



## About Making a Delegation to a Municipal Council or Standing Committee of Council

**Whether you live in a big city with a large municipal council, or a small municipality with a few councillors, you, too, can make your voice heard by your local officials.** Issues are brought to councils in three ways: they can be brought forward by councillors for decisions, presented by council committees for decisions, or presented by members of the public for consideration. Members of the public who make presentations to their municipal council or standing committees are called *delegations* (in some municipalities they are called disputations or deputations). Council delegations allow citizens to get local issues into the public arena, and are a basic component of the municipal democratic process.

### Before You Begin

Where possible, it's preferable to raise your concerns at the municipal staff level. Before you consider making a delegation to council, talk to staff to see if they can resolve your issue. Take the time to find out whether your issue falls under the mandate of a standing committee of council. Committees sometimes allow more time than councils for delegations (giving you more time to present your case), and often have more time to spend on research before making a recommendation to council. Contact your own local councillor or other councillors who might be sympathetic to your cause, and see if they will present it to council on your behalf. If you decide to be a delegation, contact your municipal clerk to find out the specific procedures for your municipality.

### Procedure

Delegation processes differ among municipalities, and the following steps are generalizations. Be sure to check with your municipal office for the specifics in your community. The procedures outlined here apply to municipal councils; however, those for standing committees are similar. Any key differences are noted below.

Contact the municipal clerk's office to request a delegation before council. Be sure to ask what deadlines apply, as they vary widely. You will probably have to register in writing, by fax or e-mail, and you might have to fill out a form. Municipal councils have a set period of time allotted to delegations, so the earlier you register, the greater your chances are of getting in their meeting schedules. Be sure to ask how much time you have to make your presentation. Often, you are permitted only 5 to 10 minutes. Check with the clerk when you register and plan your time accordingly. Familiarize yourself with the

agenda for the meeting at which you hope to present. If your issue is already on the meeting agenda, you will be asked to state your position on the issue; if it is not an agenda item, you will be asked to provide details about the action(s) you would like council to approve. Let the clerk know if you are representing a large group, as such groups are often asked to select one spokesperson.

If you have printed materials to distribute to the council members, check with the clerk's office to determine how many copies must be provided. Where possible and permitted, submit any written materials in advance so that councillors have an opportunity to review them and prepare questions. Remember, *any written material you submit will become part of the public record.*

Delegations are often scheduled at the beginning of a council meeting. The head of council (mayor, reeve, regional chair, county warden) will call your name and announce the matter that you will be addressing. Whether you stand at a podium or at your seat, address your remarks to the mayor and members of council (or chair and members of the committee, as appropriate).

After your presentation, the mayor or other head of council will open the discussion for questions from council members. Once all questions have been addressed, the delegation is ended and council will usually not entertain any further comments from the delegation. When all delegations on a topic have been heard, the council will debate the matter. Regarding delegations to standing committees, keep in mind that any committee recommendations will have to be approved by council.

### Tips for Success

- Check your facts, and then double-check them. Nothing harms your credibility more than presenting incorrect information.
- Make sure the information you are presenting is new, and not being presented by other groups (this is another reason to familiarize yourself with the agenda). Time spent reiterating what others have said is time that could have been spent presenting additional support for your cause.





- Be clear about what decision you would like council to make. If you have alternative solutions to what is being proposed, be sure to state them. Voice your opinion on a proposal, but try to focus on solutions rather than problems.
- Make notes on what you plan to say or, if you aren't terribly comfortable with public speaking, write out your presentation in its entirety so that you can simply read it. Practice makes perfect, so unless you are an experienced speaker (or even if you are), rehearse your presentation a few times. This has several benefits: it helps you craft your words well and become more comfortable with what you plan to say, and it allows you to see if your delegation will fit into the allotted time. It may feel strange to stand in your living room and say to your dog/kids/fish tank/wall "Madam Mayor and Members of City Council, I am here today to speak to you about...", but it really does help.

Be sure to address the council and committee members formally, even if you happen to know them personally. If you are unsure as to the title of your head of council, check your municipal website or ask the clerk's office.

Note that some townships have a mayor instead of a reeve, so check in advance to ensure that you use the correct form of address.

Delegations to council should be addressed to "Madam/Mr. Mayor (or Chair, Warden or Reeve, as appropriate) and Members of Council." Delegations to a committee should be addressed to "Madam/Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee."

**Here are some general rules for addressing a head of council:**

**Chair:** head of government of a *regional municipality* (e.g. Regional Municipality of Waterloo)

**Warden:** head of government of a *county* (e.g. the County of Oxford)

**Mayor:** head of government of a *city or town* (e.g. the City of Ottawa)

**Reeve:** head of government of a *village and most townships* (e.g. the Village of Hilton Beach)

Finally, **always be polite and respectful**. This might sound obvious, but we sometimes tend to get excited when talking about issues we feel passionately about. Etiquette can quickly be forgotten when debating with parties whose views are drastically unlike our own. Good manners enhance your credibility and the integrity of your position.

---

Ontario Nature protects and restores nature through research, education and conservation action. Ontario Nature champions woodlands, wetlands and wildlife, and preserves essential habitat through its own system of nature reserves. It is a charitable organization representing 25,000 members and over 140 member groups across the province, connecting individuals and communities to nature.

If you wish to support Ontario Nature or learn more about current conservation issues in Ontario visit: [www.ontarionature.org](http://www.ontarionature.org)



**ONTARIO NATURE**

355 Lesmill Road, Toronto, Ontario M3B 2W8

Tel: (416) 444-8419 Toll free: 1-800-440-2366

Fax: (416) 444-9866 Email: [info@ontarionature.org](mailto:info@ontarionature.org)