

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.



6

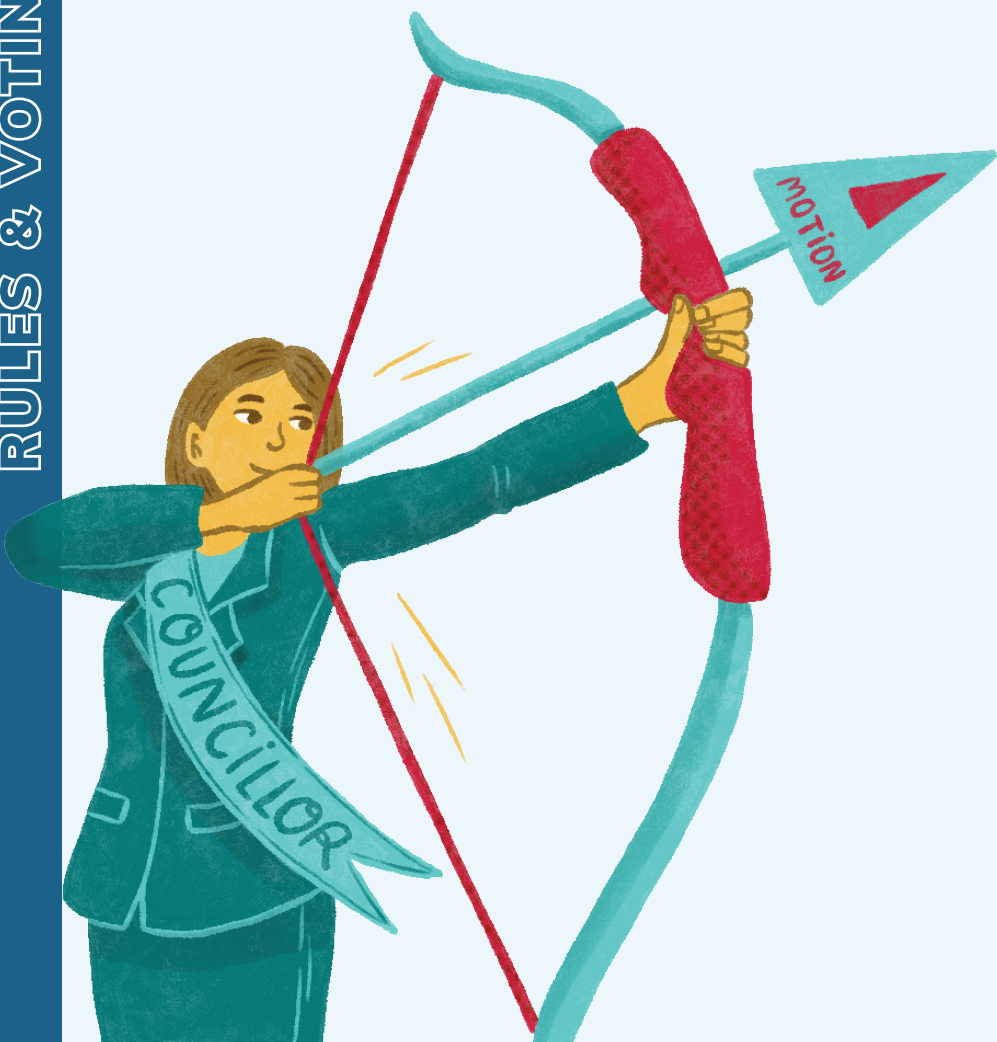
Once speakers are heard, council discusses and votes on the motion.

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.

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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.



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Cities International Society

The work of WTC in Vancouver takes place on the stolen ancestral territories of the x̱m̱əθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwx̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səlilw̱ətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation). We acknowledge the leadership of Indigenous women for time immemorial, and seek to learn and unlearn our own colonial practices as we work in cities as sites of resistance.