Requirements for Neighborhood Meetings

The following information summarizes the required neighborhood meeting process. This guidance may not include all requirements applicable to your proposed zoning action. Please refer to Chapter 134-6.1.6 of the City Code on Neighbor Communication requirements. If you have questions after reviewing this information, please contact the City’s Community Development Department at 515-283-4182, and ask to speak with a Planner in the Planning and Urban Design Division; or send an email to NHMeeting@dmgov.org.

Background
As part of the process for certain zoning actions (i.e. amendments to the City’s comprehensive plan, rezoning property, and requests for Conditional Use to the Zoning Board of Adjustment), applicants are directed to conduct an independent meeting with surrounding property owners that are located within the notification area for the request. This meeting is required to be held by the applicant or their representative prior to consideration of the application at a public hearing before the Plan & Zoning Commission or Zoning Board of Adjustment, whichever is applicable. It will be the applicant’s responsibility to submit a written summary of the meeting to the City at least three (3) days prior to the scheduled hearing. The meeting is to be held at the applicant’s expense with regard to invitation mailing costs, venue costs (if any), and other expenses that might be incurred at the applicant’s discretion, such as refreshments, presentation materials, etc.

How do I know who should be included or invited to the neighborhood meeting?
The City of Des Moines will provide the list of mailing addresses of the property owners in the notification area, based on the requirements for notification area distance. The mailing list will also include the appointed contact person for any affected recognized neighborhood association covering the subject property or within 250 feet. Please request the list after 3 business days of filing the application at NHMeeting@dmgov.org. This list will be provided in an electronic format to make it easier to generate labels for your invitations. This list will not include property owner’s phone numbers.

How should I invite property owners to the neighborhood meeting?
It is not sufficient to go door to door with flyers or making personal invitations to the meeting. Many of the property owners may not reside at the property that is within the notification area. The invitation to property owners should be sent by regular mail and can be either a letter or postcard format. It is recommended that they not be made to appear as advertising that may easily discarded. The invitations should contain the five Ws: Who is requesting the meeting; What the purpose is for the meeting, example: Meeting to discuss the proposed rezoning of property at the given location; Where will the neighborhood meeting be held, giving address and further directions if necessary; When will the meeting be held, giving a day of the week, date and timeframe; and Why is the request being made, example: rezoning is being requested to allow the property to be developed with a new retail store. You should not include details of the scheduled hearing with the City in this invitation or this could create confusion about when they should be where. The City will send separate notices with this information.

Where should my neighborhood meeting be held?
If available, the neighborhood meeting should be held at a venue at the subject property that is suitable for all weather conditions. Otherwise, it is most sensible to try for a location within close proximity of the subject property. Civic buildings such as libraries, community centers, public or private schools, or meeting rooms at area businesses are good choices, as property owners will consider these a neutral venue. If the subject property is within a Recognized Neighborhood Association area, you may wish to consult with the affected association contacts to meet in conjunction with an already scheduled meeting if it is within your timeframe. Otherwise, those contacts may be helpful in identifying a location that is well known by owners in the neighborhood and which may be economical. If you coordinate your meeting with a Recognized Neighborhood Association to “piggyback” on their meeting agenda, you must still invite the owners on the notification list provided by the City, even if they may not be members of the association. The following link to the City of Des
Moines website will be helpful in finding Recognized Neighborhood Association contact information: https://findneighborhoods.dsm.city/#.

**When should my neighborhood meeting be held?**
While it is essential that the date of the meeting be at least three (3) days prior to the scheduled public hearing with the appropriate Commission or Board to provide a timely summary, it is further recommended that the meeting be held at least 10 days prior to such meeting. This will give you, as the applicant, adequate time to meet with neighbors before they each receive a notice of the public hearing with prepaid response cards from the City. Also, it provides time for preparing responses to issues raised before entering the hearing. Please remember that reasonable time from the mailing of the invitations to the neighborhood meeting date should be given. This allows for additional time for out-of-town owners and all attendees to consult or rearrange their schedules in advance of your meeting. Please also take into consideration recognized holidays when you are selecting a meeting date, as interested owners may not be able to attend due to conflicting schedules during holiday seasons.

**What time of day should my neighborhood meeting be held?**
The appropriate time of day for the meeting should also be considered. If many of the surrounding property owners look to be owners of residences which would likely work most of the day, then evening times are typically preferred. If mostly business owners, then a business day time may work best.

**What should happen at my neighborhood meeting?**
This is mostly at the applicant’s discretion. It will be the opportunity to tell the surrounding owners about your request in a professional manner. Use whatever presentation methods that you feel will be most effective. An open house format is acceptable where neighbors can come and go if they like. In this case, a prescribed time for a short presentation should also be identified in the applicant’s meeting notice, so that all attendees have the opportunity to hear questions and concerns that are raised along with the applicant’s responses. It is professional to be open to suggestions from meeting attendees as to how you might be able to satisfy or address their concerns regarding your proposed zoning action. Establishing an agenda to handout and follow can be helpful with this as well as with staying on topic.

**What happens if my meeting is not well attended or nobody shows up at all?**
You must provide a reasonable opportunity to meet with surrounding neighbors. Attendance will vary on several factors ranging from owners that are apathetic or have no concerns to owners with conflicts in their individual schedules. This neighborhood meeting requirement is not expected to accommodate every affected owner’s personal schedule. You must be prepared to report a summary on your neighborhood meeting at the scheduled hearing of the applicable Board or Commission, and be prepared to provide information on your notification process, date and location of the meeting, and a summary of the discussion.

**How do I fulfill reporting requirements of my meeting in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance?**
Following their meeting, applicants must submit a written summary of their neighbor meetings to Community Development Planning Staff NHMeeting@dmgov.org at least three (3) days prior to the first required public hearing. Neighbor meetings summaries must include at least the following information:

1. Efforts to notify neighbors about the proposal, including how and when notification occurred, who was notified, and when and where the public meeting was held;
2. Who was involved in the discussions;
3. Suggestions and concerns raised by neighbors; and
4. What specific changes, if any, were considered or made as a result of the neighbor meetings.