



Tips on Talking with Your Alderman

Be personal.

Tell how the Chicago Clean Power Ordinance relates to your interests or personal situation (or your neighbors or people you know). Also, let them know quickly if you live in his/her legislative district.

Let your alderman know you are part of an organizational effort.

Tell your alderman that you are contacting them on behalf of the Chicago Clean Power Coalition. Be sure to identify any organization you represent. Effective groups can get a lot done and most legislators pay more attention to strong organizations than they do to one or two individuals.

Do some homework.

Try to know the basics of the legislation you are talking about; think about what points you want to make; think about what arguments are probably going to be brought up against your point of view. Connect the talking points of your issue to your personal story.

Be focused.

Stay on the subject you're concerned about. Don't stray, and don't let the legislator change the subject. Be polite, but firm!

Don't be argumentative.

Even if it would make you feel good, little is gained by badgering your alderman or getting into a verbal fight. Persuasion is the key — firmly press home your points and your needs, reminding the legislator how it personally affects you.

Don't be defensive.

Your alderman may make some critical remarks about your position or ask some tough questions. Give him or her solid information on your position to make your points more credible. Keep in mind that the legislative process often involves compromises, but you always have a right to be part of the process. Your situation and your needs are important. That attitude will keep you stating those needs and problems firmly, not defensively.

Don't stay too long, don't be rude or threatening, don't make an enemy.

You need to establish a long-term relationship with your alderman. Even if you disagree on an issue, you may find that he/she will work with you this issue (or on another issue) later.

Get a commitment.

The goal is to enlist the alderman's support, so be specific. Ask if he or she will support the Chicago Clean Power Ordinance. Better yet, ask him or her to cosponsor the ordinance! Ask the question directly and try to get a direct answer.

Be optimistic and upbeat.

Aldermen and all elected officials are quick to pick up the personal energy that goes with citizen lobbying efforts. Stay positive.

Follow up promptly.

Send a thank you note and anything else you promised to send.



Tips on Talking with Your Alderman *(cont'd)*

If you are going to visit your alderman:

- Make an appointment.
- Go in teams.
- Mention any organizational affiliation.
- Be on time.
- Begin with a warm introduction.
- Be brief and concise.
- Get a commitment.
- Leave written materials (available at www.cleanpowerchicago.org).
- Offer to get more information.
- Leave on a positive note.
- Write a thank you if your alderman agrees to cosponsor or support the ordinance.

If you are going to make a personal call to your alderman:

- Give your name and address.
- Mention any organizational affiliation.
- Be brief.
- Ask your alderman to co-sponsor or support the Chicago Clean Power Ordinance.
- Indicate your position.
- Ask for your message to be repeated.
- Thank the secretary or aide.

Personal letters to your alderman.

- Mention any organizational affiliation.
- Focus on one issue.
- Ask your alderman to co-sponsor or support the Chicago Clean Power Ordinance.
- Be personal.
- Do not use a form letter, adapt it.
- Be positive and constructive.
- Describe any relevant experience you have.
- Ask questions that require a response.
- Enclose informational materials, if any (available at: www.cleanpowerchicago.org).
- Write a thank you if your alderman agrees to cosponsor or support the ordinance.

April 2010