest Avenue | Laguna Beach, CA 92651 | (949) 497-0713

IMPORTANT! If you have concerns about the effects this proposed project could have on your property, you may schedule a site visit. If you wish for a site visit to be conducted, then sign the Agreement for Site Visit form (found [here](#)) and return it to the City Staff identified on the public hearing notice. Once we have received the form, City Staff will provide your request to the Design Review Board (DRB) members to contact you to schedule the site visit. They will receive your request with the agenda packet no earlier than one week prior to the scheduled hearing. Do not conduct unauthorized and/or unscheduled site visits.

Familiarize Yourself with the Project

Public Notices are mailed out at least 21 days prior to a scheduled design review hearing. The public notices include the hearing date, project location and description, a contact person for questions related to the proposed project, and some basic procedural information.

In addition to mailed written notices, project sites may be required to be ‘staked’ with story poles and ribbons several weeks before the hearing to provide a visual representation of proposed building improvements. The proposed plans are available through links to the meeting agenda on the City’s website or at the Community Development Department counter at City Hall.

Neighbors are encouraged to contact the applicant or City staff/project planner with any questions or concerns they may have related to a proposed project. The name and phone number of the appropriate contact person is included on the public hearing notice. Our goal is to encourage all interested parties to work together to resolve concerns prior to the initial design review hearing, whenever possible. Neighbors and applicants are equally responsible for working towards a positive outcome.

Prior to the Hearing

The City requires that applicants take reasonable steps to contact neighbors prior to scheduling a design review hearing date to resolve potential issues before the initial hearing. The applicant should make a good faith effort to contact neighbors by telephone, email, or other means to satisfy and document the early communication requirements and is not required to meet in person. If you have concerns about a project, you are encouraged to let the applicant know as early as possible so that the applicant is given an opportunity to address those concerns.

Submitting Written Comments

In addition to discussing the project with the applicant, you may submit comments in writing. Comment letters should be submitted to the City as early as possible. You may submit comments on any agenda item in writing via mail to the Planning Manager at 505 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach, CA 92651 or by email to the assigned planner as identified on the public hearing notice and hearing agenda. In order to allow sufficient time for staff to review and consider your written comments, written comments will be accepted for consideration up until the close of business (i.e., 5:30 p.m.) on the business day before the Public Hearing is scheduled.

How Projects are Evaluated

Design Review projects are approved or denied based on sixteen (16) specific criteria. These criteria are described in Municipal Code Section 25.05.040(H) and include the following:

- Access
- Design Articulation
- Design Integrity
- Environmental Context
- General Plan Compliance
- Historic Preservation
- Landscaping
- Lighting and Glare
- Neighborhood Compatibility
- Pedestrian Orientation
- Privacy
- Public Art
- Sign Quality
- Sustainability
- Swimming Pools, Spas and Water Features
- View Equity

Neighbor comments and concerns related to a proposed project should be centered on these criteria to be appropriately considered by the approval authority.

Testifying at the Design Review Hearing

At the hearing, neighbors may testify in support of a project or express their concerns. Speaking time is limited, so it is advisable to plan your comments ahead of time. Having notes on hand to stay on topic is helpful. Expressing your comments or concerns within the framework of the design review criteria will help the approval authority appropriately consider your concerns in their deliberations and decision-making.

Appeals

If you reside within 300 feet of the subject property and disagree with a decision of the approval authority, you may appeal the decision to the City Council. Appeal forms may be obtained from the Office of the City Clerk and must be filed within 14 calendar days of the decision along with a required appeal fee. The City Council will hear the appeal at a noticed public hearing. The appeal hearing is limited to the grounds specifically identified on the appeal form.