

THE FOLLOW-UP

A MONTREALER'S GUIDE TO
WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A
PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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What is the Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM)?

Why is the OCPM important?

The OCPM is a unique organization—it was created specifically for the purpose of having a neutral and independent body to lead certain public consultations in Montreal. As part of its mandate, the OCPM provides decision-makers with objective recommendations.

Why is it important for the OCPM to be a neutral and independent organization?

When recommendations are made by a third party (i.e. a source that does not have a future stake or a vote in the decision being made) they are more likely to be balanced and based on fact rather than opinion or personal gain.

How is the OCPM public consultation process different from other consultation processes in Montreal?

OCPM public consultations are the only City consultations that do not involve elected officials, city employees or companies that do business with the City.

What kinds of projects is the OCPM involved in?

The OCPM leads public consultations that deal with Montreal's urban development (like construction projects, bylaw changes) and policies. However, the OCPM can only conduct a public consultation if mandated by city council or the executive committee.

What kind of role does the OCPM play in follow-up?

None—it is not part of its mandate as determined by Montreal's City Charter.

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A Montrealer's guide to finding out what happens after a public consultation

Read this guide to find out:

- what a public consultation is, how it works and what comes after
- what a follow-up is, why it is important and why it is challenging to do
- how you can follow up and how we can improve the process



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What is a public consultation?

CHANGE IS PROPOSED

Public consultations are an important part of the democratic process.

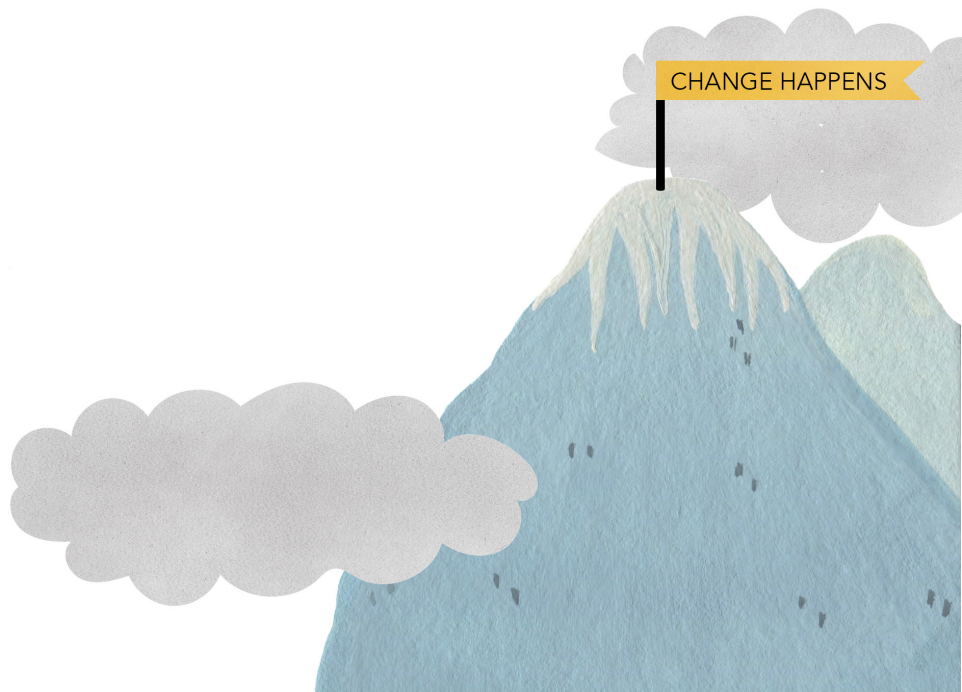
A public consultation is an event where the city asks you to share your thoughts on neighbourhood or city-wide issues and projects.

Its goal is to improve urban planning initiatives using public input and expertise. When people play a role in shaping their community, they are more likely to feel motivated to get involved.

Public consultations offer a glimpse into a project at a certain point in time, but a lot of changes can happen after a consultation is held. This is why it is important to follow up afterwards and understand how a project evolves. By allowing residents to invest in a project's development, residents are given the opportunity to help improve the quality of their surroundings.

It's all about timing

Holding public consultations early on or later in a project's development can affect the public's interest in participating. Sometimes, public consultations happen late in a project's timeline, making it feel like big decisions have already been made.



A follow-up means the public is kept informed about:

- decisions affecting the project and what next steps to expect
- how community concerns and recommendations from the public consultation have been taken into consideration in the final project

In Montreal, no official follow-up mechanism exists.

Following up is an essential part of engaging residents after these public consultations, but it's not easy to do. Here are some examples of the challenges that are related to following up:

Politics change

Sometimes, after elections, past decisions can be revisited and projects can consequently be changed.

Information is hard to find

Often, decisions relating to a project are not organized together in one place. This makes it hard to see the big picture.

Information is hard to understand

Decisional documents use a lot of legal jargon. It can be hard to figure out what type of change is being made.

How public consultation works in Montreal

In Montreal, some public consultations are organized by elected officials and city employees, while others are led by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM). This means that there are differences between public consultations in terms of how they are run, what is included in the report and how you can track decisions afterwards.

WHO INITIATES IT



Resident

With the Right of Initiative to public consultations, anybody in Montreal can propose a public consultation on a variety of issues that affect our city (see criteria [here](#)).

Property developer

A developer can submit an application for a project to the borough or the City. If the proposed development requires a bylaw change, a consultation must be held.



City or borough

The City or borough prepares plans, policies, programs, etc. as part of its regular operations. A public consultation must be held at some point in a project's development.

City council's standing committees

Standing committees (made up of elected officials) can propose a public consultation on any topic within their field of expertise.

WHO HOLDS IT



This is often a political decision: the borough council, city council and/or executive committee determine who will organize the consultation and at what point in the project it will take place.

By law, all public consultations must include at least:

- a public notice (printed in a newspaper or optionally, in a web announcement) about the project, when and where the consultation will take place
- a public hearing event where you can find out about the project, ask questions and express your opinion orally or in writing

The report that is issued after a public consultation is one of the most useful tools for follow-up. It provides a roadmap of the issues discussed, an evaluation of community concerns, and from them, recommendations for project changes that require follow-up. Unfortunately, not all reports include recommendations—this makes following up even more challenging!

HOW IT'S HELD

Borough or city public consultations

These public consultations are run by elected officials and borough or city staff. Private firms can also be hired to help organize it.

Reports from these events contain a summary of the concerns presented and sometimes general recommendations. Elected officials are responsible for approving the report.

Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM) public consultations

Each public consultation is led by independent commissioners who act as intermediaries between the public, elected officials, the City and/or the developers. These are the only consultations where elected officials and city employees are not part of the process and do not need to approve the report.

OCPM consultation reports always include an analysis of community concerns and project impacts, as well as specific recommendations regarding future decisions.

City council's standing committees public consultations

These events are organized by standing committees, with the support of city departments.

Drafted and approved by the standing committee's elected officials, these consultation reports include a summary of the concerns presented, as well as recommendations. They may also include any dissenting views within the committee.

NOW WHAT?

Typically, after a public consultation, the executive committee, city council and/or the borough council acknowledge that they have received the consultation report. Many of the report's recommendations are directed at the City or borough: it is their responsibility to negotiate with other stakeholders to ensure that the public's interest is taken into account in the final project.



The executive committee must respond in writing to the standing committee's recommendations. This one-time response does not detail which upcoming decisions will be made, but rather offers the opinion of the executive committee at that point in time.

Who is making decisions?

Knowing who has power is an important part of understanding and tracking down where and when decisions happen. Many of the decisions made by our municipal administration end up affecting what choices project actors can make in the future.

Transparency—having access to information, and knowing how, when and why decisions are being made—is what makes following up possible.

Our municipal administration is accountable for its decisions. This means that it must publicly release meeting summaries and videos of meetings that document these decisions. However, not all information that plays a role in city government decision-making is readily available. Sometimes you have to formally request to see documents, while some documents may not be requested because they are confidential.



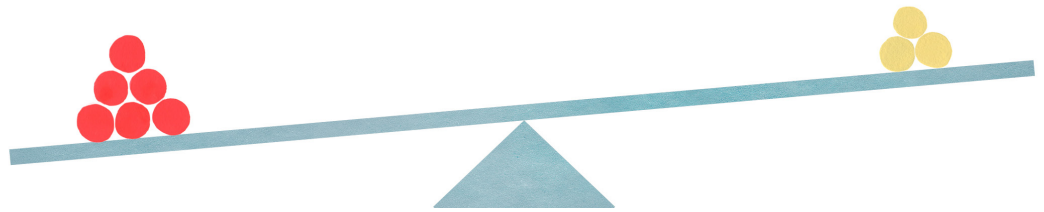
PLEASE TAKE US INTO CONSIDERATION...

Montreal has created different consultation bodies that help elected officials with decision-making.

Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM)

The OCPM is an independent and neutral body that is responsible for holding certain public consultations in Montreal and making recommendations—based on those public consultations—to decision-makers.

During an OCPM public consultation, the consultation file is made publicly available, along with all project-related documentation.



WE DECIDE

Executive committee

These elected officials (made up of roughly ten members, including Montreal's Mayor) make preliminary decisions on many issues that are then voted on by city council. The executive committee holds a lot of power. It has the power to decide on some things on its own, like contracts, subsidies, certain budgets and land transactions (the sale and purchase of lots).

You can access certain parts of executive committee meetings via webcasts and summaries. Held behind closed doors, some parts of the meetings are not made public because of confidentiality reasons.

City council

These 65 elected officials vote on issues that impact the entire city or relate to large-scale projects. These include: the Master Plan, major road networks, social housing, etc.

City council meetings are open to the public, available on webcast, and are documented in summaries available online.

Borough council

Each borough has its own council that votes on local planning decisions, like bylaws and permits, community and economic development, parks and recreation, etc.

Borough council meetings are open to the public and documented in summaries. Most boroughs have webcasts of their meetings.

Different levels of government

Decisions from the regional, provincial or federal governments can impact existing projects. These decisions can involve confidential negotiations with the city. They can also decide to hold their own consultations.

City council's standing committees

Standing committees are made up of elected officials only. Their role is to gather information, consult the public and make recommendations. Montreal has 11 standing committees that examine different city issues, like finance, culture, transportation, etc.

Standing committee consultation reports are publicly available, along with the executive committee's written response to their recommendations.

WE CAN AFFECT DECISIONS

Property developers

Developers often require bylaw changes in order to make their project happen. All bylaw changes legally require a public consultation. The developer has to provide information requested by the borough/city. The borough/city then chooses what material is publicly released.

City departments and bodies

City departments conduct studies and write reports that inform councillors about how potential decisions will affect the community.

Many of these reports and studies are available to the public upon request.

Residents

Most of the time, residents have very little direct power. However, there is one exception. In some cases, when a borough is in charge of a public consultation for a bylaw change, residents can ask for the option of opening a registry so as to obtain a referendum. With the referendum, residents then can have veto power over a project under certain conditions.

Community organizations, neighbourhood committees & coalitions

Their power resides in informing the public and communicating their concerns or opposition to elected officials. They play an important role in public consultations by representing citizens.

Borough urban planning advisory committees and the City's heritage council

These committees issue recommendations to borough or city council on projects and policies that relate to architectural integration, zoning, demolitions and heritage. They are made up mostly of residents (the advisory committee is chaired by an elected official) that have different expertises and training.

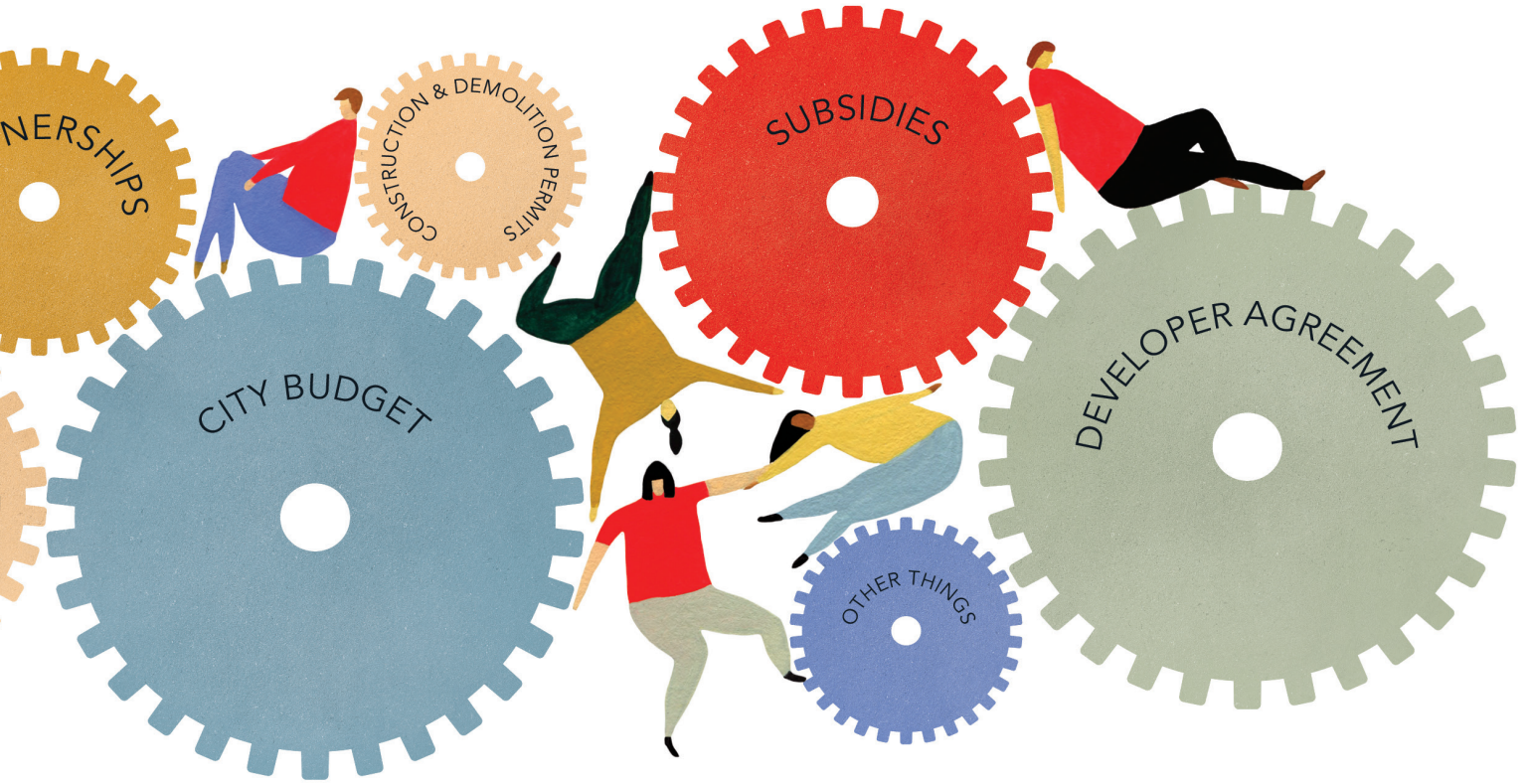
Most committee and council meetings are held behind closed doors. Their reports are publicly available or available upon request.

What happens after a public consultation?



Decision	What does it mean?	How does it happen?
<p>City budgets</p>	<p>Follow the money: many proposed projects rely on city funding. It's important to track how and where money is being spent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-Year Capital Works Budget (TCWB): used to finance major infrastructure projects, like water, roads, transit and parks that require long-term investment. • Operating budget: covers the regular annual expenses needed to run the city, like snow removal, employee salaries, housing programs, etc. 	<p>Every fall, the TCWB and operational budgets are approved by the executive committee and then voted on by city council.</p> <p>Each borough also has its own operating and TCWB budget that it is in charge of approving.</p>
<p>New bylaws</p>	<p>Bylaws decide what, how and where you can build, and the types of activities that are allowed on a specific site.</p> <p>Take note: although it might not be obvious, most consultations on proposed construction projects and Special Planning Programs (a type of neighbourhood plan) are related to bylaw changes and/or revisions to the Master Plan.</p>	<p>When a new bylaw is proposed, a public consultation must be held.</p> <p>After a public consultation, the borough council votes on the change (on rare occasions, city council votes instead).</p>
<p>Developer agreements</p>	<p>Developer-City agreements aim to ensure that a proposed project benefits the community through measures like affordable housing, heritage protection or inclusion of green spaces. In exchange, the developer is guaranteed the necessary bylaw change(s) needed to realize its project.</p>	<p>The City and the developer negotiate the agreement behind closed doors. Once finalized, the executive committee recommends the agreement to city council, who approves it.</p>

Big decisions keep being made in a project, even after a public consultation has occurred. Here are some examples of major decisions made by our municipal administration that can happen after a consultation:



Can you have a say?

Yes and no. For the TCWB, a public consultation is held by the City's finance standing committee before it is adopted by city council. However, for the operating budget, no public consultation is held.

Some boroughs have experimented with participatory budget tools that let citizens understand the complexities of balancing a budget and weigh in on budget decisions.

Yes. You can speak out at the public consultation on the proposed bylaw. In some cases, a referendum can also be held after the public consultation.

If the consultation has already occurred on the proposed bylaw, you can ask questions at council meetings to see how community input has been taken into consideration on the final bylaw.

No. You can only ask questions about the agreement at council meetings.

How do you find out about it?

Stay alert in the fall for budget announcements.

The TCWB public consultation is announced on the City's website, along with the proposed draft budget.

Once adopted by council, you can find detailed and summarized versions of the City and boroughs' operational and TCWB budgets on their websites.

Look out for public notices in newspapers or on the City or borough's website.

Agendas from council meetings announce when the vote will take place; the minutes document how council voted.

The executive committee and city council meeting agendas announce when a developer agreement will be voted on. You can request to see a version of the developer agreement once it has been approved by the executive committee and before it is brought to council.

How can you participate and follow up?

1. GET READY



Get to know the project and key players

1. Read consultation reports and supporting documents to learn more about the project, community concerns, differing points of view, key players (people and organizations) and, if available, recommendations.
2. Find out if your borough or the project's developer has a newsletter/Facebook/Twitter account where you can stay updated.

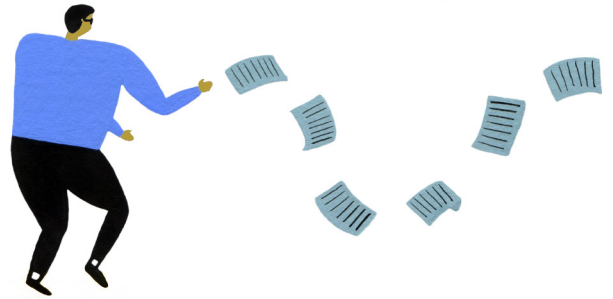
TIP: The OCPM website publishes all documents relating to past and present public consultations led by the Office.

Stay alert for consultations

Check the websites of your borough, the City, the standing committees and the OCPM.

TIP: Public consultations are a good way to make future contacts and meet like-minded people and groups that share your concerns.

2. CHASE DOWN INFORMATION



Contact key people

If known, call or email a resource person or a key project player on the project to see if there are any updates.

TIP: If a city employee is difficult to reach or you do not have a contact person, ask to be referred to someone (you might have to call 311 or email the City).

Learn about past decisions

Executive committee and council meeting summaries are important documents for tracking decisions such as new bylaws, developer agreements, budgets, subsidies, contracts, etc. However, they do not contain any details of the discussions that were held.

1. Search through meeting summaries to learn about decisions voted on, deferred or ongoing.
2. Watch past meeting videos to learn about the items which are a matter of debate.
3. Read City or borough press releases to find out the latest updates on the project.

Request important documents

Some important documents are not easily available (like studies, developer agreements, etc.).

1. Refer to meeting summaries to find out which documents exist.
2. Contact the City (call 311 or email the City) or key players to get ahold of documents that have not been publicly released.

3. ASK QUESTIONS



Find out about upcoming decisions

Browse through meeting agendas to find out when certain decisions are going to be voted on.

TIP: Many decisions are presented to the executive committee for a preliminary vote. This is a good way to predict how council will pass the final vote.

Don't be shy—speak up!

All council and borough meetings have a question period.

1. Check the schedule of future council meetings on the City and borough websites.
2. Attend council meetings and ask questions directly to councillors.
3. If you can't go in person, send your question to the city clerk. Your question will then be answered in writing or verbally during a council meeting.

TIP: Refer to the consultation reports' recommendations to make connections with the project's development and ask how community input has been taken into consideration.

TIP: Our municipal administration is accountable. This means that it is reasonable to expect elected officials to explain their decisions.

4. JOIN FORCES WITH OTHERS



Create or join a coalition

Band together with like-minded people so you can better track decisions, share the workload and alert decision-makers that your concern is a community issue.

TIP: Be sure to include a variety of people in your coalition (residents, community groups, businesses, etc).

Introduce yourselves

Write or email key players and elected officials to introduce your coalition and what you are advocating for, and to set up a meeting.

Spread the word

Contact the media, create a blog, website or social media account detailing your findings, explaining your proposals and inviting others to contribute.

Notice something? Yes, it's all on YOU to follow up!
Let's see how we can lighten the load...

How can we improve follow-ups?

Montreal has no official follow-up mechanism after public consultations. It is something many residents would like to see put in place.

Here are some recommendations geared at decision-makers on how we can all work together to make things easier:



Make information easy to find and understand

- Create a search tool to browse all city documents, so that decisions relating to a specific project can be easily found with other related documents.
- Make a project newsletter and website with regular updates. Some big projects in Montreal have already done this.
- Assign a city employee to the project to act as a community contact.

Inspiration from other cities

[re:code LA](#) (Los Angeles, California)

re:code LA is a five-year process to revise Los Angeles' outdated zoning code. The project's website details news and next steps and includes new opportunities to participate. It also presents summaries and videos of relevant council decisions.

[LA City Clerk Connect](#) (Los Angeles, California)

This searchable database shows all city council decisions and documents (like studies, reports, press releases, etc.) relating to a specific project or a city contract. You can search or choose to receive automatic updates on specific projects.

[Public Consultation Map](#) (Toronto, Ontario)

This public consultation map points to upcoming and past consultations being held by different city departments in Toronto.

[Seattle in Progress](#) (Seattle, Washington)

This app shows what projects are being proposed, approved or built in Seattle with links to building proposals, architectural renderings, etc. It also includes a calendar of upcoming events, and the option to receive automatic project or neighbourhood updates.

Make the link: create an official follow-up mechanism

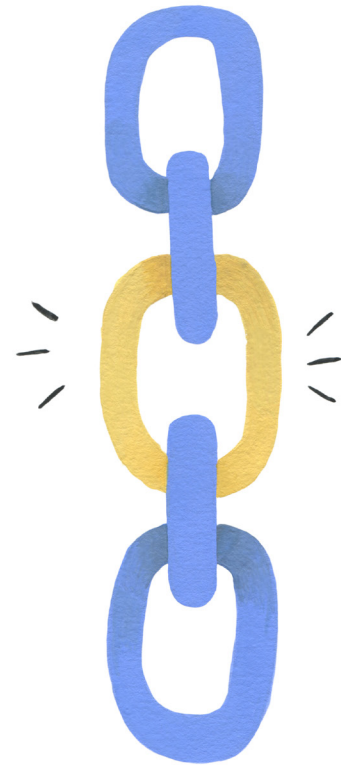
The OCPM, the *Commission de la présidence du conseil* and many elected officials have recommended that the City implement an official and mandatory follow-up mechanism.

- Put in place easy-to-understand evaluation measures to track how recommendations are taken into account, what actions will soon be realized and how the project is progressing.

Inspiration from other cities

Public Involvement Follow-up Mechanism (Portland, Oregon)

Before any council vote, all city council decisions and reports must answer a set of questions relating to how public input was taken into consideration. This form (called the [City's Financial Impact and Public Involvement Statement](#)) accompanies all council voting action items.



Keep residents updated at each step

- Create follow-up committees (that include a variety of community members) for projects that continue on after the public consultations.
- Be sure to publicly and clearly document key discussion points and decisions throughout a project's lifespan, as well as publish regular updates.
- Hold different public consultation activities throughout the development of a project to keep residents involved and in the loop.

Inspiration from other cities

Portland Plan: [Community Involvement Committee](#) (Portland, Oregon)

Made up of residents and representatives of community organizations, this committee has been continuously involved in the Portland Plan since 2009. Its goal is to share information, provide recommendations and create links between the community and the city. It provides updates on the plan's evolution, evaluates ongoing community engagement activities, and tracks important decisions on its website.

Where can I find out about...

DECISIONS

These city administrative [documents](#) can help but they are only available in French and contain a lot of legal jargon:

- executive committee agendas and minutes
- city council agendas, minutes and list of voting actions
- borough council documents—check each borough's website

COUNCIL MEETINGS

At council meetings, you can hear debates first-hand before decisions are made and ask questions directly to councillors. Access schedules here:

- city council meetings [schedules](#) (available only in French)
- borough meeting schedules—check each borough's website

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

These resources show how city planning works and where money is spent:

- [operating budget](#) and [Three-Year Capital Works Budget](#)
- [Master Plan](#)
- urban planning bylaws—check your borough's website
- [Vue sur les contrats](#) (lists who gets city contracts and subsidies)

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Find out about past, present and future public consultations here:

- [Office de consultation publique de Montréal \(OCPM\)](#)
- city and [standing committee consultations](#) (available only in French)
- borough consultations—check each borough's website

CONTACTING THE CITY

If you can't find certain documents (like City-Developer agreements), important information or key contacts, try:

- calling 311
- [emailing](#) the City
- filing a [request](#) to access information.

