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	• Bylaws • Budgets • City services and programs	• City finance and services • Policy and strategic priorities	• Emerging and/or urgent issues	• Confidential / sensitive matters	• Land use and planning decisions (Rezonings, 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.
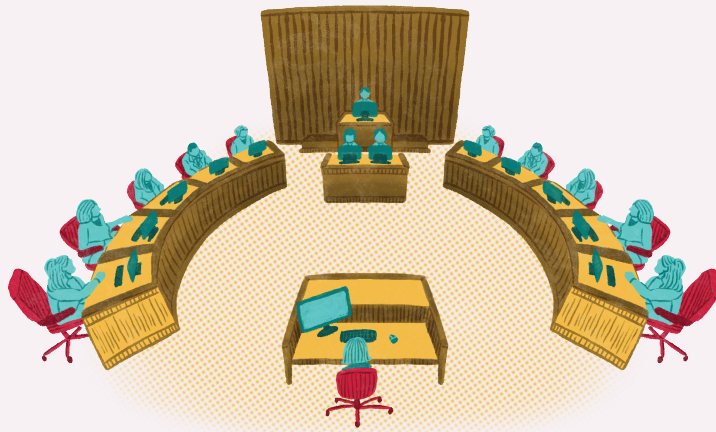
Standing Committee Meetings

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.