



Presenting your project or proposal to the Eight Streets Neighborhood Association

Thank you for bringing your proposal to the Eight Streets Neighborhood Association (ESNA). It is important for residents to have a voice in the activities that take place in our neighborhood, and we appreciate you coming to the Neighborhood Association (NA) to share your plans with our community. A presentation before NA allows an exchange of ideas and information, and helps keep everyone more informed.

You are coming before ESNA with the ultimate goal of securing approval for your proposal or project from the residents of the neighborhood. We have put together this guide to let you know what to expect at a meeting, what we expect of you, and some tips on putting your best foot forward with your presentation.

Getting on the Meeting Agenda

All that is required to get on the agenda is a call to the ESNA president. The president coordinates the monthly meeting agenda.

ESNA meets on the first Wednesday of every month. However, in order for our agenda to be published in local newspapers, the agenda is finalized approximately 10 days prior to the meeting. Proposals that require a vote cannot be accommodated after the agenda has been submitted for publishing. Most city hearings are scheduled months in advance: please respect the Neighborhood Association by planning well, and not coming to ESNA two days before your hearing and request support. ESNA does not approve any proposal without a vote of the membership.

Please be clear and specific with your meeting request. We will only vote on the items you asked of us, so the more detail you can provide the better. For example, if you ask for approval of rear decks, and on the day of the meeting say “oh, I need approval for a FAR variance as well”, we will not vote on the FAR, because it was not part of your original request.

Presenting to ESNA

The president can give you an idea of when during the meeting you will be presenting, but a final meeting timeline is not prepared until the day before the meeting. We ask that you respect the time limit given to you. Many ESNA meetings contain a full agenda, and an overrun by you would take time away from other presenters.

You will be given approximately 10 minutes to make your presentation. Out of respect, all questions are held so you can make a complete presentation. A presentation to ESNA is like any other presentation – be professional, speak loud and clear, and know your subject material.

After the presentation, we solicit Q&A from the membership. The president will moderate the discussion. Please be prepared to answer member questions and to discuss details of your proposal.

Be professional throughout your presentation. There may be people who strongly dislike your proposal, do not want your construction or business in the neighborhood, or just do not want you proposal to be here at all. They may also be less than courteous with their opinions. Please never take such comments personally. And definitely never lower yourself to their level. Thank them for their opinions and move on. The president will also be there to maintain civility during debates.

Members will also make several suggestions to your proposal. Please be clear if you are receptive to such suggestions when they are offered. If they seem outrageous, please thank the member and move on. If it's a great idea, change away!

After Q&A and discussion, the president will call for a vote. Depending on the nature of your proposal you may be asked to leave the room while members discuss your proposal and vote. We traditionally vote to oppose or not oppose your proposal.

After voting, you are welcome to, but not required to attend the rest of the meeting (if you are a resident, we encourage you to stay and be a part of ESNA). After the meeting, letters are drafted stating our position and sent directly to the government body involved (licensing, zoning, etc). Copies are also mailed to your home or business. Our letters are usually detailed, and will outline the proposal you made to us, as well as any design restrictions or promises you made to ESNA members during the presentation.

Making the best presentation to ESNA

Prepare, prepare, prepare. Coming to ESNA unprepared, without materials, or unable to answer questions makes your proposal look incomplete and disorganized. The more information you can provide, the clearer your presentation will be, and the more support you can gain for your project. Depending on your proposal, some or all of the following will help support your case.

Come to us with a clear request. Do you want a letter of support to a city agency? Were you turned down by Zoning and need to prove you corrected everything? Is all your city paperwork in order? Are you just coming to present a concept and would like feedback?

A past petitioner who came to the meeting and said “ZBA told me to come to you guys, but I’m not sure why or what ZBA wants”. If you don’t have a clear purpose, you are wasting both our time and yours.

If you need help with city procedures, please contact the City Hall office you need to do business with, or the Mayor’s Neighborhood Liaison, who can help you through city red tape.

Come with materials. If you want to build something, come with pictures, plans, even your architect or builder. If you are opening a business, come with your business plan.

Visual aids, handouts and such are encouraged. We've never had anyone bring too many aids, photos, handouts, etc. Having extra copies to pass around is always helpful.

Build support. Support from all your abutters through letters or in person will go a long way. If you're a business, talk to all the neighbors in your immediate area and get their feedback. You don't want to get all the way to a NA meeting to find out people are seriously against your proposal.

All proposals

Please talk to your abutters. The opinion of your direct neighbors will have a large impact on ESNA decisions, so you should make every effort to make your neighbors aware of your plans and try to gain their support. Send them letters. Have a meeting at your home or business. Don't let your neighbor come to a meeting and be surprised by your proposal.

Encourage abutters to either attend your ESNA presentation meeting, or write letters to ESNA with their support or concerns. These letters can be mailed to the ESNA president, or you can bring copies to leave with ESNA at the meeting. Your abutters include not only your 'side' next-door neighbors, but also residents in directly in front of or behind your building, as well as anyone who has 'direct line of sight' to the work you will be doing, as well as anyone else who might be impacted by the physical construction process itself.

Small single building projects.

If you are proposing to do minor work on your building, please bring architectural drawings and photos of the work you want to have done.

Large construction projects

If you are doing large building renovations (total gutting), or are a contractor doing major building work, or you will be razing and/or building a new building on a lot: Please bring architectural drawings of the work to be done, photos where appropriate and/or renditions of the finished project where appropriate (for new construction). For extensive exterior work or new structures, bringing your architect can help.

Be prepared to answer questions regarding construction timeline, dumpster location and time it will be, as well as work hours for the project, when the project will begin, and total length of the project. Eight Streets residents are very vigilant, and will often not hesitate to call the city and report any construction protocols violations they observe.

If you are a contractor, please be familiar with all Boston rules and regulations. The association has no patience for “I didn’t know that” answers during a meeting. Contractors should also be aware of which permits they need from the city, when their hearings are scheduled, and then schedule meetings ESNA in a timely manner.

If you are proposing a new building or front exterior changes to an existing building, please have “informal verbal feedback” from the Landmarks commission before coming to ESNA. (This prevent you from coming before us with a design Landmarks would never approve.) Also be prepared to potentially field comments on design and architecture from members, including questions on the appropriateness of your design with respect to the character to the neighborhood as a whole.

Eight Streets certainly does not want to be hostile or uncooperative, but contractors are professionals, and detailed knowledge of all Boston rules, procedures and guidelines are part of your requirement for doing business in the city. For residents doing their own large scale work, the Mayor’s Neighborhood Liaison can help you with city procedures.

Business proposals

Although a residential neighborhood, we recognize that the great variety of retail businesses and restaurants in our neighborhood are the reason we have all chosen to live in the city.

Please be prepared to talk extensively about your business. Bring your business proposal or a summary presentation of what your business will be, and why you think it will be a good addition to our neighborhood. Some members may believe your business isn’t appropriate for our neighborhood and may tell you so in no uncertain terms. Please do not take such criticisms of your business as personal attacks. Act professional, thank them for their input and move on.

All businesses should be prepared to answer questions on expected hours of operations, how active you expect your business will be, and your plans to address parking.

Restaurants, please be prepared to discuss hours, any proposed outdoor seating, any takeout proposals, extra questions concerning parking, ventilation and garbage concerns. Members will then grill you on parking, ask if you have a plan to deal with many people taking resident spaces or double parking, and if you have a valet service or discount parking plan. Members will also ask about your menu and proposed pricing structure. Members may request limitations on your hours if they believe them excessive. Members may also ask for additional outdoor seating restrictions.

If you have alcohol in your business plan, please be prepared to discuss clientele, target customer, and hours. Members may request limitations on your hours if they believe them excessive. We have many young adults in the neighborhood, live close to many parks, and are a short distance from a homeless shelter, and members will refer to all of these when they ask about your business plan.

We hope this handout has helped you. Please contact the ESNA president with any questions or concerns, and we look forward to meeting with you.