

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.

