

How City Governments Make Decisions

I. Background

The powers and processes of municipal (ie. city) governments are usually defined by the *Municipal Act*, a law passed by the provincial governments in each province. Provincial governments have the power to decide what responsibilities local municipalities will deal with, based on the division of powers established in Canada's original constitution.

II. City Government Decision-making Process

Cities generally follow the process set out below to pass by-laws or develop programs. For detailed information about how the process works exactly in your city or town, contact the Clerk's office at city hall:

1. Staff develop a policy paper which recommends a particular change to a by-law, or why a new by-law should be written.
2. The Staff report is forwarded to the appropriate Committee for review and discussion.
3. The Municipal Clerk's Office at this stage in the process sets a date for public input by putting notices in the local papers, advertising on the city's website and other community announcements. This allows citizens to:
 - (a) Participate in public information community discussions;
 - (b) Develop a strategy to either oppose or support the change, or to make amendments; and
 - (c) Make presentations to the Committee that is addressing the issue to express an opinion and/or suggest changes.
4. Following this process, a report is made to Council from the Committee.
5. Council then debates and then votes to either approve the Committee report or reject the report.
6. The Legal Department of the City deals with the legal aspects of drafting a by-law in accordance with the Council's vote, if a by-law is needed.
7. If a by-law is not needed, or if a city program is being created, the Planning Department or other appropriate city government department develops the program in accordance with the Council's vote.