

Combine public hearings to consolidate community outreach process

It is often necessary for permit applicants to conduct public hearings during board meetings for multiple permitting departments, such as the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Board of Health. In municipalities where boards meet infrequently, multiple hearings can add considerable time to the permitting process. Combining multiple appearances into a single hearing can reduce the total permit approval process time. It also allows the municipality to consolidate reviews, reducing the total number of hearings.

At the local level, combining public hearings requires coordination and cooperation between departments and agencies, as well as procedural changes. Administrative agreements between participating boards may be necessary; in other cases board and commission rules and regulations may need to be revised to facilitate joint hearings.

In some places, state legislation may be needed to authorize joint hearings or consolidated permitting.

Examples of places using the strategy

- In *Yakima County, Wash.*, permit applicants are entitled to a combined hearing. As an alternative, the applicant can agree to an extended schedule that includes additional time necessary for combining public hearings.
- In *Kent, Wash.* (in Yakima County), the planning director has the authority to combine any public hearing on a project permit with hearings from another local, state, regional, federal, or other agency as long as a number of conditions are met, including that the other agency consents to the joint hearing. Any applicant may also request a joint hearing. Other communities in Washington, such as *Shelton* and *Ilwaco*, have similar municipal codes. In Shelton, city administrators are required to cooperate to the extent possible with other agencies in holding a joint hearing if requested.
- *Maryland* has a statute allowing joint and consolidated hearings on permits for projects that involve development permits by state agencies and local governments.
- *Oregon* law allows local governments to establish a consolidated procedure for applicants to apply at one time for all permits or zone changes needed for a development project.

Highlight location: Kent, Wash.

Kent, Wash.'s ordinance allows the planning director to combine any public hearing on a project permit application with any hearing held by another agency on the proposed action, as long as the other agency agrees and is not prohibited by statute from doing so; sufficient notice is given; the agency has all the necessary information from the applicant in time to hold its hearing; and the hearing is held within the Kent city limits.

Kent's ordinance is authorized by Washington State statute that allows a local government to combine hearings as long as the hearing is held within the geographic boundary of the local government. The statute goes still further, requiring that hearings must be combined if requested by an applicant, as long as statutory time periods are observed or the applicant agrees to additional time to allow for combined hearings.

Sources of information

- Yakima County, Kent, Wash.:
<http://www.codepublishing.com/wa/yakima/html/Yakima16/Yakima1603.html>
<http://www.codepublishing.com/WA/Kent/html/Kent12/Kent1201.html#12.01.060>

- Shelton, Wash.: “Consolidated Permit Review Process”
<http://www.codepublishing.com/wa/Shelton/html/shelton17/shelton1706.html>
- Ilwaco, Wash: “Administration of Development Regulations”
<http://www.codepublishing.com/wa/ilwaco/html/Ilwaco15/Ilwaco1508.html>
- Washington, Oregon, and Maryland: “Administrative and Judicial Review of Land-Use Decisions”
<https://www.planning.org/growingsmart/guidebook/print/pdf/chapter10.pdf>

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