



# Housing Advocacy Workshop

One effective type of public comment is a **story about a specific person and a specific obstacle they face**, using an anecdote to illustrate a bigger truth. Empathy is a powerful tool for moving hearts and minds.

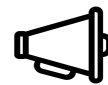
The best public comments are NOT a list of arguments or counterarguments. Arguments can be rebutted. Facts can be disputed. But a personal story is hard to deny, hard to dismiss, and hard to ignore. You may have the facts on your side, but if you can't make people care about the facts, then it won't matter. Your goal is to connect with and move people, *not* debate people.

Who is your audience? The audience is *not* the people who already firmly believe you are wrong. Your audience is people who are open to hearing and caring about your issue. Your words might move them to see housing in a new light. They may be people who have not yet connected their daily lives to the housing shortage. Your words can help draw the connection between people they know and the broader policy choices we face!

Public comment is different from other forms of speech because of the time constraint. 90 seconds to 3 minutes. You only have time for One Big Thought. You have time for a vignette, not a saga.

## COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC COMMENT

Thanks to YIMBY Action for this worksheet template



**ONE SPECIFIC PERSON**

**ONE VALUE**

This person's story shows that more housing is good for:

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**THIS PERSON'S OBSTACLE**

**WHY IT'S A BIGGER PROBLEM**

**CALL TO ACTION**

## PICK YOUR PERSON

Think of someone in your life that struggles with housing. (Ideally YOU. Or it could be someone very close to you.) What does that struggle look like on a daily basis? What are the specific problems they have to navigate? How do these problems feel?

OR think of someone who has been able to access good housing. (Ideally YOU. Or it could be someone very close to you.) What are the benefits that come with this housing? Why is housing meaningful to them? How does it feel to have housing?

Spend a minute thinking about these people and the emotional impact of their housing situation.

## PICK YOUR VALUE

Spend a few minutes identifying one specific value that this person's experience represents. This person's story shows that more better housing is good for...what? This should be a value also shared by your audience.

POSSIBLE VALUES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Caring for family</li><li>● Escaping desperate situations</li><li>● Following dreams</li><li>● Getting around safely</li><li>● Starting a business</li><li>● Accessing quality care</li><li>● Finding stability</li><li>● Finding employees</li><li>● A more diverse and connected community</li><li>● Starting or supporting a family</li><li>● Living close to work</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Financial security</li><li>● Owning a home</li><li>● Reducing risk from wildfire</li><li>● Gaining opportunities historically denied</li><li>● Protecting and accessing open space</li><li>● A walkable neighborhood</li><li>● Getting access to education</li><li>● Being able to do meaningful work</li><li>● Reducing emissions, caring for the climate</li><li>● <i>and many more...</i></li></ul>






## DRAFT YOUR COMMENT

These pieces can be shuffled into any order. Feel free to write full sentences or bullet points.

**SPECIFIC PERSON & THE HOUSING-RELATED OBSTACLE THEY FACE** (4-8 sentences)

**VALUE ABOUT HOUSING** (1-2 sentences, see above)

**WHY IT'S A BROADER PROBLEM** (1-2 sentences, max one statistic, see below)

**CALL TO ACTION** (1-2 sentences, see below)

## SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

### CALLS TO ACTION FROM SONOMA VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

- The Housing Element needs to make a big change to Sonoma Valley's livability. It needs to...
- Ease approvals and reduce costs for projects that create infill housing that is affordable for middle-income and low-income people.
- Rescue expiring subsidies for dozens of homes.
- Physically and visually integrate households of varying incomes and sizes.
- Maximize the percentage of planned housing at SDC that is affordable to households making middle incomes and less.
- Provide protection against involuntary displacement of moderate, low, and very low income residents, including mobile home residents.
- Reduce the number of whole-house vacation rentals over time.
- Reduce the number of second or empty homes over time.

### WHY IT'S A BROADER PROBLEM

- The Springs neighborhood has the largest share of overcrowded households in Sonoma County.
- The City of Sonoma has the largest share of households (38%) where the householder lives alone.
- The City of Sonoma has the largest share of senior households (33%) in Sonoma County, an increase of 65% since 2000.

## LISTENER CHECKLIST

Take turns each speaking your statement, then giving each other feedback. Pay attention to the following...

- Time your partner's story. Is it **2 minutes or less**?
- Is it **focused** on one person and one value? Are there pieces to cut out?
- Does it include **emotional language**? Where could they add more feeling?
- Does it include **specific, vivid details**? Where could they add more details?
- Does it include a specific policy **call to action**?
- Is it spoken **slowly and clearly, and looking up** at the audience?

## NEXT STEPS

Your story advances Sonoma Valley's push for more inclusive housing policy. Thank you for taking this on!

The draft Housing Elements will be released soon for about 30 days of public input:

- City of Sonoma’s draft Housing Element, covering 2 square miles: mid-July
- County of Sonoma’s draft Housing Element, covering remainder of Sonoma Valley: October

### Keep in touch

Sign up to get updated, time-sensitive calls to action from...

- Sonoma Valley Collaborative at <https://sonomavalleycollaborative.org/subscribe>
- Generation Housing at <https://generationhousing.org/get-involved/>

Sign up to get updates from the City and County at...

- City: <https://www.sonomacity.org/housing-element-update/>
- County: [https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASONOMA/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=CASONOMA\\_393](https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/CASONOMA/subscriber/new?topic_id=CASONOMA_393)

### Practice your statement

Plan whether you will give your input via email, phone, or in real time at a public meeting. When you attend a public meeting...

- Don’t worry about your clothes! No need to dress up or dress down.
- Remember to speak slowly and clearly and look up at the audience.
- Don’t yell or accuse.
- It’s ok to acknowledge that you are nervous. “This is hard for me” is fine to say.
- Practice a few more times in advance if you can (ideally with a timer).
- Most importantly, keep reminding yourself why this issue is important to you!
- Good luck, and have fun!

**Email or call elected officials:** Say that you have a public comment about the Housing Element.

- Sonoma City Council  
[Madolyn.Agrimonti@sonomacity.org](mailto:Madolyn.Agrimonti@sonomacity.org), 650-740-2540  
[kelso.barnett@sonomacity.org](mailto:kelso.barnett@sonomacity.org), 707-758-3805  
[jack.ding@sonomacity.org](mailto:jack.ding@sonomacity.org), 707-933-6568  
[robert.felder@sonomacity.org](mailto:robert.felder@sonomacity.org), 707-695-4592  
[sandra.lowe@sonomacity.org](mailto:sandra.lowe@sonomacity.org), 707-326-2461
- City of Sonoma Planning Commission staff: [planningcommission@sonomacity.org](mailto:planningcommission@sonomacity.org). Specifically request, in your email, that your statement be forwarded to the planning commissioners.
- Sonoma County Supervisor Susan Gorin, [Susan.Gorin@sonoma-county.org](mailto:Susan.Gorin@sonoma-county.org), 707-565-2982
- Sonoma County Housing Element staff: [PermitSonoma-Housing@sonoma-county.org](mailto:PermitSonoma-Housing@sonoma-county.org). Specifically request, in your email, that your statement be forwarded to the Planning Commissioners.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- Sonoma Valley Collaborative’s Housing Policy Platform (check back often as it adapts to changing information):  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1U\\_CVC87zWpquu\\_JS7F13NvlFX6LqH2R8x6gzbtXu3r0/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1U_CVC87zWpquu_JS7F13NvlFX6LqH2R8x6gzbtXu3r0/edit)
- The State of Black Housing in Sonoma County summary:  
<https://sonomavalleycollaborative.org/blog-feed/2022/3/23/reporting-on-the-state-of-black-housing-in-sonoma-county>
- City of Sonoma Housing Opportunities and Strategies:
- <https://www.sonomacity.org/housing-opportunities-strategies/>