



OFFICE OF  
**Community  
& Civic Life**

Promote the common good



Uplifting community spirit since 1968.

## Land Use/ Transportation Chair

Greetings,

Congratulations on becoming the land use chair for your neighborhood! The land use chair position is an excellent way to be involved in your neighborhood. It offers you a chance to stay on top of developments that are occurring within your community, interact with developers, city staff and policymakers, and work with your neighbors to help bring about a collective vision for your neighborhood.

Land use procedures and policies in Portland are sometimes complex and even people who have served as land use chairs for a long time can have difficulty understanding them. This packet includes a basic overview of the land use chair position. Additionally, there are a number of resources to support you in this role:

- Attend a free **ABCs of Land Use training**, hosted by District Coalitions (like SE Uplift) and delivered by knowledgeable Bureau Staff. Contact me to find out when the next training is scheduled.
- **Meet with me**, SE Uplift's Neighborhood Planning Program Manager, for a brief one-on-one orientation. It's a great way to learn about the role and get questions answered specific to your neighborhood and interests.
- **Attend SE Uplift's monthly Land Use and Transportation Committee (LUTC)**. Meetings are held on the third Monday of the month from 7pm-9pm at 3534 SE Main. Land use chairs from neighborhoods, interested neighbors, city staff, and others come together to discuss land use issues, programs, projects, and city planning efforts. As a representative from your neighborhood, you can attend these meetings and voice your questions, concerns, and ideas. Visit SE Uplift's LUTC webpage for more information. <http://www.seuplift.org/se-uplift-land-use-transportation-committee/>
- Sign up for monthly **LUTC Updates and the SE Uplift Newsletter** for news about land use and transportation policy and plans in the pipeline and more. Visit SE Uplift's main page to sign up: <http://www.seuplift.org>
- **People are often the best resource.**
  - As SE Uplift's Neighborhood Planning Program Manager, I am here to help you get started and help out along the way. I am here to provide technical assistance, advice, and support. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any issues you may have – big or small. I look forward to working with you.
  - Each neighborhood district coalition also has a liaison assigned to it from the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. The liaison can assist you with questions about city policies, zoning, and planning efforts. Our current liaison is Marty Stockton. She can be reached at: (503) 823-2041 and [marty.stockton@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:marty.stockton@portlandoregon.gov).
  - Your peers are also a great resource. Reach out to other neighborhood land use chairs either by email, in-person at the LUTC meetings, or via the LUTC google group. We are all here to support each other.
  - Lastly, we highly encourage you to share this role with other volunteers in your neighborhood, both on or off the board. It is very common for multiple volunteers to divide the role based on availability, interest, and because it's more fun working in a team. Check in with me if you have questions about this.

Thank you for volunteering to be your neighborhood's land use chair. Your time and energy is truly valued.

Sincerely,

Leah Fisher, Neighborhood Planning Program Manager

(503) 232-0010 ext. 313. | [leahf@seuplift.org](mailto:leahf@seuplift.org)

## Land Use Chair Job Description

Every neighborhood has different challenges and opportunities. Every land use chair has different skills and interests. What you end up doing as a land use chair depends both on what is needed from your neighborhood and what energizes you. The position is what you make it. There are, however, some common responsibilities for all land use chairs. Here are a few:

- 1. Resource for your Neighborhood Association Board and Neighbors:** It is your job to keep your neighborhood association board updated on land use issues that occur within your neighborhood and on citywide planning efforts. At a minimum, provide a land use report at each of your neighborhood association meetings and share issues/opportunities with the board as they arise. You will also serve as a resource for your neighbors. They will look to you for information about what is happening in the neighborhood and for advice about how they can be involved. It can feel overwhelming at times, but you can always contact the Neighborhood Planning Program Manager at SE Uplift for support and guidance.
- 2. Representative for your Neighborhood Association Board:** Follow the advice of Spider-Man: “With great power comes great responsibility.” You may have the title of land use chair, but that does not mean that you can speak for the neighborhood association board without their approval. When you respond to a land use notice, talk with reporters, interact with city agencies, etc., it is important to distinguish when you are speaking as a representative of your neighborhood association, and when you are speaking as an individual. You have the right to voice opinions, take positions and advocate. Just use your board position title when appropriate. It is prudent to err on the side of caution.
- 3. Land Use Notification and Response:** Land use chairs receive land use notifications sent from the Bureau of Development Services (BDS). Notifications inform you of various land use actions, including applications, decisions and hearings that are proposed for your neighborhood. Notifications also fill you in on how neighbors can formally respond to a particular land use application. As land use chair, it is your responsibility to share notices with the rest of the board and neighbors that may be impacted by a development (See **page 4 & 5** for tips).
- 4. Point of Contact for Developers and City Agencies:** You will be listed in the Office of Community and Civic Life Directory. Therefore, when developers are interested in talking about a project in your neighborhood or representatives from city agencies want to talk with someone about a land use/planning project, you will likely be contacted.
- 5. Source of Inspiration and Direction:** Remember that bit about the job being what you make it? It is true. There are endless opportunities to work on projects, influence policies, and engage others in shaping the future of your neighborhood. Follow your passions, listen to your neighbors, and keep an eye out for opportunities. It won't always be fun, but it can be enjoyable if you make it so.

## **Discussing Land Use Issues at your Neighborhood Association Meeting**

One of the most time-consuming activities that neighborhood associations encounter is reviewing and dealing with land use issues in the neighborhood. Often, developers ask for time at association meetings to present their projects in a public forum and get feedback from the community. This is important outreach to the community, but these projects are often contentious and can be time consuming since neighbors often have many worthwhile questions and concerns about projects. Here are a few tips to enhance discussion of land use projects within your neighborhood during your meetings:

- 1.** Send out land use issues and notices to be discussed in advance. This will allow neighbors to review projects and come to meetings prepared with questions after gaining more understanding of the project.
- 2.** Stick to the time allotted for discussions of developments and projects, as not everyone in the neighborhood is always interested in these projects, and associations have other business to take care of. Schedule time after the general meeting for people to ask additional questions or provide contact information for the developer or land use chair so people can follow up with additional questions.
- 3.** If there is a contentious land use issue to be discussed within the regular association meeting, consider front-loading committee reports and other regular association business. This way people who are not interested in the land use issue can get the info they need without waiting through a lengthy land use discussion. This also allows for the meeting to be extended if people want to discuss the land use issues further without compromising the rest of the meeting agenda.
- 4.** Consider setting up ground-rules for the meeting. Ground rules will help ensure that people treat one another and any presenters respectfully, and that all participants have the opportunity to speak.
- 5.** If there is a large development proposal, organize an additional meeting solely for the purpose of discussing the development. Set the tone of the meeting by sharing expectations of what the attendees can or cannot change about the proposal.
- 6.** If you suspect the crowd will be large and the potentially contentious, consider handing out sticky notes or paper in advance of the meeting to collect written questions during the meeting. This will allow you to couple and paraphrase questions and prevent and control the tone of the question. Or consider having another board member ask the first question to set a positive and constructive tone.

## Reading and Responding to a Notice of Proposed Development

Depending on the type of development, the City of Portland may send out notice of development proposals within your neighborhood in order to give the neighborhood an opportunity to comment on the proposal. Some examples of notifications include requests for adjustments for the setbacks on a property, demolition notifications, requests to subdivide properties, and requests for zoning changes for a site. It is important to note, that notices are only sent out when the proposed development is asking for something that is not allowable “by right” in the city’s zoning code. You will not always be given notice of construction and development projects occurring in your neighborhood.

As land use chair, you will receive notices and you will be listed as your neighborhood’s point of contact for neighbors and developers. The notices are also sent to property owners within a few hundred feet of a proposed development. You can track your neighborhood’s notices here:

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/42262>

### What to do with a Land Use Notice?

Land use notices can range from something minor on a single property that only impacts nearby neighbors to large scale development that will impact your whole neighborhood. How do you decide what needs a response and what does not need a response? Here are a few suggestions:

- Share the notice with your fellow board members and ask if they would like it to be discussed at your next meeting. Make it clear that you are not asking for their opinions on the proposal, but instead only if they think it should be a topic on the next meeting agenda. Remember, your board should always have a vote before the neighborhood association officially responds to a notice.
- Be receptive to the concerns of neighbors. Even a seemingly minor request can impact people. It is your job to listen to their concerns, share them with your board, and be part of the decision around when to formally respond as a neighborhood association. Even if a board chooses not to act, you can still help your neighbors by reviewing their comments, explaining the land use processes, and connecting them with others who might share their concerns.
- Call or email the city staff person listed as the contact on the notice. The staff person can provide specific information about what the land use case may or may not involve. This can inform whether or not a neighborhood association chooses to respond to a notice.

## **Tips for Written Responses to a Land Use Notice**

As a neighborhood association, you have a right to respond to all land use notices. A written response from a neighborhood association can carry important weight in a decision, so you want to make sure that you do the best job you can to represent the interests of your neighborhood. Here are a few tips for writing an effective response.

- Work with SE Uplift’s Neighborhood Planning Program Manager who can explain how the Zoning Code is organized and how to navigate it.
- Make sure you are referencing the most up-to-date zoning code. Updated zoning code can be found through the Auditor’s Office on the City of Portland website: <http://www.portlandonline.com/auditor/index.cfm?c=28197>
- Know your rights: You have the right to comment on the development; you have the right to receive notice of the decision; you have the right to appeal the decision if you don't agree with it. Appeals fees are waived for neighborhood associations.
- Create a response that addresses the needs of your neighborhood. If you feel the proposed land use principally does not fit into your neighborhood, than explain this in the letter. Each zoning code section has a “Purpose” section at the beginning of the chapter. This will give you the principles behind the rules and allow you to speak to the principle of the zoning regulations. Make sure you have your response in writing so you can submit it to the record if there is a public hearing.
- Letters of support are great, too! If you think a proposed development will make your neighborhood a better place, than tell the assigned planner that as well. It helps keep your neighborhood in regular communication with the city.

## **Tips for Oral Testimony**

Depending on the land use case, there may or may not be an opportunity to testify in person in front of City Council or a Hearings Officer. This can be a powerful way for you to convey your neighborhood’s interests. It can also be a bit intimidating. Here are few tips to help you perform like a star:

- Have a prepared statement. Practice it! Submit it to the record before or after you testify.
- Keep in mind time limits! In most cases, you will only have 3-5 minutes to testify at a hearing or council session. What you can say in 3 minutes you can say better in 2.
- Avoid emotional statements, stick to the facts and the current zoning code.
- Remember your audience: Hearings Officers are hired land use attorneys, but Council members are elected officials who may not have the depth of knowledge about a subject you do. Keep it simple, clear, and concise.
- If you are able to share a visual with the information, that can go a long way to help the Council members understand the situation. This may be providing a well-known example/site/location/situation they can relate to or bring in photos to share with them and include in your submitted testimony.

## Interacting with City Agencies

The city agencies are there to work for you. If you have a question or a concern, don't hesitate to contact the appropriate agency. Here is a list of agencies you may be in touch with in your role as land use chair.

### **Bureau of Development Services-(BDS)** <http://www.portlandonline.com/bds/>

BDS oversees current planning including zoning, code enforcement, and building permits. It is the agency that sends out the land use notices you will receive. You can always contact the planner listed on the land use notice if you have questions or need further information. If neighbors are concerned that there may be a code violation for a specific property, you can direct them to report it here: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/34180>

### **Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS)** [www.portlandonline.com/bps/](http://www.portlandonline.com/bps/)

The Bureau of Planning is useful for getting zoning code, maps and information about comprehensive planning. BPS provides district liaisons and works on on-going planning projects, studies and district plans. Our current district liaison is Marty Stockton, (503) 823-2041 and [marty.stockton@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:marty.stockton@portlandoregon.gov). She is there to serve as a resource for you.

### **Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT)** [www.portlandonline.com/transportation](http://www.portlandonline.com/transportation)

PBOT is in charge of transportation plans and projects, street maintenance operations and new infrastructure construction. If neighbors have a safety concern or an idea for a transportation improvement, you can direct them to report it to (503) 823-SAFE.

### **Bureau of Environmental Services (BES)** [www.portlandonline.com/bes](http://www.portlandonline.com/bes)

BES handles citywide watershed management, wastewater treatment, sewer lines and stormwater projects. You may hear from the bureau when it is engaged in a large scale project.

### **Office of Community and Civic Life (Civic Life)** [www.portlandonline.com/oni](http://www.portlandonline.com/oni)

ONI provides neighborhood, business associations, and coalitions contact and meeting information, demographics, maps, and general information on crime prevention and mediation services. On issues related to crime and livability, you can direct neighbors to talk with the crime prevention officer assigned to your neighborhood: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/28395>

### **Portland Parks and Recreation (PPR)** [www.portlandonline.com/parks](http://www.portlandonline.com/parks)

PPR manages parks, natural areas, community centers, dog parks, pools, and other community activities.

## Additional Resources

### **Portland Maps** [www.portlandmaps.com](http://www.portlandmaps.com)

Provides comprehensive property specific mapping information, relating to zoning, public services, natural resources and hazards, census, and more. Provides addresses as well as neighborhood association information. The “Gallery” has an abundance of land use information that can be sorted by neighborhood.

### **Portland Map App** <https://www.portlandmaps.com/bps/mapapp/>

The Map App is an online tool developed by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability that combines the presentation of proposals in an interactive map experience with the opportunity to testify and then read your testimony in real time.

### **Architectural Heritage Center** [www.visitach.org](http://www.visitach.org)

Useful resources for historic preservation, creation of historic districts, and architectural enthusiasts.

### **Coalition for a Livable Future** [www.clfuture.org](http://www.clfuture.org)

The Coalition for a Livable Future (CLF) unites over 90 diverse organizations and hundreds of individuals to promote healthy and sustainable communities. By connecting issues, people and organizations, CLF empowers communities to take action together to shape the big decisions affecting the Portland region’s future.

### **1000 Friends of Oregon** [www.friends.org](http://www.friends.org)

1000 Friends of Oregon works with Oregonians to enhance our quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural and scenic areas.

### **Resolutions Northwest** <https://www.resolutionsnorthwest.org/>

Offers free or reduced price mediation, facilitation, and trainings to neighborhood associations and neighbors who may be having trouble working through a dispute. This contract is in transition and may or may not apply to your specific request. However, do not hesitate to contact them to make an ask for advice and guidance on issues that might come before you.

## How To Organize Land Use Meetings

You've heard a rumor that a property on your street might be redeveloped. You've received an official land use notification from the city about a new development in your neighborhood. You are concerned about what may be built and you are confused about what you and your neighbors can do about it. This toolkit is designed to help you find out where you can turn to for information about new developments, and how you can organize meetings with your neighbors and developers.

### How do I find out information about new developments?

In the vast majority of situations, you will not receive official notification from the city that a new development is going to take place in your neighborhood. In most instances, this is because the new development is being built "by right". That means the project meets all the requirements set out in the city code for the particular land use zoning of the property. If the developer is not asking for any adjustments to the code there is usually not a requirement to notify immediate neighbors or the neighborhood association.

If the developer is asking for an adjustment (for example, a three-foot setback from a neighboring property line instead of a five-foot setback required by code) or something that requires a land use review, notice is sent out to neighbors in close proximity to the property, as well as to the neighborhood association and the district coalition. The notice provides an opportunity for neighbors and neighborhood associations to weigh in on the requested adjustment(s) and these comments are considered by the city staff and/or land use hearings officer reviewing the case. You can track these types of notifications for all neighborhoods in Portland here: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/36652>. Here is a good resource for how you and your neighbors can respond to an official land use notice: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oni/article/510781>

Since it is likely that you won't be notified of a development in advance, what can you do when you hear a rumor that something is afoot?

- Try talking directly with the property owner about future plans for the site.
- Look for signs of development activity by going to [www.portlandmaps.com](http://www.portlandmaps.com). Type in the property's address and look under the "Permits/Cases" tab to see if there has been any recent activity, such as an application for a building permit. You can also see if the property has recently been sold by looking at the deed information under the "Assessor" tab.
- Contact the Bureau of Development Services at (503) 823-7300 and ask if there have been any requests for building and demolition permits or other development activity. Staff can also explain what the zoning code does allow to be built on the property.
- Contact SE Uplift's Neighborhood Planning Manager at (503) 232-0010 and ask him/her to look into potential activity at a site, explain what is and isn't allowed by city code, and discuss ways in which you and your neighbors can weigh in on development in your neighborhood.

## **Setting up meetings to discuss a development**

You've gotten wind of a potential development in your neighborhood. You may have all of the details or you just have a general sense of what is being proposed. You might have some concerns or you'd like to learn more about the development. How do you go about setting up a meeting to find out more?

Meetings between neighbors and developers can be tense, uncomfortable, and frustrating. They can also be informative and productive. It is important to recognize that you don't have complete control over how things will turn out. Some developers are easier to work with than others. Some neighbors are easier to work with than others. Some projects are more controversial than others. You might do everything in your powers to set up a great meeting and it still might go south for reasons beyond your control. That's ok.

### **Step 1: Contact the developer/property owner.**

When contacting a developer to arrange a meeting, you may want to ask:

- How much time and what day(s) they have available to meet with you.
- If they can share any plans or drawings with you in advance so that you can distribute to others ahead of the meeting. Also ask them to bring plans and drawings to the meeting that are large enough for people in an audience to see.
- How far along they are in the project and if this is an appropriate time for them to talk with neighbors.
- If they are seeking any particular feedback from the neighborhood (i.e. building materials, colors, location of driveway access).

### **Step 2: Choose a meeting time and location**

Things to consider when choosing a meeting time and location:

- Choose a meeting time that gives you enough time in advance to get the word out.
- Choose a location that is nearby, accessible, and large enough to host the anticipated number of attendees. This could be the same location where the neighborhood association meets, a place of worship, a coffee house, etc.

### **Step 3: Spread the word**

There are many ways that you can let your neighbors and interested people know about the meeting. When spreading the word, try to present the information you know: the location of the development, the general plan (number of apartments, townhouses, etc.), the time and location of your meeting, and where people can go if they want additional information. Avenues you could take to get the word out include:

- Go door to door and hand out flyers with meeting information.
- Post to the neighborhood association listserv, social media platforms, and Nextdoor.
- Send an announcement to newspapers like The Oregonian and SE Examiner.

### **Step 4: Prepare for the meeting**

How you set up a meeting is very important for how the meeting will turn out. If a meeting isn't well structured or moderated, it can easily turn into an unproductive situation where people end up talking past

one another (sometimes at great volume!). Here are a few tips to consider when you prepare for your meeting:

- Determine in advance who will facilitate the conversation. You will want someone who can give fair voice to everyone in the room and who can keep things from getting out of hand.
- Allocate enough time for the developer to give a full presentation and community members to ask questions and provide feedback.
- Develop a set of meeting ground rules and have these posted and/or printed on the meeting agenda.
- Consider meeting with a smaller group of neighbors first to discuss what concerns they may have and what they would like to accomplish at the meeting.
- Talk with city and/or SE Uplift staff to see if they can attend or provide technical assistance to help people understand things like the property's zoning code and the city's long-term growth plans.

### **Step 5: Meet!**

It is time to meet and learn more about a development. How a meeting is presented can go a long way to how it turns out. If you set a tone of confrontation, you will get confrontation. If you set a tone of respect, you are more likely to have a respectful conversation. Here are a few suggestions for the night of the meeting:

- Show up early to make sure the room is set up in a way that everyone can see and hear.
- Have a sign in sheet where people can leave their contact information. This could be useful if you need to communicate about the development in the future and/or plan additional meetings.
- Do a round of introductions. It is nice to know who is in the room.
- Ask for someone to take notes. The notes can be shared with those who were interested by unable to attend the meeting.
- Set the ground rules. Have someone read the ground rules and ask the participants if they would like to add any additional rules.
- Stick to the ground rules. They are only useful if they are followed.
- Set expectations. It is important for people to know what the purpose of the meeting is, as well as to let them know that ultimately neighbors and the community can only have so much influence in how a development turns out.
- Make sure everyone is heard. Some people aren't as comfortable expressing themselves in meetings as others. Don't let any one voice dominate the conversation.
- Offer to send the meeting notes to the developer.

### **Questions to ask a developer at a meeting**

Project specific

- How many units are you building?
- What is the square size of the units? How many bedrooms?
- How much will you be selling the units for?
- Who do you anticipate will buy the units?
- How tall are the buildings?
- What are the setbacks from adjacent properties?
- What type of landscaping will there be?
- Are there any greenspaces or common areas for residents to use?
- When you came up with the design, how did the existing neighborhood character influence it?

- Would it be possible for this project to work with fewer units? Smaller heights?

#### Transportation related

- How much on-site parking will be provided?
- How will people access the property?
- Have you conducted a transportation study?
- How will you work to mitigate potential conflicts between accessing the property and bike/pedestrian safety?

#### Process/Timeline

- Where are you in the permitting process?
- What is your timeline for construction?
- Where are you with the design? Is there still time to make changes?
- How will you work with neighbors to mitigate impacts during construction?
- How can people contact you?

### **Step 6: Follow Up and Next Steps**

Depending on the outcomes of the meeting, your job might be done or it might just be beginning. In either case, it is a good idea to check back in with the developer/property owner a few days after the meeting. Send him/her the meeting notes and any follow up questions that might have arisen since then.

It is also a good idea to contact all of the people who attended the meeting. Thank them for their participation and share the meeting notes and any additional information that might come your way.