

GUIDELINES FOR SPEAKERS AT PUBLIC FORUMS

Tip sheet

At Council, we encourage our community to have their say on issues and topics they care about. Hearing directly from people impacted by the decisions that Council makes is an important part of our democratic process. In addition to participating in Council's community engagement activities, you can apply to address elected Councillors at a public forum. This tip sheet will help you understand the process and ensure your speech effectively communicates your point of view.

HOW TO APPLY TO SPEAK

If you wish to speak about an item on the agenda for a Standing Committee or Council meeting, apply before midday on the day of the meeting. You can review upcoming Council [meeting agendas](#) on our website. Your application will need to note the item of business you want to speak about and whether you are speaking for or against the recommendation. Read the Council report and understand the recommendation to Council before deciding to apply as it may address your concerns already.

If you wish to speak about a matter that is not on the agenda for a Standing Committee or Council meeting, we must receive your application by 5pm on the Thursday before the forum you want to attend.

To apply, complete our [online application form](#). Alternatively, visit our Customer Service Centre from 9am-4.30pm Monday-Friday or call 02 4921 0333 and ask to speak to the Council Business Support team. We can help you complete your application. Your application may not be processed if information is missing.

APPROVAL TO SPEAK

The Chief Executive Officer determines requests to address Council at a public forum. She will consider the Code of Meeting Practice, the number other requests to speak, the nature of the item and any relevant legislation. The Council Business Support team will contact you before the meeting to advise of the outcome of your request and provide further information.

You may only address Council once per item. There is a maximum of four speakers at each public forum unless otherwise approved. Two speakers can address Council per item, one for and one against. Applications regarding items on Council's agenda will be given priority over matters not on the agenda.

SPEAKING AT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

While it can be intimidating to make a public speech, and there are protocols and procedures you must follow at the forum, remember Councillors and staff are people just like you, just temporarily occupying elected or unelected roles. They are interested in your experience and the information you can give them to help them make better decisions.

To hear a wide range of views and concerns within the limited time available, we encourage people speaking at public forums to:

- note the four-minute time limit for each speaker. Prepare your speech to cover your major points within that time. We strongly suggest that you practice beforehand, especially if you are not used to public speaking.
- focus on issues and information Councillors may not already know.
- if you are part of a group, nominate one person to speak on the group's behalf.

If you want to distribute any written material at the forum, please give it to Council staff before 5pm on the day of the forum.

During the meeting, follow the directions of the Mayor. The Mayor chairs the meeting and will let you know when it is your turn to speak.

You may not ask questions of Councillors or Council staff.

Councillors may ask you questions after your address, with speaker slots limited to 10 minutes in total per speaker. You are under no obligation to answer these questions.

Show courtesy to other speakers. Do not disrupt or interject when other people are making their submissions.

SUGGESTED STRUCTURE FOR YOUR PRESENTATION

Brief introduction.

“Good evening Madam Mayor, Councillors, and staff. My name is XYZ and I live in XYZ. I’ve come here to talk about/bring to your attention XYZ”.

You may wish to mention how long you have lived in Lake Macquarie.

A one sentence overview of your position.

“I am concerned the proposed development may cause dangerous traffic conditions for local school children.”

Why this issue is important to you How will this decision impact you personally, and how will it impact the wider community?

Additional detail including outside references or your own expertise/view as a member of the public. What evidence do you have for your argument?

Conclusion Concisely restate your position and what you would like Council to do. It’s appropriate to end your comments by thanking the Mayor, Council, and staff for their time and reaffirming your hope action is taken on the topic of your speech.

EXTRA TIPS

Be concise: You have only a short time (four minutes) to get your point across. Writing out your speech and timing yourself before the meeting will help ensure that you make all of your points within your allotted time. Try to stick to no more than three topics/points in total.

Speak slowly: By speaking slowly, you will be heard and understood by all. Council values your opinion and they know you’re taking time out of your day to speak.

Be polite: A clear, persistent message is more effective than one that is confrontational and rude. That said, feel free to say you are angry about specific aspects of the issue and calmly explain why. Try positive phrasing, such as “I hope you consider doing (XYZ) because (ABC).”

Connect yourself to the decision: Council wants to know what the impacts of their actions will have on our community members and the things they value. Be sure to mention how a decision will directly impact you and your family, or if you have expertise in a relevant industry or profession.

LIVESTREAMING

Public forums are broadcast live on our website but are not available for subsequent viewing. Temporary audio recordings are also made for the purpose of minute preparation and are stored securely for three months after the meeting minutes are confirmed.

By attending or addressing a public forum, you consent to this use of your image, voice and personal information.

AFTER THE MEETING

Once all speakers have addressed Council, Councillors will consider items, usually in the order they appear on the agenda.

Councillors may deal with the matter on the day and make a decision, or they may defer the matter to another meeting if they need more information. If you are not able to wait to hear their decision, you can find out what happened by watching the recording of the meeting on Council’s website.

NEED FURTHER ASSISTANCE?

 4921 0333 @ COUNCIL@LAKEMAC.NSW.GOV.AU