

601 Public Hearing Planning and Preparation

All public hearings must be held in person. However, hybrid public hearings that provide an in-person and virtual component are highly encouraged. For the in-person public hearing, the typical format starts with an open-house where the public can view display materials at their own pace and have informal conversations with the project team. The open house is then followed by formal proceedings with a presentation (live or voiced over) and an opportunity to comment. The virtual component includes a broadcast of the presentation with a formal comment period. Planning and preparation follows a multi-step process as noted on the next page.

The information presented in the 600 Series is intended for use in non-PD&E public hearings only. For guidance and materials specific to PD&E public hearings, refer to Chapter 11 of the [PD&E Manual](#) and the Public Engagement Resource Kit (PERK) for best practices and sample materials.



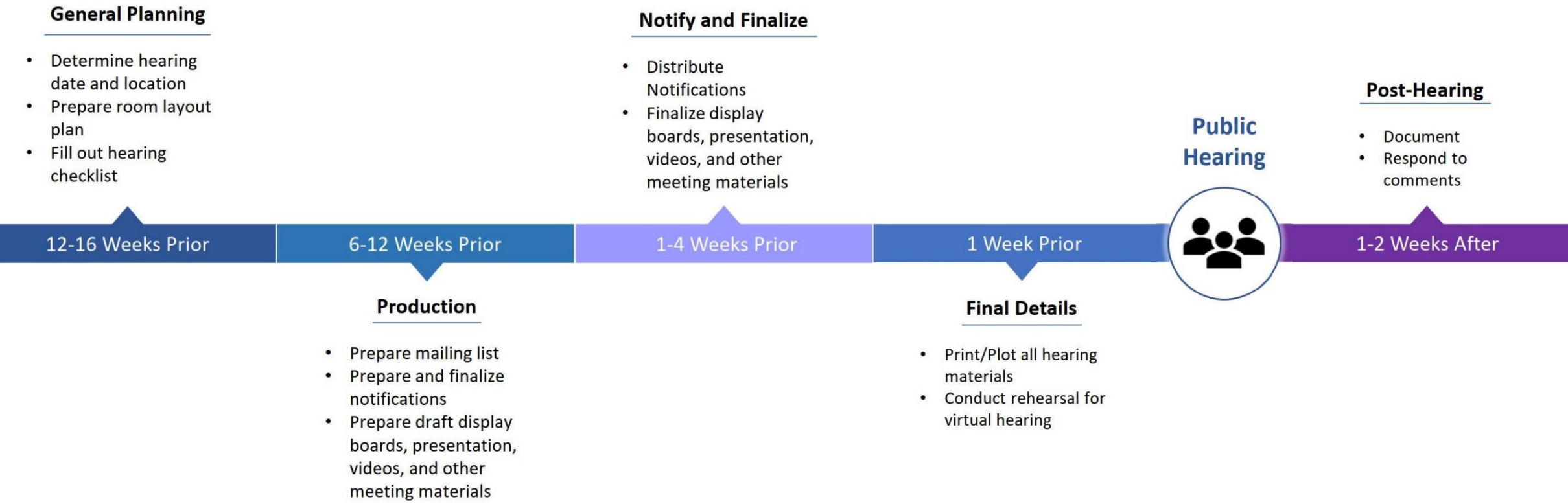
Non-PD&E public hearings are encouraged to have an in-person and interactive virtual component. These do not have to be held at the same time.



Public Hearing Checklist

Use a public hearing checklist to ensure all public hearing details are considered. A sample checklist is provided at this [link](#) and can be used to organize the activities related to planning for a public hearing and ensuring notifications are completed and distributed within the required time frames.





602 Selecting a Public Hearing Time and Location

Public Hearing Time

FDOT-sponsored public hearings should be scheduled during the work week, Monday through Friday, at a time most convenient and accessible for the affected community. As a best practice, most FDOT-sponsored public hearings are held on Tuesday or Thursday in the late afternoon/early evening starting at 5:00 p.m. Typically, Mondays and Fridays are avoided as some people may be taking an extended weekend, and Wednesday nights may be avoided due to religious services. Consider the age of the anticipated audience, transportation availability, location access, distance, etc., when determining the time of the public hearing. Public hearings are typically divided into two parts – the open house portion where the public can review boards and materials at their own pace and the formal proceedings that include the public hearing presentation and public testimony. For the benefit of the public, the public hearing notification should include the time that the informal, open house starts and the time of the presentation.

Public Hearing Location

It is important, but not always easy, to find a venue that is in the project area, easy to reach (on a public transit route, if possible), complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), complies with the Department's policy on the Jessica Lunsford Act (avoid public K-12 schools), has sufficient parking, and has sufficient space for the public hearing format.

Public venues are preferred over privately-owned facilities. If the nearest public facility is not reasonable due to either insufficient space or is located too far from the project area, then a privately-owned facility can be used.

Document the site selection process in the project file.

Before selecting a facility, estimate the size required based on the expected number of attendees and the number and size of display boards. Prepare a room layout plan that shows the arrangement of the sign-in tables, display materials, tables, chairs, and space for attendees to confirm that the facility can accommodate your needs. It is important to visit the facility, take pictures and measurements and check the audio/visual equipment. Ask to meet the person who will be on duty at the facility during the public hearing. Consider the following when selecting a location:

- If a sound system is needed, does the facility provide such equipment?
- Will the facility allow entry into the space early enough for set up? Likewise, is there a closing time that restricts breakdown time?
- Are there enough tables and chairs available?
- Is there plenty of parking and is handicapped parking available?
- Are the restrooms handicap accessible?
- Is the parking lot well-lit?
- Is there a place for signage directing people to the correct room?
- Can people walk easily from transit?
- Is there a property manager on duty at the time of the public hearing for emergency purposes?
- Are there local sign regulations that require permits for way-finding signs?

Also make sure all of the following are considered before final approval of a location.

ADA Compliance: All public hearings must be held at a site that provides reasonable accommodation and access to disabled persons wishing to attend and participate. When notified at least seven days in advance, the Department must reasonably accommodate a person's disability to provide an equal opportunity for participation. While the Department cannot provide transportation for disabled persons, every effort should be made to accommodate special needs, such as wheelchair access and seating, materials for visual impairment (through the use of large print materials, for example), or referral to a transportation service that may suit their needs.

Jessica Lunsford Act: Public school facilities for grades K-12 should not be used for public hearings. School facilities may be used, however, if there are no other feasible options in the area, and with approval from the Department's Assistant Secretary of Engineering and Operations. Alternate educational facilities to consider include colleges, universities, and private schools.

603 Public Hearing Notification Requirements

There are a variety of methods for notifying the interested and affected community about an upcoming public hearing. Information regarding the public hearing should be clearly conveyed in all notifications and must contain, at a minimum, the following:

- Purpose of the public hearing
- Description of the project
- Date, time, and location of the public hearing (include venue location map)
- Instructions on how to participate virtually
- Nondiscrimination statement
- Information about ADA requests
- Notice of standard statement regarding FDOT assumption of FHWA NEPA responsibilities (Federal PD&E projects only)

The following nondiscrimination and ADA standard statements must be included for all notification methods:

- *Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status.*
- *Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (free of charge) should contact _____ at _____ at least seven days prior to the meeting.*

Similarly, the following standard statement related to project development must be included for all PD&E projects with FHWA involvement:

- *The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by FDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated May 26, 2022, and executed by FHWA and FDOT.*

Each notification method and corresponding requirement are discussed in the following sections. For more specific notification requirements, see the [PD&E Manual Part 1, Chapter 11](#).

Notification to Elected and Appointed Officials

Notify all elected and appointed officials with jurisdiction in the project area at least 25 but no more than 30 calendar days prior to the public hearing. Elected officials should receive the invitation before the public is notified. Invitations may be sent by standard mail or email and should include a copy of the newspaper advertisement or public invitation letter/newsletter.

Notification to Property Owners and Tenants

Notify all property owners and tenants within at least 300 feet of the project centerline at least 20 days prior to the public hearing. Those affected by the project may extend beyond 300 feet and should be contacted. The invitation can be sent by letter or as part of a newsletter. The addresses for this notification can be obtained from the county property appraiser.

Because property owners may live elsewhere or tenants may occupy the property, be sure to include both the site address and property owner address if they differ.

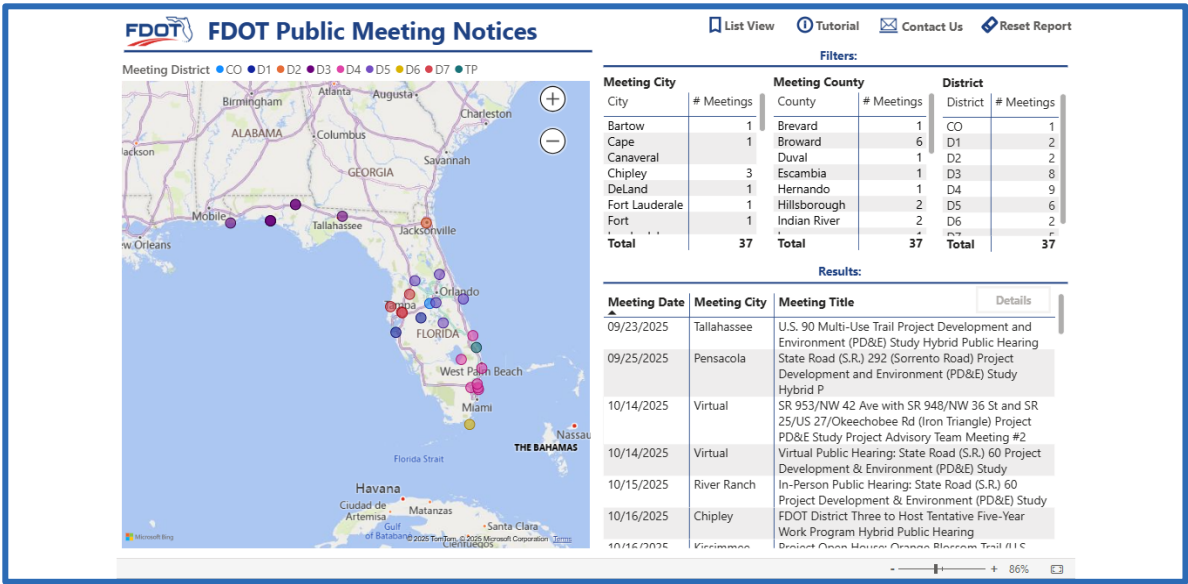
Florida Administrative Register (FAR)

Section 120.525, F.S., requires that notices for all public hearings, workshops, and meetings must be published in the *FAR* at least seven calendar days prior to the event. All notices to be published in the *FAR* are submitted electronically through the Florida Department of State's e- rulemaking website at www.flrules.org.

The FAR is published each weekday except on those days observed as official state holidays designated by Section 110.117, F.S. All materials to be published must be uploaded to the FAR website by 3:00 p.m. on the day prior to publication. For publication on Mondays, the ad must be uploaded to the website by 3:00 p.m. on the previous Friday. See the PD&E Manual, Part 1, Chapter 11 for an example of a FAR notice.

FDOT Public Notices Website

To comply with Section 120.525, F.S., notices of all public hearings, workshops, and meetings must be published on [FDOT's Public Meeting Notices website](#) at least seven days before the public hearing. Public hearing notices are typically added to the website by the District Communications Office. The information to be provided to the District Communications Office includes the project title, District number, public hearing date and time, address of the in- person location, information on how to participate virtually, project website, and contact names and contact information. Include the standard nondiscrimination statement, NEPA Assignment statement (if applicable) and information about ADA requests.



The form for publishing these notices is located on the [FDOT Intranet](#) under E-Forms and requires an FDOT account to access. Once the form is submitted online, the District Communications Office will review and publish it to the website if approved. A copy of the notice should also be sent to the District Communications Office for their information and possible further distribution.

Project Website

If available, include information about the public hearing on the project website. Information should be posted at the same time that notifications to the public are sent out.

Newspaper Advertisement

To comply with Section 339.155, F.S., publish a public hearing notice two times within a newspaper of general circulation to the project area. The first advertisement should appear between 15 to 30 days prior to the public hearing, and the second advertisement should appear 7 to 12 days prior to the public hearing.

Press Release

A press release may be sent to encourage media coverage about a scheduled public hearing. All press releases must be coordinated through the District Communications Office.

Social Media

FDOT uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube through the Central and District Communications offices. Social media can be helpful in expanding the reach of notifications in appropriate circumstances. All social media activity must be coordinated through the District Communications Office.

Reaching Underserved and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Populations

Outreach to traditionally underserved and LEP populations is critical. For the traditionally underserved, bringing information to their communities helps increase their awareness of public hearings. Further, engaging several of the community leaders (not necessarily elected leaders) and seeking their help to spread the word or provide ideas about how best to reach their community can be beneficial.

Translating public hearing notifications may improve awareness for people for whom English is not their primary language. If the LEP community is large enough, there may be a non-English language newspaper or radio station where a public hearing notification could be placed. Consider posting the translated notice on the project website and establishing telephone numbers with voicemail for individuals to leave messages in their native languages for the project team. Include information about these options in the appropriate languages in public hearing notifications.

604 Public Hearing Materials

Each public hearing should utilize a variety of display and viewing materials for communicating with the public. A typical in-person public hearing includes sign-in sheets, comment forms, speaker cards, project handouts, display boards, and a presentation (PowerPoint or video). The virtual component includes the same presentation as the in-person public hearing. Any boards displayed at the in-person public hearing should be posted to the website for virtual participants.

Sign-in Sheets

Sign-in sheets are used to capture a list of participants for record keeping. Sign-in sheets are considered to be part of the public record.

Comment Forms

Comment forms are the primary method for capturing written comments at a public hearing. They should include plenty of space for the comment and an area for the person’s contact information. Comment forms can also be used for survey questions such as “How did you hear about this public hearing?”

Speaker Cards

For anyone that wishes to speak during the formal comment period, provide a speaker card for them to fill out. The information requested on the speaker card includes name, address, and contact information. Speaker cards are used to capture the list of speakers for record-keeping.

Handouts

Attendees should be given written handout material outlining the purpose

of the project, recommended alternative or design, and how to provide comments. Handouts may also be required in alternative formats to aid people with disabilities and in the predominant non-English language(s) in the project area.

Title VI Information

A Title VI board or display is required for all public hearings and meetings. The Title VI board provides participants with the contact information for District and State Title VI coordinators if they wish to make a Title VI complaint. This information must also be provided to virtual participants.



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
TITLE VI

The Florida Department of Transportation complies with various non-discrimination laws and regulations including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status.

Persons wishing to express concerns about Title VI may do so by contacting:

District One	Central Office
Florida Department of Transportation District One Title VI Coordinator Jane Doe 801 N Broadway Avenue Bartow, FL 33830 850-555-2287 Jane.Doe@dot.state.fl.us	Florida Department of Transportation Statewide Title VI Coordinator John Doe 605 Suwannee Street, MS 65 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0450 850-555-4742 John.Doe@dot.state.fl.us

All inquiries or complaints will be handled according to FDOT procedures and in a prompt and courteous manner.

Project Display Boards

Project display boards are used to convey information about the project to the public. Some public hearings could include the following boards depending on the context of the project:

- Project location map
- Purpose and need summary
- Traffic summaries
- Typical sections (existing and proposed)
- Concept boards with aerial background
- Intersection/interchange concepts (if applicable)
- Alternatives impact matrix (more applicable for PD&E projects)
- Summary of noise impacts (if applicable)
- Section 4(f) information (if applicable)
- Other environmental studies (if applicable)
- Funding
- Schedule

Project Presentation

During the formal proceedings, a live or voiced-over presentation is provided that includes information about the project including the recommended alternative, summary of impacts, and ways to comment. A sample presentation script is provided in Part 1, Chapter 11, Section 11.2.5.6 of the PD&E Manual.

Virtual Access to Display Materials

There are several ways to provide virtual access to project materials, including on the project website, in a virtual room, or on the virtual meeting platform. These are passive methods where the public can participate at any time from their own computer. They can be used to enhance and augment the virtual experience and to promote effective and efficient opportunities for communicating with the public.



605 Conducting the In-Person Public Hearing

Setting Up

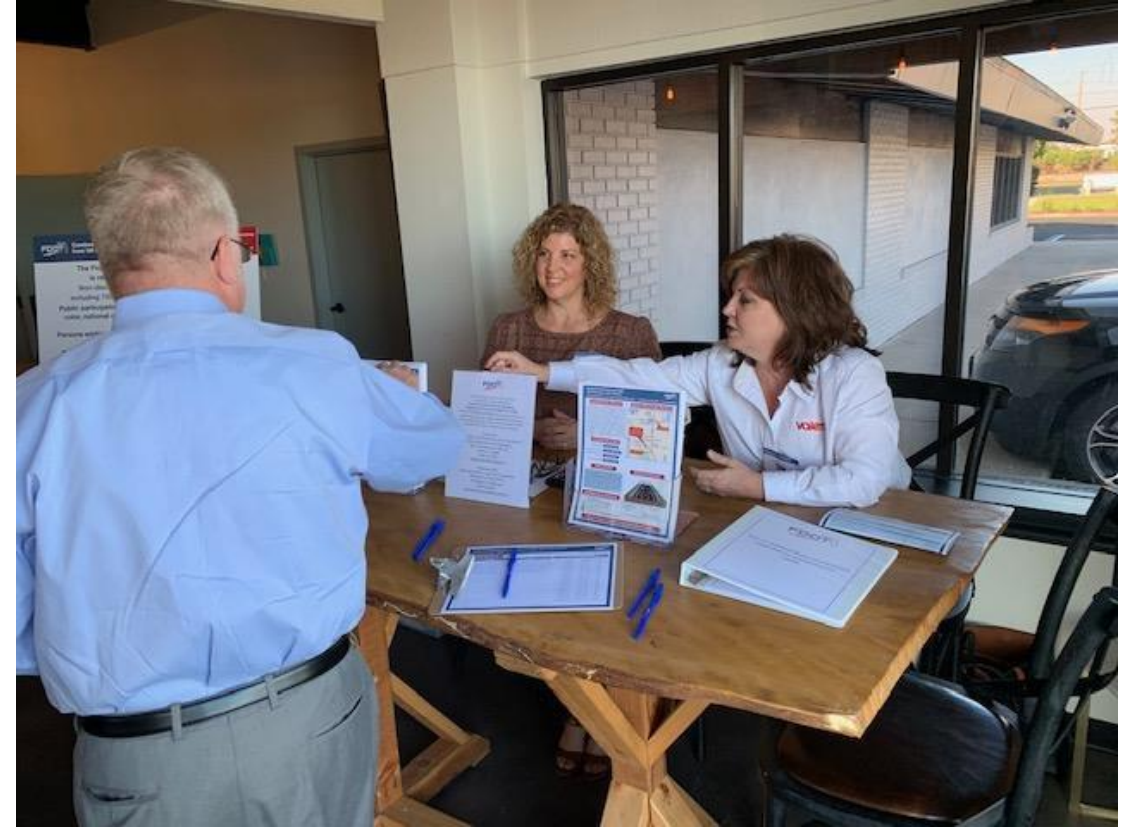
Arrive at least two hours in advance of the published start time to setup. More time may be needed depending on the number and size of display materials. Aim to complete the setup at least 30 minutes prior to the start time to welcome those who arrive early.

Staff Briefings

Prior to the start of the public hearing, a thorough briefing with staff will help eliminate the possibility of someone providing incorrect information. It is a best practice to gather the team and discuss roles, responsibilities, and anticipated questions from the public. Emphasize to staff that it's ok to say "I don't know" and to find a team member who can answer the question. It's better to find someone to help rather than provide the wrong answer.

Welcome and Sign-in

As people walk into the meeting room, their first impression is the sign-in table and those who greet them. Welcome people as they enter and ask them to sign in. Having people sign in creates a record of who attended and provides a contact list in case additional follow-up is needed. If handouts are available, provide them at the sign-in table.



Display Area

The display area is where the boards are provided for public review and input during the informal or open house portion of the public hearing. This area is generally staffed by the FDOT PM, Consultant PM, facilitators (if applicable), subject matter experts, and community engagement support team.

Arrange the display boards in a logical order best suited to the project. Not every board needs a staff member assigned to it. However, assign multiple team members to high traffic area (i.e., concept boards). As people enter, allow them to review the materials at their own pace. Identify several team members who can float and provide staff support where it's needed most. The FDOT PM and Consultant PM should be free to roam the meeting room and dedicate their time to one-on-one conversations.



Presentation Area

The presentation area is where the formal proceedings are conducted, which includes the project presentation followed by the public comment period. Provide a table up front for the moderator and chairs for the

audience. The audio/visual support team assists with running the presentation. Others can provide speaker cards and help keep an orderly flow for the public wishing to speak at the microphone.

Challenging Conversations

How staff handles conflict and objections from participants influences people's perception of both the project and the Department. People are more willing to collaborate and stay engaged if they are properly informed, kept in the loop, and treated fairly. Some conversations become difficult. The following suggestions can help defuse tense situations:

- Be respectful
- Actively listen
- Rephrase their concern to show you are listening
- Don't respond to what's unproductive
- Ask another team member for help
- Direct the person to the comment form

Collecting Comments

Multiple ways to comment should be provided at the public hearing. Opportunities include the ability to provide written comments submitted through a comment form, by mail, or email, or verbal statements at the microphone during the formal proceedings. All public hearings have a minimum ten-day public comment period that begins the day after the last hearing event (in-person or virtual, whichever occurs later).

606 Conducting the Virtual Public Hearing

Welcome

As people join the meeting, the organizer should periodically thank them for joining and letting them know that the public hearing will soon begin. As an alternative, include a statement on the screen with a similar message.

Virtual Broadcast

The goal of the virtual public hearing is to replicate, as much as possible, the experience and information provided at the in-person event. As part of the virtual broadcast, participants should be able to view the presentation and then provide comments. Ask those interested to speak to include their name in the chat box and then call upon them at the appropriate time. The Organizer should mute everyone in the virtual meeting throughout the presentation and then unmute each speaker individually when they are called to speak. Make sure to discuss with the project team the most appropriate way to taking comments during the virtual broadcast.

Collecting Comments

Virtual participants can submit written comments through an online comment form (if available), by mail, or email, or verbal statements during the virtual broadcast. All public hearings have a minimum ten-day public comment period that begins the day after the last hearing event (in-person or virtual, whichever occurs later).

