

# Presenting to Municipal Committees: Tips and Traps

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# Purpose

- To give public works staff and managers considerations when speaking to municipal committees
- Goals:
  - Understand your audience
  - Identify presentation techniques useful in making your case
  - Identify shortcomings to overcome
  - Give educational credits for attendance



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# Today's Outline

- The City Committee Process
- Knowing Your Audience
  - Profiles of City Committee Members
- Presentation Techniques
- Pitfalls to Avoid
- Media Issues
- Public Forum Issues
- Public Records Law Issues



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# Basics of The Municipal Committee Process



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# When Do You Need To Present to a Municipal Committee?

- Budget Committee
  - Yearly Approval Process of City Budget
- Planning Commission
  - Approval of Land Use Decisions
  - Examples:
    - Comprehensive Plan Amendments (Zoning)
    - Also approves land-use related planning devices such as transportation plans, public utilities master plans



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## When Do You Need To Present to a Municipal Committee? (con't)

- Parks & Community Services Board
  - Advises the City Council on parks and open space issues
- Transportation Commission
  - Advises the City Council on transportation-related issues



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# Process

- City/County staff generates plan
- Staff presents to Municipal Committee
- Committee deliberates and gives recommendation to elected body
- City Council/County Commissioners deliberate
- Approval of plan through ordinance





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# Knowing Your Audience



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# Who am I presenting to?

- Profile of a Municipal Committee Member:
  - Typically Volunteers
  - Appointed by the Municipal Elected Officials
  - Residency or Business Ownership Requirements



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# Volunteers Appointed by Elected Officials

- Sources:
  - Off the street
    - Civically-interested individuals
  - Council/Commissioner recruits
    - Can have elected official backing
    - Can be opposed by officials
    - May be close political allies of elected officials



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# Volunteers Appointed by Elected Officials (con't)

- Learning curve for new members
- May have long-standing tenure on particular committee
  - Large volume of institutional knowledge
- Motivation to serve on committee
  - May have particular “pet issues”
- May have strong ties to community



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# Volunteers Appointed by Elected Officials (con't)

- Easy process for elected officials to re-appoint
- Elected officials may also not re-appoint for reasons Including:
  - Inactivity
  - Adverse personality/political stances
  - Loss of eligibility



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# Example Profile

- Professional with college degree
  - Possible retiree with long connection to community
- Serves on multiple committees
- Possible local political aspirations
- Close ties with local elected officials
- “Pulse on the Community”



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# Presentation Techniques



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# Overall Goals

- In essence-making an argument to the committee on why your proposal should be accepted as presented
- Argument in favor of proposal, yet not presented as a one-sided proposal
- Displays good rationale and need





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# Proposal Techniques

- Based on an argument in favor of proposal
- Rhetoric approach
- Uses three pillars of support from Aristotle
  - Ethos
  - Logos
  - Pathos



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# Ethos: The Credible Advocate

- Ethos
  - The speaker's credibility
  - Can be from a number of sources
    - Education
    - Job Experience
    - Appearance
    - “Borrowed” Credibility: Person with high credentials vouching for speaker's credibility
    - Reputation



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# Logos: The Logical Connection

- Data demonstrating facts
  - Past trends
  - Current situation
  - Projected future effects
  - Compliance criteria by law
- Applying data to present proposal
  - Using hard numbers: capital expenditures, condition satisfaction, and timelines



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# Logos: The Logical Connection (con't)

- Data Issues
  - May be based on assumptions: identify assumptions
  - May be incomplete: identify data needed
- Use of analogies
  - Neighboring communities
  - Past local performance
- Prepare to identify data strengths and weaknesses



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# Pathos: The Emotional Appeal

- Identifies with audience's sense of identity and self-interest
- Arguments that trigger emotion:
  - Examples:
    - Reliability/Disrepair
    - Convenience/Inconvenience
    - Aesthetics
    - High Status: Gaining Notoriety
    - Economic development
    - Efficiency/Inefficiency



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# Pathos: The Emotional Appeal (con't)

- Dynamics:
  - Easier to approve of a proposal that appeals to a group's self interest
  - Proposals can demonstrate needs based on community desires
  - Difficult (i.e. expensive or unpopular) decisions can be proposed through Pathos appeals as well:
    - Compliance necessities
    - Community perceptions of need (economic development)



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# Pitfalls to Avoid



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# Based on Aristotle Again

- Ethos:
  - Losing credibility
- Logos:
  - Presenting faulty data
  - Incorrect assumptions
- Pathos
  - Misidentifying emotional appeal





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# Ethos Pitfalls

- Losing Credibility:
  - False credibility: misrepresenting authority
  - Past misrepresentations
    - Prior performance: project history
  - Detached from proposal ownership
  - Reputation issues
- Typically deal with past performance measures



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# Ethos Pitfalls: Remedies

- Gaining back credibility:
  - Past performance shortfalls:
    - Identify causes and explain
      - Budgetary Constraints
      - Unanticipated Delays/Regulatory Hurdles
    - Explain why it will not be an issue again
  - Integrity issues are very difficult to overcome
    - Important to maintain especially in public bodies: ethical issues, government oversight laws



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# Logos Pitfalls

- Bad Data
  - Can be demonstrated through prior proposals and inconsistencies
- Assumptions may not be backed up by data
- Anecdotal data unreliable
- Unknown data
- Speculative trends



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# Logos Pitfalls: Remedies

- Identify unknowns or questionable data
- Explain, explain, explain
- No excuses—taking ownership and demonstrating conclusions from questionable or unknown data values



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# Pathos Pitfalls

- Misidentifying emotional approach
  - Appealing to the incorrect community desires
  - Using heavy-handed emotional appeals
    - Concluding that audience should feel a certain way
- Failing to give meaningful options
  - “Hand in the wood chipper approach”



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# Pathos Pitfalls: Remedies

- Allow the audience to come to its own conclusion on community values
- Give meaningful options
  - Proposal consequences
  - Modified proposal consequences
  - Consequences of inaction
- Balance needs of staff with needs of community



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# Presentation Tactics

- Have an outline
  - Formats Vary
  - Use what you are comfortable with
  - Example:
    - Introduction: Builds Ethos
    - Request: What are you asking for?
    - Proposal: Situation—Task—Plan—Responsible Parties—Budget/Timeline—Expected Results: Builds Logos
    - Why it is necessary: Builds on Pathos



# Presentation Tactics (con't)

- Always have a question & answer session at the end
- Why?
  - Builds Ethos: Demonstrates capability of speaker
  - Reinforces Logos: Challenges data and reinforces logical connections
  - Builds Pathos: Able to explain the “why” and ability to meet community needs





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# Presentation Tactics (con't)

- Anticipate questions that will be asked and have answers
- Rehearse if at all possible
- Anticipate reaction to proposal through polling with colleagues
- Introduce yourself to committee members to build rapport



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# Media Issues

- Committee Presentations are recorded
  - Typically Audio
  - Sometimes Televised
- Testimony is on the public record and reviewable
- Anyone can fact-check
- Appearance and Presentation Techniques are meaningful



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# Media Issues (con't)

- Pictures: Caution
  - Internet-sourced pictures used in slides may be subject to federal copyright protection
  - Have a policy on presentation pictures to avoid infringement claims



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# Public Records Law Issues

- Documents submitted to committee are part of the public record and reviewable
- Retention of documents subject to Public Records Laws
- Minutes taken and reviewed for approval at later hearings
  - Speak Clearly for Record
- Record may be used at future hearing or appeal



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# Questions?



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