



Women Transforming Cities Civic Resources

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Local governments are the closest level of government to communities. They have a significant impact on our day-to-day lives, so it’s important to know how they work. Vancouver’s local government is made up of three main bodies: Vancouver City Council, Vancouver School Board, and Vancouver Park Board. Together, they govern and manage all city-wide programming and operations.

Use our comprehensive downloadable resources to learn more about how you can participate in your local government and take a deep dive into the intricacies of municipal operations, from understanding decision-making procedures to decoding city budgets.

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Vancouver's Local Government Ecosystems

Local governments are the closest level of government to communities. They have a significant impact on our day-to-day lives, so it's important to know how they work. Vancouver's local government is made up of three main bodies: Vancouver City Council, Vancouver School Board, and Vancouver Park Board. Together, they govern and manage all city-wide programming and operations.

City Council

Council is made up of a mayor and ten councillors who are elected "at large" for a four-year term. An "at-large" system means that residents vote for councillors and a mayor to represent the entire city, not just their particular neighbourhood. This is important to note because other municipalities across Canada operate differently. Together, the mayor and councillors are responsible for making decisions about city policies, infrastructure, and services such as bylaws, tax rates, streets, sidewalks, and water. The provincial government lays out the powers and legal responsibilities of Vancouver City Council through legislation called the Vancouver Charter.

The main responsibilities of Vancouver City Council are:

- Pass bylaws regulating things like business licensing, building, noise, and land use
- Buy, sell, and lease city land
- Approve property tax rates
- Approve the city's budgets
- Allocate funds for special activities, such as arts and community services
- Participate in the hiring of the city manager who oversees all city staff

Mayor

The mayor acts as the chair of city council. You can think of them as the team leader or captain - their role is to ensure council runs smoothly under their guidance. It is important to note that the mayor has the same voting power as any other member of council.

The mayor's main responsibilities include:

- Chair council meetings and provide leadership to councillors
- Represent city council at events, ceremonies and meetings with other levels of government as well as private and non-profit organizations
- Act as the liaison between council and the city manager/chief administrative officer and other bodies like Metro Mayor's Council and the Vancouver Police Board
- Establish and appoint councillors to regional government sub-committees

City Staff

While council decides the policy direction and priorities, city staff do the work to implement those decisions. In other words, council has the vision and city staff bring that vision to life. City staff are hired and not elected. Unlike the mayor and councillors, staff are not bound to 4-year election cycles and will continue to work with whichever elected officials voters choose.



Key city staff positions:

- **City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer:** Hired by and reports to Vancouver City Council. They oversee all of the city's operations, provide leadership to city departments, and implement council's decisions.
- **Planners:** Develop plans for the whole city, a specific area, or a specific site, including how those plans align with the vision set by council.
- **City Clerks:** Provide administrative support to council, such as organizing speakers for public hearings, taking minutes in meetings, and ensuring that candidates have the necessary paperwork collected to run in elections.

Vancouver Park Board

The park board is made up of seven commissioners who are also elected at large for a four-year term - you'll recall that means residents vote for commissioners to represent the entire city, not one particular neighbourhood. Commissioners elect a chair and a vice chair for a one-year term. The commissioners set the vision and policy that guides the Vancouver Park Board's services and programs.

The board listens to residents and acts as their voice to ensure that Vancouver parks and recreational facilities remain accessible and sustainable. Park board commissioners direct park board staff who oversee services provided directly to the community.



Responsibilities of the Park Board:

- Maintain parks, gardens, and beaches
- Maintain trees on public property
- Offer art, cultural, and recreational activities
- Operate golf courses and pitch-and-putts
- Operate community centres, public pools, rinks, sports fields, and courts
- Assign specific uses for park spaces such as what park spaces will be playgrounds, green space, or off-leash dog areas



Vancouver School Board

The Vancouver Board of Education, more commonly referred to as the Vancouver School Board, is comprised of nine elected trustees and a student trustee. The board's work is divided into four standing committees that each oversee the different elements of the school district such as; policy and governance, facilities planning, education plans, and finance and personnel. Each committee forwards recommendations to the full board for approval.

There are over 100 schools within the Vancouver School District, and the Vancouver School Board oversees the day-to-day operation of each of those schools. **The school board does not, however, set school curriculums. Curriculums are determined by the BC Ministry of Education.** Provincial legislation known as the School Act dictates the Vancouver School Board's power and responsibilities.

The board is responsible for:

- Developing policies, priorities, and bylaws for the operation of schools
- Maintenance, construction, and facility planning for school buildings and grounds
- Interior building management including security, heating, cleaning, indoor air quality, and safety inspections
- Leasing and renting out school facilities such as sporting fields, auditoriums, and gymnasiums
- Supporting and improving student learning and well-being
- Setting and regulating the school district calendar

Vancouver Police Board

The provincial government's Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General sets the expectations for policing across the province through legislation called The Police Act.

The Police Act says that municipalities are responsible for providing and funding police services, either through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), by establishing their own municipal police force, or by partnering with a neighbouring municipality that has their own police force.

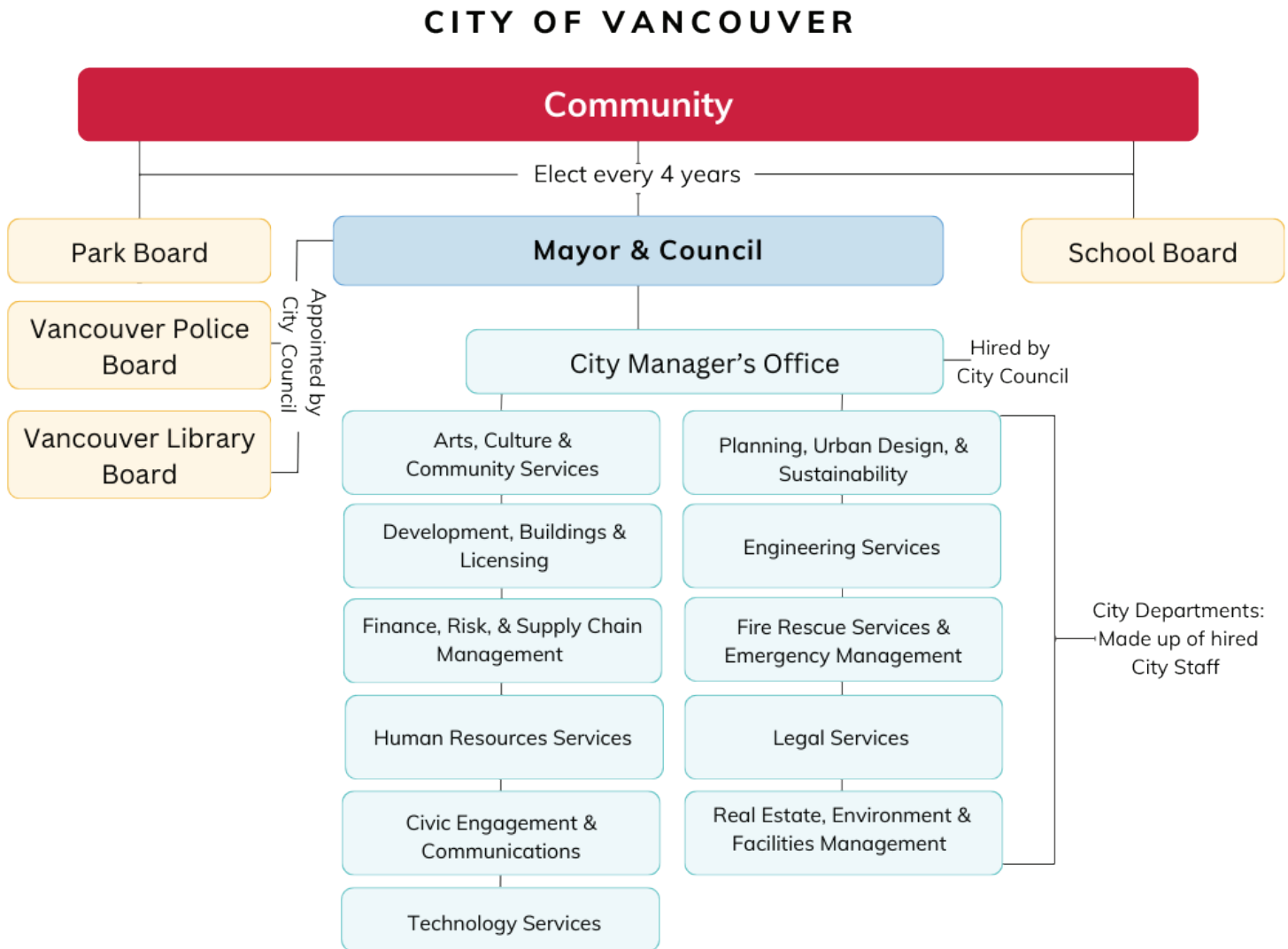
Vancouver has its own police force - the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) - which is funded by city council, but independently governed by the Vancouver Police Board (VPB). The mayor in office is always the chair of the VPB. The board provides civilian oversight and governance to the VPD in response to public safety needs.

Some of the VPB's responsibilities include:

- Employ sworn and civilian staff of the VPD
 - A key responsibility is the hiring of a police chief who is responsible for the day-to-day operations/management of the police force
- Set policy and direction
- Oversee finances/budget
- Act as the authority overseeing policy and service complaints, including complaints against the VPD chief and deputies

City of Vancouver Organizational Chart

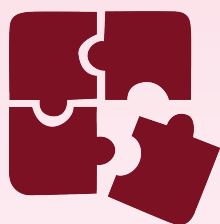
There are many different departments in the City! They all work to help manage the ongoing business and operations of the city and support the work of the mayor and council. It can get a little confusing trying to understand how everything works together. This organization chart maps out who is involved and how they are connected.



How City Council Decisions Are Made

Once elected, City Council is responsible for setting a vision for the city and making decisions that shape how residents are able to live, work and play. Council establishes strategic priorities that highlight the main items they want to focus on throughout their term. Those priorities range from topics like reconciliation to addressing the housing crisis. The decisions council makes are informed by city staff, public opinion gathered from community engagement, and debates amongst fellow council members.

How the Government Makes Decisions



Vision & Strategy

The city council sets the priorities and strategies with the advice of staff, who work in specialized areas.



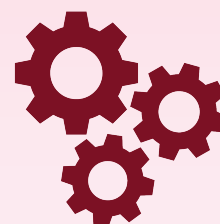
Plans & Policies

Staff consult with council, experts, and the public to develop plans, reports, and policies.



Decisions

Council votes to approve, amend, oppose, or to send plans and policies back to staff for revisions



Implementation

The city council sets the priorities and strategies with the advice of staff, who work in specialized areas.

Types of Decisions Made by City Council

The city makes decisions that affect many aspects of our lives including access to affordable housing, the creation of bike lanes, efficient transportation routes, noise restrictions, and many more. Examples of city council decisions:

- Allowing ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft
- Creating the bylaw that ensures property owners and landlords provide heating in residential homes
- Allocating funds to buy snow plows for efficient snow clearing in the winter
- Determining where child care spaces can be developed and issuing licenses

...AND HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THEM

City hall regularly seeks input from Vancouver residents for its plans and decisions. Here are some ways you can make sure that your opinions are considered in the City's decision-making processes:

Vote!

Voting is a key way to ensure that the people governing your city represent your values and priorities. Municipal elections across BC are held on the third Saturday in October every four years. Vancouver elections are held “at large”, meaning candidates run to represent the entire city rather than a particular neighbourhood or area of the city.

Sometimes, there are specific spending allocation questions voters are also asked to respond to for example, “Do you support the City [of Vancouver] borrowing money for three areas of major capital projects, as outlined in the Capital Plan.”

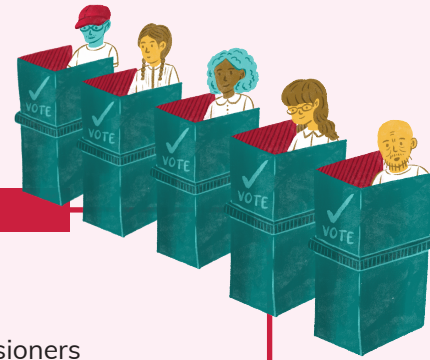
Tip: You can fill out or leave blank as much of the ballot as you want and your vote will still be counted.

Voters always vote on:

- 1 mayor
- 10 city councillors
- 7 Park Board Commissioners
- 9 Vancouver School Board trustees

To be able to vote, you need to:

- Be 18 years old or older on election day
- Be a Canadian citizen
- Have lived in BC for at least 6 months
- Live in Vancouver or own property registered in your name in Vancouver
- Not be disqualified by law from voting



Speak at meetings

Anyone who has an interest in Vancouver's decisions can speak at council or park board meetings. For example, if you're someone who commutes through, works in, or owns a business in Vancouver you can still speak at meetings - but the chair may ask you to state whether you're a resident.

Here are some helpful things to know:

- You can speak by phone or in person.
- You can only speak on agenda items that will be voted on (members' motions and reports that include recommendations).
- Speakers have 3 minutes or 5 minutes to address council or park board depending on the type of meeting and if you're speaking on behalf of a group.
- The meeting chair can allow accommodations for people who need additional time, for example, if you are using a translator or need more time to speak due to a disability.
- Speakers must sign up by 5 pm the day before a regular council meeting to get their allotted speaking time. For public hearings, speakers are encouraged to sign up to speak beforehand, but there is no deadline.

Submit written comments or email council

Members of the public can provide feedback through the City of Vancouver's website and respond to specific agenda items or leave general comments. However, if you want to speak to a particular issue or agenda item it may be more effective to send an email with your feedback directly to council members. Their official email addresses can be found on the City of Vancouver website.

Organize with others

There is strength in numbers! Getting together with other people in the community who care about the same issues is a great way to create change. You can:

- Run an issue-focused campaign to grow awareness and support for issues you care about, with people who are just as passionate as you. For a step-by-step guide on how you can do this, check out our Cities Organize toolkit.
- Send letters and emails to the mayor, council, and city staff
- Speak with council members at events or ask for a meeting with your community group
- Connect with community organizations or groups who are active on the issues you care about



Stay informed

Keep up to date with the latest city news:

- Watch council meetings online or in person
- Sign up for the City of Vancouver's monthly newsletter on their website
- Sign up for notifications when council meeting agendas are published
- Follow the City of Vancouver's social media accounts to hear about engagement opportunities
- Run an issue-focused campaign to grow awareness and support for issues you care about, with people who are just as passionate as you. For a step-by-step guide on how you can do this, check out our Cities Organize toolkit.
- Send letters and emails to the mayor, council, and city staff
- Speak with council members at events or ask for a meeting with your community group
- Connect with community organizations or groups who are active on the issues you care about

How to Participate in Vancouver Urban Planning Decisions

Have you ever wished there were more apartments in your neighbourhood instead of single-family homes, or that there was a bike lane on the route you take to work, or a childcare centre near your office building?

Making urban planning decisions is one of the most significant ways city councils create change. These decisions impact where major roads go, what kind of buildings and businesses are allowed in different neighbourhoods, and our access to green spaces. Council decisions also impact the development of official long-term plans for the city. It is important that Vancouver City Council knows what residents prioritize so they can make decisions that reflect those priorities. Vancouver has many neighbourhood-specific and service-specific plans that you can participate in to influence urban planning decisions in the city.

One of the city's major long-range plans is the Vancouver Plan, which was passed in 2022 and sets a 30-year vision for the city. The plan outlines steps that aim to make the city more livable, affordable, and sustainable. The goals in the plan were created after extensive public engagement, research, and analysis of Vancouver's urban planning landscape.

Vancouver Plan



Creating more housing options



Developing complete, connected neighbourhoods



Supporting businesses



Addressing the climate crisis and restoring ecosystems

[Learn more about the Vancouver Plan](#) 

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED



Attend a Consultation on the Vancouver Plan

The city continues to have ongoing consultations about different plans for specific neighbourhoods or services that support the implementation of the Vancouver Plan. Consultations are a great place to express your thoughts directly to city staff.



Attend and Speak at a Public Hearing

Public hearings are a type of council meeting that provide an official opportunity for the mayor and council to hear the public's views on certain city planning decisions, including rezoning bylaws, community plans, and heritage designations. Sign up to speak at a hearing on an issue that matters to you.



Complete [Shape Your City Surveys](#)

Shape Your City is an online portal for frequent, ongoing surveys about proposed plans for areas of Vancouver. Vancouver residents can ensure that their city develops in ways that align with their needs by filling out these surveys online.



Participate in [Talk Vancouver](#)

Talk Vancouver is an online panel where you can tune in to hear about the latest city initiatives, share your views, and connect with Vancouver residents who have the same needs as you.



Stay Informed

Being up to date on current city initiatives is a crucial step to ensuring that you can speak out on issues that are important to you. Stay in the know by watching Vancouver City Council meetings and signing up for the city's newsletters.

Types of Meetings

It can be a little daunting to think about speaking at a council meeting. Remember, you do not have to be an “expert” to voice your opinion to council. Municipal governments work best when the public actively participates, which means your elected officials and city staff need to hear what you think. It is useful to know the different kinds of meetings that happen at Vancouver City Hall as the opportunities to speak differ depending on the kind of meeting.

	Council Meetings	Standing Committee Meetings	Special Council Meetings	In-Camera Meetings	Public Hearings
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bylaws • Budgets • City services and programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City finance and services • Policy and strategic priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging and/or urgent issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential / sensitive matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use and planning decisions (Rezoning, area plans, heritage designations)
Open to the public to watch	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Public can speak	✓*	✓*	Dependent on the agenda item	✗	✓
Public can submit comments online	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
When	Every second Tuesday at 9:30 am ¹	Usually on Wednesdays	When needed	When needed - usually after or during a council meeting	As required - 6 pm on Tuesdays & 1 pm on Thursdays ²

* Sometimes there are agenda items that the public cannot speak on

¹ Except in August and January

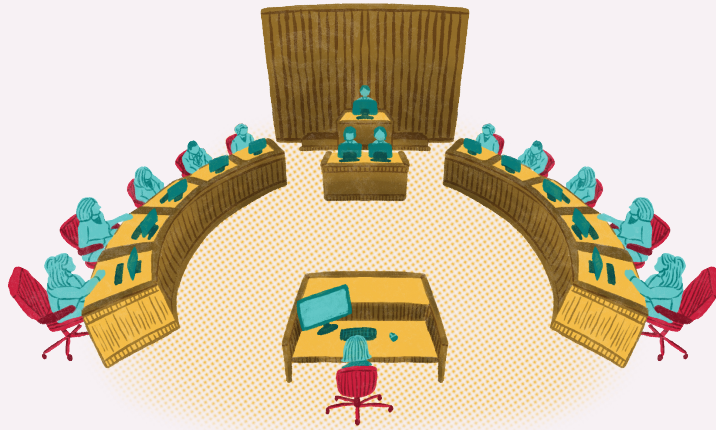
² Except in August

Council Meetings

Regular council meetings are where the mayor and councillors discuss and decide on bylaws, budgets, city services and programs. A typical council meeting will feature updates from city staff, voting on recommendations prepared by staff, passing bylaws, and giving notice of upcoming members' motions. Staff reports are, as the name suggests, written by city staff. Their contents cover a broad range of city projects, including updates to city plans, recommendations for council to approve, and findings that councillors asked staff to look into.

Meetings are open to the public and held every second Tuesday at 9:30 am.

You can attend meetings either in person at Vancouver City Hall or by tuning in to their livestream online. The public can fill out a comment form online in response to a council motion or sign up to speak to specific council meeting agenda items. The deadline to sign up to speak is 5pm the day before the start of a meeting.



Standing Committee Meetings

Standing committee meetings are very similar to regular council meetings but are chaired by a councillor recommended by the mayor and may not be attended by all council members. They are held to hear information from city staff and the public, and make decisions on specific topics within the scope of each committee.

Vancouver has two Standing Committees:

1. City Finance and Services
2. Policy and Strategic Priorities

Standing committee meeting agendas include similar elements to regular council meetings, such as hearing staff reports. These meetings are also where council members' motions are introduced, debated, and voted on. Council members' motions are written and brought forward by councillors or the mayor to propose a policy direction for the future of the city. For example, a motion might propose adding a bike lane to an area of the city or forming a task force to address a certain issue. **Meetings are open to the public and are usually held on Wednesdays at 9:30 am.** Typically, a brief council meeting immediately follows a standing committee meeting to consider and approve the recommendations of the standing committee. Just like regular council meetings, the public can submit comments online, sign up to speak to standing committee agenda items, and watch the meeting online or in person at city hall.

Special Committee Meetings

Special council meetings can be called by the mayor or a majority of councillors when an emerging or urgent issue arises. A special council meeting is also held to hear public speakers before council approves the annual budget. **Meetings are open to the public and scheduled when needed.** Depending on the agenda item, the public may or may not be invited to speak.

In-camera Meetings

In-camera meetings are **closed to the public** so that council can discuss sensitive or confidential matters. The Vancouver Charter (provincial legislation) outlines the criteria for a meeting to be closed to the public. Broadly speaking, the criteria includes labour, land, and legal decisions. For example, staffing decisions and negotiating with unions, city decisions on buying or selling land where public knowledge of a potential deal could harm their interests, or discussions that could get in the way of an ongoing law enforcement investigation. Council must first provide advance notice, offer a rationale as to why a closed meeting is necessary, and collectively approve the in-camera meeting during a regular public council meeting. In-camera meetings are typically held on the same day as a regular council meeting. When in-camera decisions are deemed no longer sensitive, information on the meetings is released to the public.

Public Hearings

Public hearings provide an official opportunity for the council to hear the public's views on certain city planning decisions, including:

- Rezoning bylaws – changes to the height, density and uses (such as commercial use, multifamily homes, or mixed-use) allowed for buildings on a piece of land or area
- Community plans – overarching frameworks that guide planning decisions for specific areas of the city
- Heritage designations – provides legal protections for buildings or landscapes that are deemed culturally significant

Hearings are always open to the public and anyone can sign on to speak. Speakers have five minutes each instead of three (or eight minutes if speaking for a group of four or more). Unlike other council meetings, there is no registration deadline to speak; you can add your name to the list at any point before the chair closes the speakers' list. Councillors may ask clarifying questions of speakers. Members of the public can also submit comments and petitions on public hearing agenda items on the city's website - the deadline to send comments and petitions is 15 minutes after the chair closes the speaker's list.

Understanding City Motions

A motion is a term used in legal and civic spaces that refers to the formal process of requesting something to happen or expressing an official opinion within a governing body.

Motions can be procedural, for example, requesting a change to the meeting agenda or requesting more time to ask questions. However, council members can also use motions to propose a new policy direction. These proposals are called “members motions” and are often the first formal step of policy-making. Any member of council can bring forward a members motion to be discussed and voted on during council meetings.

The Process

1

A council member writes a motion when they have a specific idea, proposal, or concern they want the council to consider.



2

Council members submit a written notice of the proposed motion to the city clerks prior to a council meeting.



3

The motion is added to the council meeting agenda and released to the public the week prior to the meeting. The motion is introduced at a council meeting and must be “seconded” by another council member in order to proceed.



4

The public can speak in support or opposition to a member motion at this meeting, which is held every second Wednesday at 9:30 am.



5

Council members can suggest changes, referred to as amendments, to a motion. A majority of council members present need to vote on amendments to approve them. Once the amendment is approved, council returns to discussing the now-amended motion.



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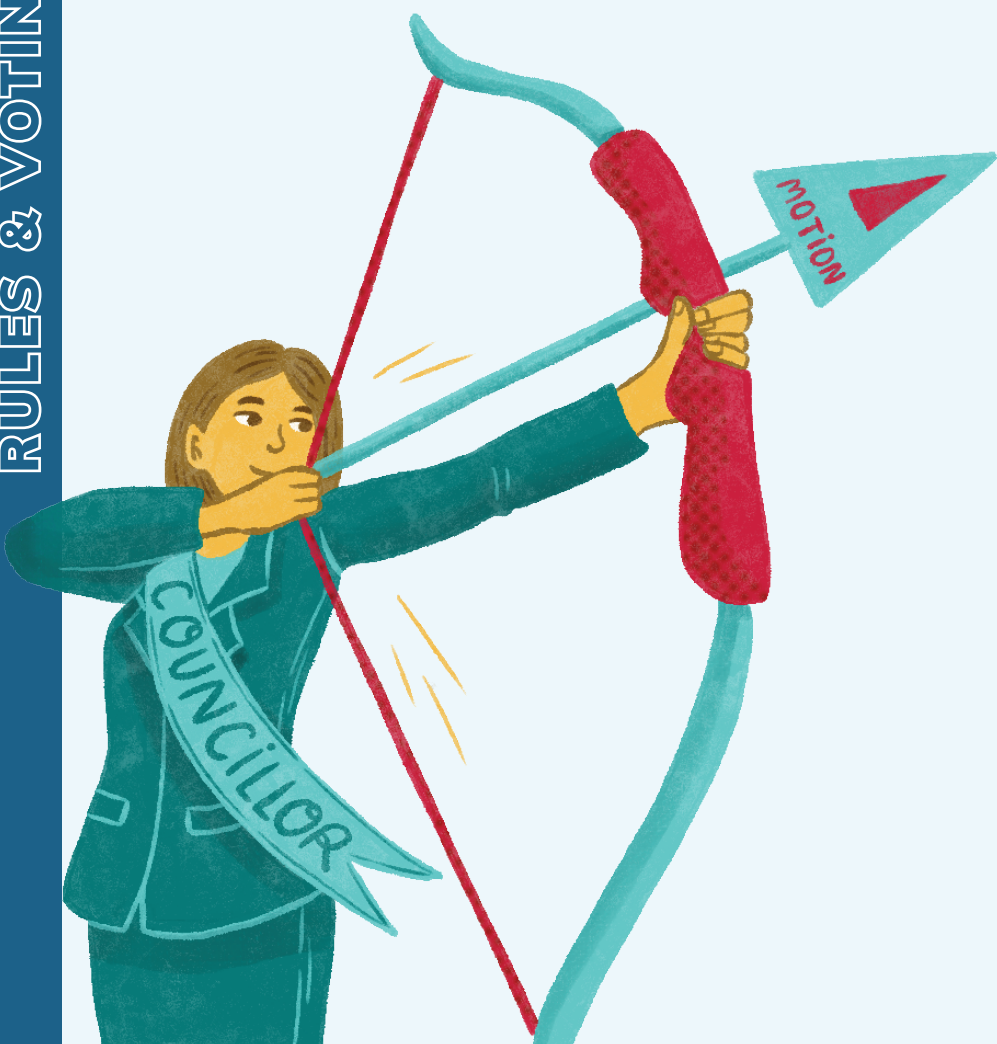
Once speakers are heard, council discusses and votes on the motion.

City clerks provide administrative support to city council, including helping with the documentation of motions, taking minutes during meetings, and organizing speakers for meetings & public hearings. The city clerk is a resource for you and if you have any questions about city procedure or need support speaking or writing to council you can call or email the clerk’s office!



Rules & Voting Procedures

- Any council member can bring a motion forward.
- In order to pass, most motions need the support of a majority of council members present at the meeting.
 - However, there are some decisions, mainly those that may have a long-lasting impact on the city (such as declaring a state of emergency, passing bylaws, or acquiring and disposing of property), that require a 2/3 majority to pass.
- If the vote results in a tie, the motion is defeated.
- If a council member does not want to vote for or against a motion, for example, because they are unsure or feel that they do not have enough information, they can vote to abstain. However, in Vancouver, a vote to abstain is counted as a vote for a motion.
- If any of the elected officials on council have a conflict of interest in relation to a motion being discussed, for example, making a decision about a street where a councillor runs a business, then the council member must declare their conflict of interest and they will not vote on the issue.



Useful Links

Explore the **upcoming meeting schedule and previously recorded meetings**



Find out more about the **different types of council meetings**



Use the **contact information for councillors** to inquire about a recently addressed or future motion.



COMPONENTS OF A MOTION

Motions can be confusing! They are often really formal and it can be difficult to understand what city council is considering. Let's break down how motions are formatted and what you need to know to understand the decisions being made by your city council.

Title: Gives a snapshot of the motion topic. In Vancouver, councillors “give notice” – a heads up to their colleagues and the public – by sharing the title of their motion at an earlier council meeting before the motion is submitted.

Submitted by: Here you will find the name of the member of council bringing forth the motion.

Whereas:

1. The "whereas" section of a motion contains clauses that provide context about the topic the motion is addressing.
2. This part of the motion explains the councillor's rationale for the policy changes and can provide insight into how they're choosing to frame the issue being addressed.
3. This section will often contain facts and figures related to the issue being discussed and mention related policy decisions or priorities.

The separate points are called clauses. Each clause is designated with a number or letter to easily distinguish between them.

Therefore be it resolved that:

- A. The “therefore” section of the motion contains clauses that list action items or directions for city staff to implement. Focus here to understand what the councillor is proposing and the motion's implications.
- B. This section highlights the desired outcomes and actions of the motion. Councillors can debate and propose changes, formally known as amendments, to clauses in this part of a motion, which must be approved by a vote.
- C. Actionable tasks will be assigned in this part of the motion. For instance, the motion may ask staff to create a report on the topic at hand, prepare bylaw changes, or request the mayor write a letter advocating on an issue.
 - This can provide insight into what to expect after a motion has been approved and where you can go to follow up on a motion after it has been discussed.

Tip: In a hurry?

Skip straight to the “**therefore be it resolved**” section if you want to quickly understand what the motion is proposing.

INFLUENCE A MOTION

Staying informed and engaging with your city council is a great way to shape your city. Motions are one of the main ways city council enacts change. As a result, participating in influencing a motion can help ensure that your ideas and values are represented in the decision-making process. Remember, your elected officials work for you - so the decisions they make should align with the direction you want for your city!

Engage

Talk to your councillors

Your city council is the closest level of government to you meaning that they are more accessible than any other of your elected officials. They work for you! Calling, emailing, or booking a meeting with a councillor is a great way to directly communicate your concerns or ideas. Remember, it is well within your rights to voice your feedback to the folks representing you at City Hall.

Remember, your elected officials work for you - so the decisions they make should align with the direction you want for your city!

Speak to a motion at council meetings

Calling in to a council meeting or heading down to Vancouver City Hall to speak in person is one of the best ways to engage with your local decision-makers. Here are some resources to keep in mind:

- Explore our tips on [how to speak to council](#)
- Find information on [how and when to register to speak at a council meeting](#)
- Sign up to [receive council agendas](#) when they are released to the public

Write letters, emails, or submit feedback on the City of Vancouver's website

If the idea of public speaking makes you nervous, write it down! Communicate your ideas and concerns directly to councillors through letters or emails. Make sure to personalize the email so they know who you are and why the issue is important to you. If you don't have a specific councillor in mind, you can email all council members or [submit any feedback or comments to Vancouver City Council on their website](#).



Collaborate

Become a member of a civic agency

Civic agencies provide community perspectives and feedback to help inform council decisions. Anyone can submit applications to sit on boards, commissions, committees, and panels. You do not have to be an “expert” to participate, there are a broad range of civic agencies, including agencies specifically for people with lived experience e.g. people with disabilities advisory committee, 2SLGBTQ+ advisory committee, renters advisory committee, etc. [Check out our resource on civic agencies to learn more.](#)

Join community associations

Your voice is more powerful as a collective! Get involved with community organizations that advocate to city council, or find organizations that share your vision for Vancouver. Together, you can amplify each other's voices and garner community support.

How to Speak to Council

Decisions made by city council have a huge impact on our everyday lives. Speaking at council meetings allows you to voice your opinions about the decisions your elected officials are making and to share your experience of living in the city. It is a key opportunity to influence and contribute to your city's decision-making processes. Vancouver City Council has a Procedure bylaw, which lays out how council meetings work and how the public can engage in them.

Before you get ready to speak to Vancouver City Council it is worth noting that the process is imperfect and needs improvement to ensure that everyone can share their opinions and experiences. Currently, council meetings favour those with the privilege of time and high English proficiency. The reality of the processes is that many residents who work during the day, have caretaking roles, or don't speak fluent English are excluded from the decision-making that shapes our city. It can be a huge task to show up and make your voice heard in a system designed to exclude many people. Showing up and sharing your story, in the face of these structural barriers, can be a powerful act of resistance. Here are some notes and tips to help you navigate the system.

YOU CAN SPEAK AT:

Council Meetings

Held to make decisions on:

- Bylaws
- Spending
- Providing services
- Vancouver's economic, social, and environmental well-being

Standing Committee Meetings

Held to hear information from city staff and the public on issues regarding:

- City Finance and Services
- Policy and Strategic Priorities

Public Hearings

Held to hear input and decide on:

- Land use and planning decisions: Rezoning, area plans, heritage designation

SPEAKERS HAVE:

For council & standing committee meetings

3

minutes to speak as an individual or on behalf of an organization

For public hearings

5

minutes to speak as an individual, or

8

minutes on behalf of other persons or groups (representing 4 or more people, including the speaker - individuals of the group must be present either in person or by phone)

[Check out our resource on the different types of council meetings to learn more.](#)



THE PROCESS:

To speak, sign up online at the [City of Vancouver website](#). You can choose to speak in person at City Hall or over the phone. Meeting agendas are typically posted on the city's website one week before a meeting. Review the agenda and the item(s) you would like to speak to before signing up!

Once you have signed up to speak, you will receive a confirmation email with your speaker number and instructions on the process for both in-person and over-the-phone participants. Your number indicates your position on the speaker list for the agenda item you have signed up to speak to.

When will my turn to speak be?

Your time slot to speak can vary based on:

- Changes to the order of the agenda
- The number of speakers on each agenda item ahead of you
- How quickly the chair moves through the list of speakers

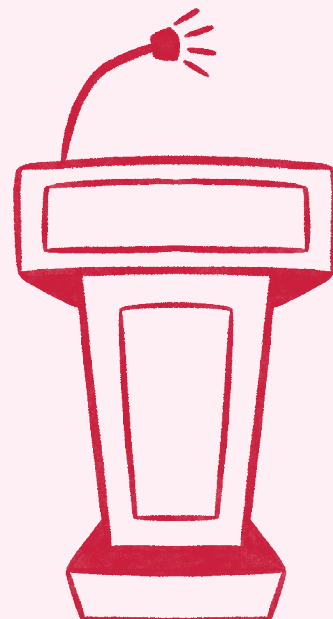
Here are some tips:

1. Watch the meeting live stream on the City of Vancouver's Youtube channel.
2. Follow @VanCityClerk on X (formerly Twitter) where they'll post updates.
3. The meeting chair will give another opportunity to speakers who missed their turn once they've made it through the list of speakers.
4. You can sign up to speak even if you're unsure if you'll be able to make it - there's no penalty for missing your turn.

Note on Translation & Accessibility

The City of Vancouver does not currently offer official translation services for speaking to council. Speakers who require translation services can reach out to the city clerk's office beforehand but it is not a guarantee that city clerks will be able to support with translation services. If possible, try to bring your own translation aid.

Speakers needing accommodations for translation support or because of a disability may receive extra time to speak at the discretion of the meeting chair.



TIPS ON SPEAKING TO COUNCIL

- Be clear and specific when giving your rationale.
 - Numbering your thoughts can help organize your points. For example: "I am against [agenda item] for three reasons - [1, 2, 3 or firstly, secondly, finally]."
- Stories are powerful evidence. Council wants to hear what you think and why you think it. Share your personal experience with the issue and how the motion may impact you. Facts and figures can be helpful too but don't worry if you don't have those on hand because city staff will have presented data to council.
- Review past meeting recordings to get a sense of what to expect.

Remember to state your:



- Name
- Organization (if applicable)
- Position on the agenda item (for or against)
- Rationale

These tips are only suggestions. At the end of the day, it is your speech—pick a strategy that makes the most sense to you!

Public Hearings

In 2023, Vancouver City Council made a change so that speakers cannot be asked questions in council meetings. However, during public hearings council members may ask you clarifying questions after you speak. **You do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable answering, especially if they feel invasive, irrelevant, or misleading.** Ask for clarification or for them to repeat the question if needed.

Potential responses to councillor questions:

- Redirect the question
- "I am here to speak about X, not Y."
- "I don't know about X, but I can tell you that [share your main point]"
- "This [person/organization] would be able to better answer this question."



Official Community Plans

WHAT ARE THEY?

Official Community Plans (OCPs) are created by local governments to outline long-term visions for communities - they typically have a 20-year time frame. They set objectives, priorities, and policies that guide decisions made by city council, particularly planning and land use decisions.

OCPs often include planning policies that aim to progress economic, social, and environmental priorities. Once an OCP is put in place, decisions made by elected officials and staff should align with the plan's goals - but local governments are not required to action or implement what is included in the plan.

WHAT GOES INTO AN OCP?

What is included in an OCP is largely dictated by the needs of each municipality. Generally, an OCP will include:

- Housing plans to meet anticipated housing needs over a 5-year period, including policies for affordable housing, rental housing, and housing for people with a disability
- Land use guidelines for commercial, industrial, institutional, agricultural, recreational and infrastructure zones
- Development and land use restrictions
- Plans for major roads, sewers and water systems
- Proposed public facilities, including schools, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites
- Targets, policies, and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions



WHY SHOULD RESIDENTS CARE ABOUT OCPS?

- 1** If you're curious what the priorities are of your city, and what the council is likely to prioritize - the OCP can give you a great starting point.
- 2** If city council is making decisions that don't align with the priorities of the OCP, you can refer to it in your correspondence. For example, if the OCP says they are prioritizing rental housing but council is voting against affordable rentals - you can raise that.
- 3** OCPs provide an opportunity to embed critical frameworks across city services and projects, for example, applying an equity and reconciliation lens to all your city's priorities.
- 4** Find out when your community is updating their OCP next, and see how you can provide input. Participate in surveys, attend community engagement sessions, or join the OCP committee to shape the future priorities of your community.

Civic Agencies

Civic agencies are volunteer bodies established by city council to provide community perspectives and input to council and city staff. They are a great opportunity to directly engage with and learn more about your local government.

Members of civic agencies offer advice on city priorities, projects, and initiatives. They are often consulted and asked to provide early and ongoing feedback on various projects - although the city is not required to follow their recommendations. Civic agencies are typically made up of members of the public who apply through the city's website and are appointed by council based on staff recommendations.

While some agencies have representatives from professional organizations, many seek volunteers who have lived-experience such as women, renters, urban Indigenous peoples, and many more. If you have a desire to support change in your community - apply!

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET INVOLVED

Who can apply?

Anyone can apply! You do not need to be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

How do I apply?

- Submit your application on your city's website
- Applications often open near the beginning of a council term (around November - January following a municipal election)
- Openings may also come up throughout the year as member slots become available or if council forms a new agency
- If you are applying as a representative of an external organization you will need to submit a letter of nomination with your application.
- It may take up to eight weeks after the application deadline for city council to appoint members.

How much time will I need to commit?

Time commitments vary based on the civic agency. On average, you will spend 5 - 10 hours each month attending meetings, reading reports, and answering emails.

Types of Civic Agencies

TYPE A	TYPE B	TYPE C	TYPE D	EXTERNAL
<p>Makes recommendations to council and staff related to equity-deserving communities</p> <p>Advises on local issues using their lived experience</p>	<p>Makes recommendations to city staff on matters related to planning in specific geographic areas</p> <p>Advises on planning matters e.g street naming</p>	<p>Makes recommendations to council and city staff on matters related to development, operations, planning, zoning.</p> <p>Governed by their own distinct bylaws.</p>	<p>Task forces that advise the mayor on specific local issues, such as Indigenous Reconciliation or Accessibility.</p>	<p>Appointed by council and act as advisors or administrators of affiliated organizations.</p>
<p>For example, Women's Advisory Committee</p>	<p>For example, Chinatown Historic Area Planning Committee</p>	<p>For example, the Vancouver City Planning Commission</p>	<p>For example, Accessibility Task Force</p>	<p>For example, Vancouver Library Board or Pacific National Exhibition (PNE) Board of Directors</p>



Understanding the City Budget

Each year, the City of Vancouver undergoes a budget process to allocate funds for city services, facilities, and infrastructure. Put simply, the budget is an itemized list of money coming into the city and how that money is spent. The budget dictates what the city can get done; motions passed by council are important but if they are not resourced through the budget they will not be implemented. You can think of the budget as a moral document that shows you the values of the city by providing a monetary overview of what the city is prioritizing.

Unlike other levels of government, local governments cannot run a deficit meaning the city cannot spend more money than it brings in so all potential programs and services must be planned and accounted for in the budget. Provincial legislation states that cities cannot spend on anything that is not in the budget. If something unexpected happens, like a pandemic, the budget will need to be amended, and the city will usually need to undertake new public consultations (this could be meetings or online surveys).

The draft budget is developed by city staff, who account for how much money is required to operate all of the city's departments and programs, and is guided by input from the public. City Council then amends and approves the final budget at a council meeting. The city budget consists of the operating budget and the capital budget. The operating budget funds the day-to-day expenses of the city including programs and services, while the capital budget includes longer-term projects over a larger time frame.

OPERATING BUDGET

Operating Budget

- Funds day-to-day operations of the City and its 80+ services and programs
- Primarily funded by property taxes and utility fees*
- Makes up the largest portion of the annual budget at nearly 85%

Main categories include:

- Public safety, police, and fire
- Libraries
- Parks and recreation
- Urban design and sustainability
- Engineering and utilities
- Arts, culture, and community services
- Salaries for municipal workers

CAPITAL BUDGET

Capital Budget

- Funds larger, long-term projects, mainly supporting city infrastructure and development
- Primarily funded by government grants, development cost levies, and property taxes
- Funds projects laid out in the capital plan, a four-year plan for the city's capital investments

Main categories include:

- Water, sewers and drainage
- Streets and maintenance
- Waste collection and disposal
- Housing
- Community and civic facilities

*Utility fees are charges paid by residents for City utility services including water distribution, sewer collection and treatment, and garbage collection and disposal.

Influencing the Budget

The budget is one of the strongest indicators of a city's priorities. 88% of Vancouver's budget comes from residents through taxes, parking permits, and program fees. Whether or not you directly pay property taxes as a homeowner, indirectly as a renter, or work in the city, it's essential that the budget reflects your priorities too.

Here are a few ways to make your voice heard:



Online

- Register for [Talk Vancouver](#) to receive engagement surveys from the city around budget season. The budget survey is usually available from August to September and asks a series of questions about your priorities for Vancouver's budget
- Sign up for [Shape Your City](#), Vancouver's online engagement platform, to ask questions about the budget and comment on civic issues
- Follow the City of Vancouver on [social media](#) (plus each individual councillor!) to stay updated about the budget process

By Phone or Writing

- [Write to city councillors and the mayor](#) using their contact form on the City of Vancouver's website
- [Email city councillors directly](#) through the email addresses provided on the City of Vancouver's website, or at budget@vancouver.ca
- Call 3-1-1, the city's general information line, especially during the budget engagement period in the fall to offer your thoughts or concerns

In Person

- [Attend city council meetings](#) to hear updates on city finances and the budget process
- [Register to speak at City Hall](#) and give your opinion on specific issues regarding the budget. You can expect the budget to be presented at a council meeting around November or December
- Connect with community organizations involved in municipal politics to amplify your impact

Budget Timeline

The timeline for creating the annual city budget varies from year to year, but the process generally begins in the spring. As part of the process, council will discuss the proposed budget at a special council meeting to hear from community members. Typically, the final budget is approved by the end of the calendar year.

Here is an overview of what the budget process looks like:

MAY - JUNE



DEVELOP BUDGET OUTLOOK: Prepared by city staff and provides key information about the current and forecasted financial landscape that informs the budget process. This includes looking into new revenue sources (such as increasing parking fees) or reallocating funds (through reducing or cancelling existing programs) in order to help balance the budget.

JUNE



COUNCIL REVIEWS BUDGET OUTLOOK: The council considers the budget outlook and uses it to begin building the upcoming budget.

AUG - OCT



DEVELOP SERVICE PLANS: City departments create detailed accounts of what services they provide, and how city funds will be spent delivering those services.

AUG - SEPT



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: Community members are given an opportunity to provide input on the budget through online surveys and by phone.

SEPT - DEC



DRAFT BUDGET: City staff and council write and revise several before the final budget is published. City council have a special open council meeting (usually in December) to hear public input on the budget.

NOV - DEC



APPROVE FINAL BUDGET: The complete budget is approved and published, to take effect in the new year.

What happens if the budget isn't approved?



“Legally the City of Vancouver must approve a budget before May 15 of the following year. So if city council fails to approve the budget during the usual timeline, say due to public pressure, they still have four and a half months to revise the budget before it legally must be submitted.”

How Does The Budget Get Funded?

The City of Vancouver generates revenue from a variety of sources to fund the annual budget. Provincial legislation requires Vancouver City Council to produce a balanced budget each year. This means they cannot run a deficit to fund the operating budget, in other words, the city cannot spend more money than it brings in. The capital budget is allowed to use invested funds and debt instruments (e.g. issuing bonds and borrowing money from other levels of government) to fund projects, but these debts are paid out annually through the operating budget.

The City of Vancouver's annual budget is composed of:

Property Tax

- The property tax rate is set by council
- Funds the majority of services in the operating budget
- Used for the maintenance or renewal of civic infrastructure and facilities in the capital budget

Utility Fees

- Primarily funds utility services within the operating budget
- Also provides capital funds to maintain utility infrastructure
- Examples: water distribution, sewage, garbage collection and disposal

License and Development Fees

- Money businesses and developers pay to operate in the city
- Used primarily for expanding and building new infrastructure and facilities

User Fees and Other Sources

- Funds gathered through various city services
- Examples: community centre programs, city parking



Understanding Council Meeting Agendas

Vancouver City Council typically releases the agenda for meetings one week beforehand. The agenda provides insight into what will be discussed in the meeting and the order in which these items will be discussed. While council may decide to change the agenda, reading it in advance will still give you a good idea of what to expect during the meeting.

Here's an overview of some of the key parts of a typical council meeting agenda:

Matters Adopted on Consent



At the beginning of the meeting, councillors can vote to approve several reports at once if they all agree to it. Any member of the council can ask to take an agenda item out of the package that is being voted on for more discussion, questions, or amendments, or if they wish to vote against it.

Reports & Presentations



These are prepared by city staff, usually responding to specific directions council has already given or issues they have asked staff to look into. Their contents cover a broad range of topics, including updates to city plans, projects, and strategies, and grants to community organizations. Reports will typically include recommendations for council to approve; while presentations do not contain recommendations.

Bylaws



This stage of the meeting is more procedural and goes relatively quickly. Generally, the issue has already been debated and voted on at a previous meeting and council is formalizing its decision by passing a bylaw. Council members must have been present or get caught up on the previous meeting to be eligible to vote.

Notice of Council Members Motions



This is where councillors give their colleagues and the public a heads up about motions they are bringing forward at a future meeting. They must state the title of the motion and the date of the meeting it will be introduced.

New Business



While it doesn't happen often, council members can bring forward a motion or issue to discuss if they haven't given notice at a previous meeting. This usually only happens if the issue is time-sensitive or urgent.

Enquiries and Other Matters



Here's where councillors have a chance to bring up any other issues that weren't on the agenda. For example, they may recognize a significant event impacting the community, ask staff about the status of a certain project, or raise questions about a policy that residents have been asking about.

For standing committee meetings



The agenda for standing committee meetings follows a similar format with the addition of council members' motions.

Council Members' Motions

Council members' motions are written and brought forward by a councillor or the mayor to propose a policy direction for the future of the city. For example, a motion might propose adding a bike lane to an area of the city or forming a task force to address a certain issue.

