

The opportunities for public consultation*

The Ontario *Planning Act* and local by-laws set out the rules for public consultations for all new development.

In Toronto, the planning approvals process depends on how closely a new development conforms to the Official Plan and the Zoning By-law.

The **Official Plan** is a “principles document.” It describes the municipality’s vision for the city, sets out its planning policies and sketches its plans for each neighbourhood. The Official Plan may also contain “Secondary Plans,” or “Part II Plans,” which define the character of the city in more detail. For example, the Secondary Plan might define a neighbourhood as “low density residential” or “commercial.” It will set out the scale and density of buildings, and the types of uses allowed.

The **zoning by-law** puts the Official Plan into action. Each site is given a particular zoning designation, defining the use of the site, the density of development permitted, maximum building heights, set-backs, parking requirements, open space requirements, and so on. There may also be special zoning provisions or by-laws dealing with ravine lots, tree protection and other city-wide policies.

**This fact sheet describes the planning process in the City of Toronto. Other Ontario jurisdictions will have different processes.*

IF A DEVELOPMENT MEETS THE OFFICIAL PLAN AND ZONING BY-LAW

This is “as of right” housing. **No public consultations are required.** Some developments may need site plan approval or a building permit. These are technical approvals that are not normally subject to public consultation. However, sometimes citizens will demand public discussions, or ask their councillor to “bump up” the site plan approval to a council committee.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

When you first hear about a housing proposal

- Contact the proponent. Say you are a supporter. Ask how you can help.
- Contact people who might also support the proposal. Keep them informed, or link them directly to your information source.

The goal: to create a network of supporters, and to plan the “message” that will inform your actions.

Email, phone or write a letter to your councillor

- Let them know you support the development.
- Caution them against a “double standard” – requiring public consultations just because the people who will move in are disabled or on social assistance. Urge them to uphold the City’s responsibilities to treat all its residents equally.
- Send copies of letters or emails to the housing proponent.

The goal: To show beleaguered councillors there is support, and to ensure all councillors understand the human rights implications of their actions.

If there is a public meeting

(hosted by the councillor, city planning department or proponent)

- Encourage as many supporters as possible to attend
- Write a letter to the planning department before or after the meeting (contact information is on the notice), and send a copy to the local councillor and the proponent
- Speak at the meeting, as early in the meeting as possible. Speak “from the heart.”

The goal: To give the city planner material for a positive report; to give the local councillor courage to support the proposal; to show opponents they do not speak for the entire community; to discourage anyone from making discriminatory or offensive remarks.

Continued...

The opportunities for public consultation continued...

IF A DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ONLY MINOR CHANGES TO THE ZONING BY-LAW

Developments that conform to the general intent of the zoning by-law, but need minor variances, can be approved by the Committee of Adjustment. This committee is appointed by City Council, but it is not a political body. Instead, committee members will make a decision based on the merits of the development.

When the Committee of Adjustment receives an application for a minor variance, it sends a notice to all neighbours within 60 meters. The notice gives the time and date the committee will hear the application. Interested people can speak at the meeting or write to the committee. The committee will make a decision on the same day as the hearing.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Write a letter of support to the Secretary of the Committee of Adjustment before the hearing (contact information on the notice), and send a copy to the local councillor and the proponent.
- Contact the proponent and ask how else you can help.

The goal: To demonstrate neighbourhood support for the proposal to both the Committee and the local councilor.

IF A DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT MATCH THE OFFICIAL PLAN OR ZONING BY-LAW

Developments usually need a rezoning or Official Plan Amendment if they change the use of a site (say from industrial to residential) or build a taller or more dense building than the zoning permits.

When the City receives a development application, they send a notice to neighbours, and put a large sign on the site. The City usually holds at least one public meeting. The City Planning Department will then make a report to Community Council. The Community Council will hear public deputations. The Community Council will then send a recommendation to City Council. City Council does not hear public deputations.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

If there is Community Council meeting

- Write a letter to the Chair of the Community Council before the meeting, and send a copy to the local councillor, your own councillor, and the proponent.
- Encourage other supporters to write or email as well.
- Speak at the meeting. Be brief. Plan what you will say with the proponent and other speakers to avoid duplication.

The goal: To supply pro-housing councillors with reasons to support the proposal and show your own councillor that constituents support the proposal.

If there is City Council meeting

(and the Community Council voted against the development)

- Before the meeting, email or phone your own councillor, email the City Clerk, and encourage as many supporters as possible to do the same.

The goal: To show your own councillor that constituents support the proposal; to show other councillors there is city-wide support.

APPEALS TO THE ONTARIO MUNICIPAL BOARD

Anyone who participated in the original planning process can appeal a City Council or Committee of Adjustment decision to the Ontario Municipal Board (the OMB). The OMB is appointed by the provincial government. Its decisions are final.

When the OMB receives an appeal, it sends a notice to neighbours within 120 meters of the site. The OMB will receive deputations. The OMB makes decisions based on the planning merits of the development, and will discount discriminatory arguments.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Contact the proponent to learn how you can be most effective.

The goal: To give evidence of support for the proposal, and counter arguments put forward by opponents.