

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

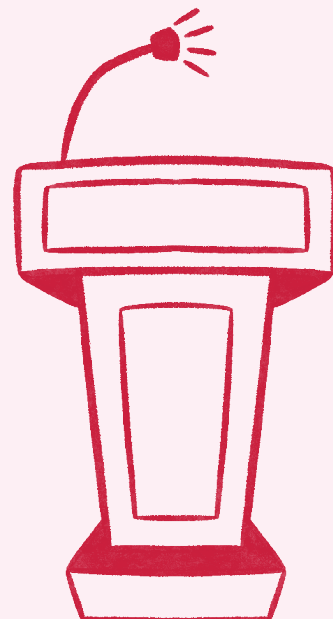
Here are some tips:

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."



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The work of WTC in Vancouver takes place on the stolen ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səliwətał (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.