

What is a Public Scoping Hearing?

When the city starts a neighborhood rezoning, the Department of City Planning (DCP) has to measure the “environmental impact” of the rezoning. This includes things you might think of as “the environment,” like parks and open space, but also impacts on people, businesses, and important places (like schools) in the area.

First, DCP releases a “Draft Scope,” which is an initial proposal for what they want to study. Then they hold a Public Scoping Hearing to get feedback on the Draft Scope. After the Public Scoping Hearing, the city should change their plans for the Environmental Impact Study to include the feedback they received.

Why it's important to participate

What DCP studies in its Environmental Impact Study shapes the decisions they make about the neighborhood rezoning. If a rezoning might affect the community in a bad way, it's important for DCP to do a detailed study to understand what those bad effects are going to be, and to come up with a plan for addressing them. If DCP decides early on in the process that it's not necessary to study a particular kind of bad impact, then they won't adjust their rezoning plan to address those bad effects. That's why it's so important for community members to speak at the Scoping Hearing—it's your chance to demand that the city studies everything that's important to your community.

What happens at the Scoping Hearing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When you get to the hearing, you'll be asked to sign in. If you want to speak (sometimes called “giving testimony” or “testifying”), you'll also need to sign in on a “Request for Speaking Time” sheet.City agencies and community boards will speak first. They have no time limit on how long they can speak.Individual members of the public will speak next. Each person gets 3 minutes to speak.All comments will be officially recorded.The hearing will last as long as it takes to hear all speakers. If there are too many speakers for one evening, the city may decide to hold a second meeting, so more people can give testimony. But they're not required to do that.
What do people talk about at the hearing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The city will only respond to comments related to certain issues, including residential displacement (will people who currently live in the neighborhood be pushed out?), business displacement, and impacts on community facilities, like schools. Comments about these and other environmental issues will be published and responded to in the Environmental Impact Study.However, rezonings are also part of a bigger political process, and the Scoping Hearing is the first step in that process. You can really bring up any challenge you feel the neighborhood is facing and that you want the city to work on as part of its overall plan. (But remember: if it's not related to land use or environmental issues, it won't get addressed in the Environmental Impact Study.) Talk about what's most important to you, and don't worry too much about the technical details!
Is this the only chance to give feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No. Written feedback can also be submitted before and after the hearing. The deadlines for written feedback are made public when the Scoping Hearing date is set.

Ask the city to make it easier to participate

Community members and elected officials can ask the Department of City Planning (DCP) to do things that help more people participate. Here are examples of things you can ask for:



Better access to the Draft Scope

Ask DCP if you want the document available in more places, or if you want it translated into different languages



Rescheduling the hearing date and time

Let DCP know if there are scheduling conflicts that make attending difficult (like holidays or school events)



Delaying the hearing date

Ask for more time to do outreach to multi-lingual communities and other groups that are hard to reach



Multiple hearings in different locations

This can help increase participation, especially across large areas like Jerome Avenue



Interpretation services for the hearing

You can also ask for important documents to be translated



More time to submit written comments

More time means more people can participate

Tips for getting ready

Organize together as a coalition before the hearing

- Decide together what messages you want to get across during the hearing, and what specific issues or recommendations you want to cover.
- Encourage lots of coalition members to attend, even if not everyone wants to speak. Scoping Hearings are a chance to demonstrate your coalition's power and show how many people are involved and united around a common platform.
- Divide up the topics you want to address so that everything gets covered. Since each person only gets 3 minutes to speak, consider asking individual coalition members to focus their time on 1-2 specific issues.
- Coordinate so that all coalition members who speak talk about the coalition's platform in the same way

Prepare to give your testimony

- Write your comments in advance and practice it out loud to make sure you can stick to the 3-minute limit.
- In general, think about including these points in your testimony:
 - Who you are ("My name is...")
 - What your connection is to the neighborhood ("I own a restaurant on Jerome avenue," or "I'm a rent-stabilized tenant in this neighborhood, and I've lived in my apartment for 13 years")
 - That you're a member of the coalition and support the four principles of the coalition platform
 - The issue you want to focus on—what your main concerns are and what specific recommendations you want to make