

## **Public Hearings**

Public hearings allow citizens to express opinions on matters of public concern. Generally, no official action is taken during a public hearing. Some hearings are required by law, but they may also be used by the council for other matters. They may be called in order to gather facts related to proposed action or to gauge public opinion by allowing citizens the opportunity to comment on a specific topic, such as a land-use plan. They may also be used as town hall meetings to meet members of the public and learn about their concerns. Finally, they can be used to allow the citizens to vent their frustrations. Public hearings may be held as a part of a regular or special meeting, or they may be entirely separate meetings.

Although there are many opportunities to meet, official decisions may only be made in regular, open meetings of the elected body. At such meetings, issues are publicly debated, and action is taken. Local officials must resist the temptation to make final decisions prior to official meetings and then "rubber-stamp" them at the official meeting.