

Guide to Public Hearings



What is a public hearing all about?

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) encourages participation in regulating the state's utilities. A public hearing is the last step in which the public can contribute to the process that determines whether the PSC will take action that could affect the rates or services offered by a utility or location of new utility facilities that will be constructed.

Public hearings offer an opportunity for consumers, property owners, local government officials, industry representatives, and others to bring their thoughts and concerns to the attention of the Commission. Bringing these concerns and views to a public hearing is essential for the Commissioners to reach the most fair and reasonable decision possible. The three Commissioners decide whether to approve, deny, or modify an application.

How do I get involved?

Attend a hearing and express your views. It is also possible to submit comments in writing or electronically via the PSC website, psc.wi.gov. Participation at a public hearing is the most important part of the process. Commission decisions are based on the hearing record. The record includes testimony from staff, utility, and other experts and all public comments submitted within the period of dates specified in the hearing notice. All documents submitted to the PSC about cases under review are available for viewing on the Electronic Regulatory Filing System (ERF) of the PSC website. If you wish, you may sign up to receive e-mail notifications when documents are filed for a case in which you are interested. Information on how to receive e-mail notices can be found on http://psc.wi.gov/apps/erf_public/info/help.htm

Is it difficult to testify before the PSC?

It is easy to testify. A lawyer is not necessary and you do not need to stay for the entire hearing. When you arrive at the hearing, simply fill out an appearance slip to state that you would like to testify and wait to be called on by the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ). The ALJ ensures the hearing is conducted in a fair and orderly manner and that everyone has a chance to voice their opinions. If you have any questions while at the hearing, please talk to the ALJ or PSC staff.

When you testify, the ALJ will ask you to give your name and address, and to begin your statement. Please speak clearly and at a steady rate so your statement can be accurately recorded by the court reporter. Sometimes the ALJ will ask a question to help ensure your testimony is clear. If you are with an organized group whose members share the same opinions, it is often best to choose one or two persons to testify on behalf of the entire group. If you are disabled or hearing impaired, special arrangements will be made for you provided the PSC is notified ahead of time.

What should I say at the hearing?

The PSC is looking for facts, opinions, concerns, and ideas related to the case. Your comments must be about the subject of the hearing, but may be about any aspect of the case. You can bring exhibits to better clarify your viewpoint. The ALJ will determine if they can be entered into the record along with your testimony.

Can I attend other types of hearings?

The PSC regularly holds technical hearings in Madison where PSC staff, utilities, and other parties provide exhibits and testimony. Each witness has technical or professional background on the issues. Expert witnesses may include engineers, accountants, planners, economists, and environmental specialists. Witnesses are often cross-examined to help clarify testimony.

The technical hearings are open to the public for observation.

What if I want to do more than provide testimony at the public hearing?

Being a party to a case, or having intervenor status, can be established if a person, group or an organization has substantial interests that may be affected by the Commission's decisions or if their participation will promote the proper disposition of the issues in the case. To intervene, submit a written request to the PSC's ALJ as early as possible during the case review.

A person granted party status is responsible for prefiling testimony and exhibits according to the schedule set by the ALJ. A party is also required to provide copies of these documents to all persons on the case's service list and to the PSC. Parties will receive copies of testimony and supporting documentation from the other parties. Prefiled testimony is subject to rebuttal by other parties of the case. Parties must appear at the technical hearings and be available for cross-examination. They are also allowed to ask other parties questions and reply to rebuttals. Both public and intervenor testimony becomes part of the record.

What happens after the hearing?

After the hearing is completed, the record is closed and no new information is added. The Commissioners can use only the record as a basis for their decision.

A briefing period may follow the hearing. Briefs are written arguments about issues the Commissioners need to decide. They are usually written by lawyers for the utilities and other parties.

The Commissioners review the transcripts, exhibits, and briefs. An open meeting is then scheduled for the Commission to talk about the issues raised in the hearing and to make their decisions. These meetings are held in Madison, are open for the public to observe, and are often broadcast over the Internet, via the PSC's website.

After the Commission reaches a decision, an order is issued. If you filled out an appearance slip when you attended the hearing and checked the box showing that you would like a copy of the order, the PSC will send you a copy free of charge.

How Do I Get More Information?

If you need more information about public hearings, becoming a party, or have questions about a specific docket, look at the PSC website, contact the docket coordinator, or call the PSC.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is an independent state agency that oversees more than 1,100 Wisconsin public utilities that provide natural gas, electricity, heat, steam, water and telecommunications services.



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