



How to Write a Council Agenda Item

Our goal is to keep memos brief and to the point. Agenda items are read by the Council, general public and media to aid them in the business of local government, including enacting community laws, approving funds, reviewing development applications, establishing forums for public review and debate and responding to petitions. View examples at www.townofchapelhill.org/agendas.

Guidance on Writing

- Avoid repetition
- Use action verbs
- Use bullet points
- Use simple English and write clearly
- Carefully select terms and be skeptical of abbreviations/ acronyms
- See “How to Follow Town Style”

Summary and Subject Line

Executive Summary

- A well-crafted summary along with links can take the place of a memo
- Include title of agenda item, council goal, recommendations and attachments (sometimes)
- Write as if many readers will read no further – the summary is the first thing that the reader sees

Subject Line

- Keep it brief and action-oriented, use key words that ring a bell with the reader
- State the memo’s function: report, update, petition, etc.

Memorandum

Recommended Council Action

- Here’s where to say what action you recommend

Context with Key Issues

- Tell us what’s happening... and how often, where
- As much as possible complement, not repeat, the subject line
- Limit discussion of the technical
- Answer the “what events brought us here?” question

Explanation of Recommendation

- Why is this the best option for the Council to choose?
- Avoid writing more than is needed
- Provide ample links to longer explanations and definitions
- Provide staff rationale for decisions, and provide information

Fiscal Note

- Describe the impact to Town revenues and resources

