

RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING

WORKSHOP REPORT THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

May 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Susanna Haas Lyons Consulting and drafted by Anson Ching, and Susanna Haas Lyons.

This publication does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Simon Fraser University Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. Any works referring to this report should cite:

Susanna Haas Lyons, Anson Ching, and Jennifer Wolowic. (2022). *Renovate the Public Hearing: Report on 2022 Workshop on the Future of Public Hearings in British Columbia*. Vancouver, Canada: Simon Fraser University Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

Support for the workshop was provided by members of the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative and social enterprise teams, as well as students of Simon Fraser University.

The British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Union of British Columbia Municipality staff provided input on the design of the workshop.

Illustrations were completed by Anna Fong.

The report layout was designed by Hanna Stefan.

The Simon Fraser University Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative acknowledges the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skuwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), qícəy (Katzie), k^wik^wəłəm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and Tsawwassen peoples, on whose unceded traditional territories the university campuses are located.



ABOUT THE RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING PROJECT

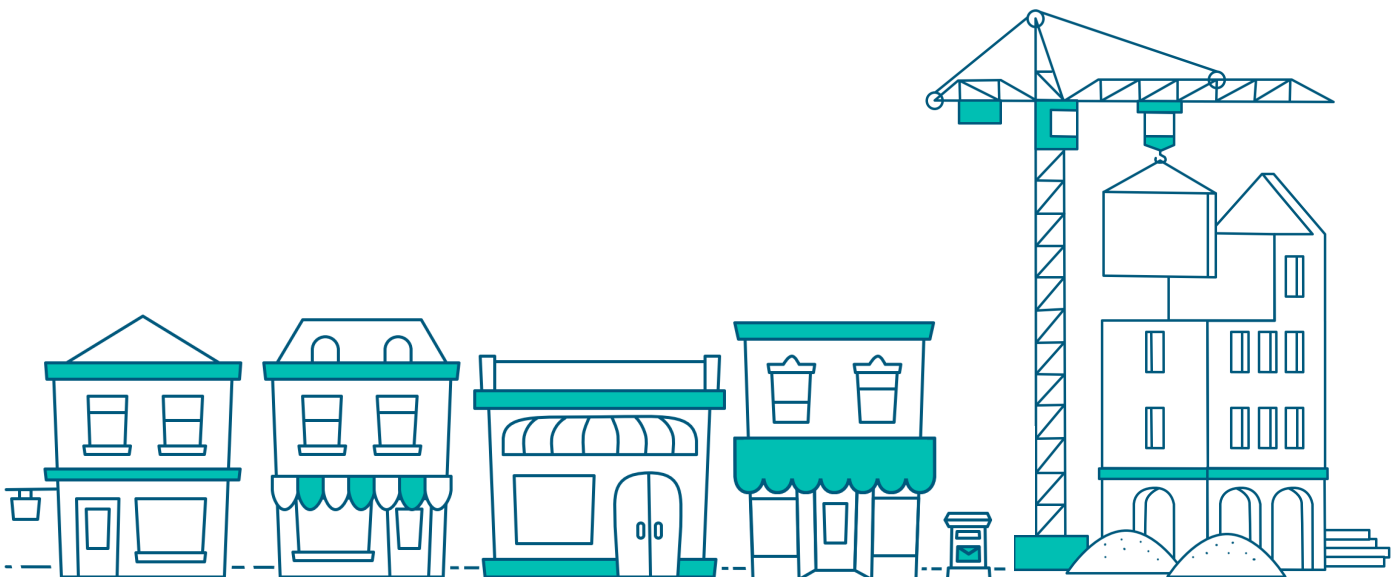
Renovate the Public Hearing is a collaborative initiative to explore potential improvements to the British Columbia (BC) provincial local government land-use public hearing requirements as a means to enhance social justice, community building, and strengthen democratic culture.

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue’s Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative (the Initiative) developed this project. The project received CMHC *Housing Supply Challenge* incubation funding for project development, to allow for collaboration building and to develop ways to identify evidence-based solutions.

Exploring any change requires a solid understanding of the status quo, current critiques, and alternatives. Starting from August 2021, the project team built relationships across British Columbia and internationally to inform the project’s approaches and how to evaluate these efforts.

The Initiative researched the history and critiques of public hearings, global examples of alternative public engagement practices, and best practices for evaluating public participation. The project also held focus groups and conducted interviews to better understand the benefits and costs of public hearings for cities, developers, and residents.

This report summarizes a generative workshop convened in spring 2022 by the *Renovate the Public Hearing* project. The workshop aimed to identify what is valued about current public hearing procedures and what criteria should be used to evaluate any alternatives.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public hearings in BC were established as a mechanism for ascertaining the “desires of the majority of owners of property in a neighbourhood,” to be used alongside studies and recommendations from experts in land use and planning.¹ One hundred years later, many voices are asking to revisit the purpose and process of public hearings for local governments.

PUBLIC HEARINGS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA TODAY

Public hearings are often residents’ first or only direct, face-to-face interaction with local government decision-making. Held with the right complementary measures and astute initiatives, this legal requirement can function as an important mechanism of democracy. Yet, BC’s Local Government Act legislated public hearing is often viewed as a performative battleground exercise that leaves people angry and apathetic towards their local government. In some cases—such as hearings over affordable housing projects—the open microphone format invites speeches that can raise racial and class tensions and increase polarization.

Both the BC government’s Development Approvals Process Review (2019) and Opening Doors: Unlocking Housing Supply For Affordability (2022) final reports identified “a Provincial review of public hearings and consideration of alternative options for more meaningful, earlier public input and in different formats” as priority areas.

RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING WORKSHOP

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue’s Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative hosted a workshop to bring together a range of perspectives on public hearings to better understand current tensions and opportunities for alternative options. The April 2022 province-wide workshop convened 36 BC elected officials, local government staff, community organizations, and policy/industry experts to share their opinions and ideas on local government land use public hearings.

Renovate the Public Hearing workshop participants shared ideas through brainstorming exercises. Participants were asked to share their experiences and opinions but were not asked to deliberate, rank outcomes, or come to an agreement. Together, they identified various benefits and challenges related to how current public hearings are held. They also explored options for improving public hearings and the more extensive public input process for local government land use decision-making.

¹ Chairman Secretary. (1926). Letter to City Clerk of Vancouver from Chairman Secretary. Vancouver, BC. Vancouver City Archives (COV S20 013 E 07 fld 2).

HIGHLIGHTS OF PARTICIPANT INPUT

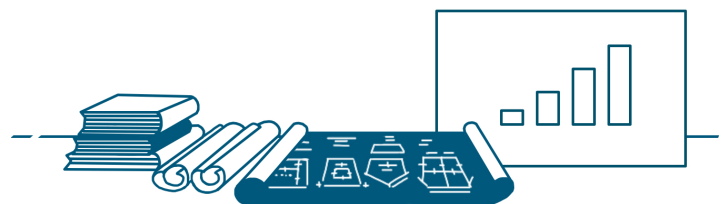
Belief in the importance of public input in land use decisions. Public hearings and notification requirements are the only provincially required opportunity for the public to directly share their land use opinions with elected officials and local government staff. Public input processes can also help inform developers, foster transparency in land use decisions, and enable decision-makers to learn what matters to communities - all of which are important elements of local planning and democracy.

Strong consensus on the challenges of BC's public hearings. Participants from different backgrounds agreed that BC's local government public hearing mechanism, as legally required, needs substantial improvement. Concerns included procedural fairness, timeline and capacity constraints, social impacts and harm, and the inability—at times—to host productive public discussions.

Strong interest in improving the public input process. For fairer outcomes, participants agreed on the need to go beyond the requirement of a public hearing late in the land use decision-making process. The required baseline standards need to be raised or expanded upon. Some participants found value in public hearings as part of more comprehensive engagement processes and others suggested removing the public hearing mechanism altogether.

Interest in a range of options for improving BC public hearing requirements. Participants offered many options for how to improve public hearings by building on the overall public input process for local land use decisions. Some of the most common suggestions include mandating preliminary hearings earlier in the pre-development approval process, offering online engagement methods, and strengthening the relationship between public hearings and official community plans through clearer engagement requirements.

Innovation is already happening. Some local governments extend engagement beyond the requirements to compensate for the public hearing's limitations. Approaches already being used in BC include early public information sessions, requiring developers to do preliminary engagement, involving advisory groups or resident associations, using online engagement to increase accessibility, being selective on what warrants a public hearing, and more. Participants supported experimenting with multiple ways for the public to be consulted and engaged beyond public hearings.



Support for stronger requirements for First Nations engagement.

Participants recognized that engagement with Indigenous communities has needs beyond the requirements of a public hearing. Recognizing the importance of land use to reconciliation efforts, many participants suggested legislative guidance to support early and responsive engagement approaches with Indigenous communities and First Nations governments.

Interest in rethinking the purpose and approach of public hearings.

Some participants advocated for a re-considering the main philosophy and purpose behind public hearings. Many participants were interested in exploring how to move away from site-specific public input and toward engagement on directions or values that can guide future land use projects.

Think beyond one size fits all.

Participants stressed the importance of considering the range of capacities among local governments across the province when exploring alternatives to the public hearing. Any required changes must be just as reasonable for rural regional districts and electoral areas as for large urban municipalities.



NEXT STEPS

Following the spring 2022 generative workshop, a post-workshop survey was widely distributed across the BC. The survey gathered further public input related to the themes generated by workshop participants. The survey also helped rank some workshop outcomes to identify priority areas for future work related to land use public input processes. Visit democracydialogue.ca/publichearings for results.

The materials and results of this workshop, including the public survey, will be shared with the Province and other interested parties. In addition, the outcomes of the workshop and related materials will also inform a potential second stage of the project.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS, SPRING 2022

Meeting via Zoom on April 7 and 8, 2022, participants explored the current and desired future state of the BC public hearing process to guide local government partnerships—led by the *Renovate the Public Hearing* project—and inform future policy analysis.

At the workshop, participants identified the current rationale, challenges, and opportunities created by public hearing requirements in the BC Local Government Act. They also generated ideas about alternative approaches for gathering input and criteria that could be used to evaluate those alternatives.

The workshop was hosted by the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue’s Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative and funded by the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation’s Housing Supply Challenge. The workshop was designed and facilitated by civic engagement specialist, Susanna Haas Lyons, with the help of a team of small group facilitators.

PARTICIPANTS

Over the two half-days of the workshop, 36 people represented various groups, including local government, for-profit and non-profit developers, service providers, residents, youth, and consultants working in planning, community relations, and civil engineering.

Participants joined from the North Central, Lower Mainland, Kootenay and Boundary, Southern Interior, and Vancouver Island and Coastal areas of BC. See the appendices for a complete list of participating organizations.



CURRENT STATE OF BC PUBLIC HEARINGS

A range of perspectives exists about the strengths and limitations of BC’s current public hearing process. Several BC communities are applying innovations to address the public hearing’s challenges and leverage its strengths. During the workshop, participants shared their experiences and knowledge to identify the following:

BENEFITS OF BC’S PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS

Participants at the workshop were asked to reflect on the current state of BC’s public hearing process. In small groups, they explored: What benefits do public hearings offer the land use decision-making process?

The following is a summary of their input:

- **Direct public engagement.** Public hearings give an opportunity for the public to directly voice their concerns and opinions to elected officials and local government staff.
- **Temperature reading of the community.** Public hearings can help decision-makers get a sense of where support and opposition is clustered in communities.
- **Legitimacy building.** When done well, public hearings and notification requirements can enhance legitimacy or add some transparency to land use decisions.
- **Citizen-to-citizen relationships.** Public hearings help facilitate grassroots political engagement where like-minded folks can rally.
- **Educational opportunity.** Public hearings can help educate the public on a project’s benefits and impacts as well as some processes of local government. They can also be learning opportunities for councils, local governments, and developers and non-profit organizations.
- **Compatible with new technologies.** With recent shifts to remote technologies, there are now more options for people to access and participate in public hearings.
- **Can be somewhat improved with small changes.** With additional procedural rules or guidelines emphasized at the start of a public hearing, there are ways to direct comments to focus on land use considerations instead of people; reducing harm.
- **Standard baselines.** Legislation around public hearings sets basic public expectations, such as notifications and what kind of input can be submitted.

CHALLENGES OF BC'S PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS

These same small groups also explored: What are the typical challenges of a public hearing?

The following is a summary of their input:

- **Timing does not allow for meaningful input.** Since public hearings are held relatively late in a project's pre-development approval process, it is often too late for community input on development projects to impact project decisions.
- **Not conducive for reconciliation efforts.** For projects impacting First Nations communities, meaningful relationships and trust need to be built in an ongoing way, and this is not in alignment with the public hearing process. Many municipalities want to invest in government-to-government relationships, while aware of capacity and timeline challenges.
- **Some land use decisions are not well served by public debate.** Some land use decisions, such as affordable housing developments, are critically needed yet are often unpopular. Bringing these types of decisions to public hearing can favour hyper-local residents while reducing opportunities to achieve policy priorities designed to achieve a broader public good.
- **Legislation for public hearings is vague.** There is much variation in how local governments across British Columbia govern their public hearings, partially due to some vague elements of the public hearing legislation. Many of the procedures and requirements have been established through decades of court cases. This can lead to logistical obstacles or confusion for all those involved.
- **Obstacles to accessibility and equity.** The public hearing process features many barriers to participation for people like non-English speakers, lower-income, Indigenous folks, rural folks, younger people, parents, and those with constraining work schedules.
- **Public hearings can divide a community.** Though public hearings can also be places to network, they can also create strong divisiveness within communities, especially because its nature is adversarial. The public often interprets outcomes as having winners and losers.
- **Can create incorrect expectations.** Members of the public often misunderstand what they can achieve or expect from public hearings. They may expect their submitted ideas will be adopted or acted upon or that the public hearing is a public referendum-style vote.



- **Erodes trust in local governments.** The public hearing format constrains the capacity or flexibility of municipal staff and planners to respond to public comments; it can seem like the decision has already been made prior to consultation. Some of this may be linked to misalignment of expectations.
- **Limited awareness.** The default public notice requirement for a public hearing has a limited range of mediums, making it harder to attract diverse attendees, including those who may impact the result. Recent changes to notification legislation may help.
- **Favours those who oppose.** Those opposing a land use decision are often highly motivated to participate in a public hearing. Conversely, those who may be positively-impacted or even neutral are less likely to attend a public hearing.
- **Consideration of future residents is often overlooked.** Public hearings typically gather input on specific land use decisions from current residents of an area. This can encourage not-in-my-backyard attitudes, perhaps to the detriment of potential future residents.
- **Can do harm to individuals.** Public hearings can be intimidating places, where comments can attack or have an unwarranted focus on specific groups of people instead of the land use of the project in question.
- **Can be the wrong point of engagement.** Some concerns raised by speakers may be outside of a public hearing's scope, and instead relate to decisions made in the area's official community plan (OCP). More frequent engagement and education about official community plans are needed.
- **Tension with contemporary values.** The original intent of public hearings was about acknowledging landowners' rights, often in a colonial context. Participants questioned whether the philosophical basis of the public hearing reflects contemporary values.
- **Requires additional initiatives or institutions.** As a public hearing is considered a bare minimum for public engagement, participants agreed additional proactive engagement and initiatives create the best kinds of public consultation. Without legislative requirements, though, additional initiatives must have the political support of elected officials to be enacted and may be revoked by subsequent councils.

PUBLIC INPUT INNOVATIONS

The Renovate the Public Hearing Discussion Guide and an introductory presentation shared alternative public input approaches with workshop participants.

Participants were then asked to share their own knowledge and experience of public input innovations for land use decision-making. Participants also discussed some of their opinions related to each.

Below is a summary of innovations and comments shared by workshop participants. Many are examples from local governments with larger population sizes:

- **Planning advisory groups.** Planning advisory committees and town planning commissions are helpful for providing recommendations, but there needs to be better and more transparent ways for people to join such groups. Members are often hard to recruit or selected at elected officials' discretion.
- **Virtual public hearings.** Virtual or hybrid public hearings can be more accessible and attract less disrespectful behaviour. Many have found virtual public hearings have improved the diversity of speakers choosing to attend and made it easier to manage behaviours.
- **Online methods.** Using online options for public input such as surveys, emails, or video submissions can allow for a broader range of public input. Many municipalities are now using their own public engagement websites to share project information and key dates, give updates, receive comments and public input, and provide questions and answers.
- **Being selective on what warrants a public hearing.** Some local governments are being more selective in holding public hearings. Not having a public hearing for projects that align with official community plans can help circumvent challenges and speed up approval processes.
- **Delegating decisions to local government staff.** Bill 26: Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act (No. 2), 2021 allows local government staff to issue development variance permits for minor projects, but most councils have not adopted these delegations because they want to retain oversight or control, or do not have capacity to do so.



- **Including Indigenous views.** The BC Local Government Act requires local governments to consider gathering input from First Nations when developing official community plans, but not for zoning bylaws or amendments. To support meaningful government-to-government relations and Indigenous community input, some local governments are emphasizing early and culturally appropriate engagement.
- **Resident associations.** Resident or neighbourhood associations can add value to a land use project by educating and organizing input around a land use decision. Local governments maintain a contact list of active neighbourhood associations and gathering their feedback may be incorporated into pre-development approval processes.
- **Early information sessions.** Many larger local governments hold earlier in-person information sessions like open houses or semi-formal town hall meetings outside of City Hall to build a dialogue with residents and gather early input.
- **Providing clear expectations.** Local governments are experimenting with ways to set clear expectations, uphold community guidelines, and distribute educational materials. This can be done on the website, sent in early notices, and at the beginning of a public hearing.
- **Requiring developers to do preliminary public engagement and track public feedback.** Some local governments have incorporated public input requirements into their application requirements for developers. Some require initial public engagement as part of the application submission and others require developers to document public comments and how they are responding to public feedback as part of the pre-development approval process.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC INPUT PROCESSES FOR LOCAL LAND USE DECISIONS

ELEMENTS OF AN IDEAL PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

What would be an ideal public input process on local land use decisions? To answer this question, workshop participants participated in a systems mapping exercise in small groups. First, each person was asked to draw their ideal public input process on local land use decisions, which may or may not feature a public hearing. Then workshop participants came together in small groups to discuss commonalities and differences between their sketches. Their discussions included what they might do differently compared to current practice. They were also asked to consider what advice they would give to someone considering the design of alternatives.

The following is a summary of shared ideas that emerged from the small group discussions about what might be done differently compared to the current practice of public hearings in BC.

Offer multiple ways for the public to be consulted and engaged. Beyond the public hearing, additional public input opportunities would benefit the land use decision-making process across the province. Example methods to consider include advisory groups, focus groups with specific populations or on particular needs, information sessions, polls, and other online input methods. These changes might be more accessible to the public than the current public hearing approach, thereby enabling more equitable input gathering.

Explore the interface of official community plans and public input. Some concerns about land use planning are addressed in official community plans, and may be better addressed in that context instead of at a public hearing on a specific development opportunity. Explore the role of engagement sessions to interpret or amend official community plans.

Make legislative change, with care. Any effort to change the public hearing or public input processes must be mandated, otherwise local governments with lower budgets, less capacity or interest will struggle to adopt new processes. However, the requirements must be carefully designed in consideration of capacity differences across local governments in BC.

Move away from site-specific public input to values-based input. Some workshop participants called for doing away with site-specific or zoning-based public hearings. Instead, the public could be involved in land use decisions only at the broad area-wide level, where discussions are values-based. For example, public hearings would be replaced by engagement on official community plans, which could possibly reduce not-in-my-backyard attitudes.

Employ liaison assistance. Consultants with experience in civil engineering, planning, and engagement and could help applicants liaise with relevant approving authorities, the community, and stakeholders.

Explore the interface of official community plans and public input. Some concerns about land use planning are addressed in official community plans, and may be better addressed in that context instead of at a public hearing on a specific development opportunity. Explore the role of engagement sessions to interpret or amend official community plans.

Emphasize public input at early stages. Early collaboration among the public and other involved groups, developers, and local officials can guide land use directions before resources have been spent in design and planning. Input at conceptual and visioning stages allows developers to understand community needs and desires while also supporting the community to consider the broader context, such as the needs of future residents.

Require informational sessions by developers. Support public understanding of a proposed project early on and throughout the decision-making process, perhaps in the form of early information sessions or community engagement opportunities. Developers should have to identify public benefits in their projects and gather information from the public.

Before a public hearing, require complementary engagement. To support better outcomes at a public hearing, mandate a preparatory informational open-house or divide the public hearing into two stages. For example, a first-pass public hearing would invite residents of the immediately affected community to share their views, followed by a first-pass meeting with council; then, the wider public would be notified about a more traditional public hearing.

Formalize roles for resident-led advisory planning commissions. Advisory groups should be transparently recruited from the community, and would benefit from formally defined roles beyond the discretion of currently elected officials. Encourage these groups to give their own feedback, and/or help analyze public input before bringing feedback to council.

Adopt models that encourage deliberation and consensus-seeking. Many participants described the adversarial nature of traditional public hearings. Adopt public input methods where consensus-seeking between diverse viewpoints is the goal. Even though full consensus is not likely, deliberative processes build stronger mutual understanding, more transparency, and higher levels of buy-in from the public. If public input is solicited in this way, public hearings could be the exception rather than the rule.

Offer support to participants. Many community members experience barriers to participation in public hearings. Offer services and compensation to deepen equity and accessibility, including providing childcare options, reimbursing transit expenses, sharing accessible project information, and information about the process, etc.

Incentivize innovation and foster a competitive spirit between local governments. Instead of mandating specific public input models or tools, outline objectives and indicators of success to allow local governments to experiment with different forms of public input.

Manage expectations at the outset. With every form of public input, clearly and transparently define the purpose and intended outcomes. Participants need to understand what they can expect from their participation and local governments need to communicate the type of input that will help make the decision.

Use contemporary notification technologies. Leverage up-to-date technologies to meet digitally oriented people's needs by using phone apps, text notifications, etc. Continue to offer print and mail notifications to meet the needs of diverse community members.

Use virtual engagement technologies. Members of the public can feel intimidated at an in-person public hearing, and in-person sessions are inaccessible for many people's schedules and travel options. Offer the option of providing an online submission or joining meetings virtually to allow for greater accessibility. Live stream and share meeting recordings to increase the number of people engaged.

Support and mandate First Nations engagement. Engagement with Indigenous communities should be required for land use decisions that affect Indigenous folks, including the majority of BC First Nations people who live off-reserve. These consultations should occur early in the land use decision-making process.

Specifically outline land use decisions that do not need public hearings. Suggested examples include: when an affordable housing development is based on the maximum allowances in an official community plan, when development is deemed a crisis response, or a land use project that overwhelmingly impacts First Nations people—including those living off-reserve—who are consulted through a different mechanism.

Allow a customizable process. Encourage innovation and adaptability by identifying and legislating shared principles of public engagement on land use decision-making, rather than legislating specific processes.

EVALUATING CHANGE

After identifying elements of an ideal public input process, workshop participants came together in a plenary discussion to explore ways to measure whether a change is better than the current state. Workshop participants were encouraged to consider measuring impacts on a range of roles, such as participant, elected official, staff, developer, etc.

Below is a summary of some of the ideas suggested for ways to measure the impact of any change to the public hearing process:

Verify demographics:

- Determine if all those affected have been notified
- Determine if a wide range of opinions were shared, instead of just a few loud voices
- Compare the demographics of those giving input to the community's demographics

Ask participants if they:

- Believe they have been heard
- Felt safe expressing their concerns or ideas
- Understand how the process works and what the next steps will be
- Had easy access to information in order to participate
- Think adequate responses or reasons were given in response to their concerns
- Believe outcomes were already decided beforehand
- Believe there were enough snacks, provisions, or services provided to support their involvement



Ask decision-makers if:

- Their views changed because of the public input process
- The same speakers have been showing up to multiple sessions
- The input allowed them to understand the competing interests and priorities among various segments of the community

Ask local government staff if:

- The public input is applicable or actionable
- There were voices or people that should have participated but weren't there
- The public showed up well informed or with misguided expectations

Ask developers if:

- Public input is applicable or actionable
- They learned something new or heard from a new perspective
- They believe outcomes were already decided beforehand
- They felt they were able to communicate their challenges with financing and market risks
- They would have changed their proposal if the feedback were received earlier

NEXT STEPS

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue's Strengthening Canadian Democracy Initiative of Simon Fraser University is committed to furthering the results of this workshop by sharing all materials with the Province and other interested parties.

These materials include the workshop discussion guide, this report, and the results of a public post-workshop survey. The outcomes of the workshop and related materials will also inform a potential second stage of the project.

POST-WORKSHOP SURVEY

Following the spring 2022 generative workshop, a post-workshop survey designed by the Initiative and hosted by Ethelo Decisions Inc. was widely distributed via online channels throughout British Columbia.

Local government staff, elected officials, for-profit and non-profit developers, housing-related associations, and service providers, as well as residents who have and who have not attended public hearings, were invited to participate.

The survey gathered further public input related to the themes generated by workshop participants. The survey also helped rank some of the components identified in the workshop and in this report to inform priority areas for future work related to land use public input processes. Visit democracydialogue.ca/publichearings for survey results.

SECOND STAGE OF THE PROJECT

Renovate the Public Hearing project is funded by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The first funding stage allowed for project development, collaboration building, and research to identify options to pursue evidence-based solutions.

If funding is approved for a second stage, the Initiative will partner with the BC Law Institute (BCLI) to engage in a law review and reform process.

Goals for the second stage of the Initiative include:

- **Project committee.** BC Law Institute to form an expert project committee to consider leading options for reform and public input and to guide BCLI in making recommendations for legislative reforms in British Columbia.
- **Learning cycle.** Partnership with local governments to create a feedback and learning cycle among residents, local government staff, and elected officials to inform the law reform process.
- **Public engagement and education.** Public engagement to help validate recommendations.

APPENDICES

This province-wide workshop convened a combined total of 36 British Columbia elected officials, local government staff, community organizations, and policy/industry experts associated with the following organizations:

LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

- Aboriginal Housing Management Association
- BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs
- BC Non-Profit Housing Association
- BC Law Institute
- Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC
- Capital Regional District
- City of Burnaby
- City of Castlegar
- City of Kamloops
- City of New Westminster
- City of Rossland
- City of Terrace
- City of Victoria
- CityHive
- Co-operative Housing Federation of BC
- District of Saanich
- Electoral Area E, Cariboo Regional District
- Ethelo Decisions Inc.
- KLO Neighbourhood Association
- Lu'ma Development Management
- Metro Vancouver Regional District
- MOSAIC
- Nanaimo Neighbourhood Network
- Peace River Regional District
- Planning Institute of British Columbia
- Pooni Group
- Pottinger Bird Community Relations
- Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen
- San Diego State University
- Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
- Thompson-Nicola Regional District
- University of British Columbia, School of Community and Regional Planning
- Urban Development Institute
- Yes in New West



WORKSHOP AGENDA

RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING

April 7 & 8, 2022 | On Zoom

Purpose

This workshop will collaboratively explore the current and desired future state of the BC public hearing process, to guide pilot projects led by the *Renovate the Public Hearing* project, and inform future policy analysis.

Workshop outcomes

- Explore benefits and challenges of public hearings in the planning process
- Capture innovations currently being applied
- Explore ideal “public hearing” or alternative procedures/process
- Brainstorm characteristics to judge the efficacy of possible alternative processes

Results

The results of this dialogue will be published in a community-friendly report that will be shared with the Province and will directly inform the next steps of the SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue’s project to Renovate the Public Hearing.

Preparation

- Complete (and share) the [presurvey](#)
- Read the [discussion guide](#)
- Bring a dark marker and a few sheets of paper to the second day

APRIL 7

9:00AM Welcome & Introductions

About BC Public Hearings

Presentation and plenary discussion. Jennifer Wolowic, Project Manager, Strengthening Canadian Democracy, Simon Fraser University

Benefits and challenges of public hearings

Small group discussion

What benefits do public hearings offer the land-use decision-making process?

What are the typical challenges of a public hearing?

Break

Benefits and challenges of public hearings

Plenary discussion

Innovations within the current legislation

Given the challenges, how are you responding within current legislation? What have you observed about how others are responding?

12:00PM Adjourn

APRIL 8

Please bring a bold marker and a few pieces of white paper to this session.

9:00AM Welcome & Overview of the Day

Design options for public input and land-use decision-making

Presentation

Designing the ideal “public hearing” or alternative procedures/process

Individual reflection

If you were starting from scratch, or designing for a newly established democracy, what would be an optimal public input process on land use decisions?

Break

Designing the ideal “public hearing” or alternative process

Small group discussion

Evaluating changes

Plenary exercise

How would we know if a change to public hearings is better than the current state?

Project Next Steps

12:00PM Adjourn



What to Expect

This interactive online workshop will involve you in helping to shape pilot projects to explore adjustments or alternative processes to BC public hearings. Please plan to share your ideas, listen to others and use a mix of online technologies.

To engage fully, you will need:

- A laptop or computer is preferred. While you can participate via smartphone, you may find it more difficult to fully participate
- A webcam (optional)
- A microphone
- Speakers or headphones
- Avoid multi-tasking; close other windows and application

MURAL

This workshop will use MURAL, an online whiteboard, to support collaboration. If you're not familiar with MURAL, please consider getting oriented in advance. As is useful to you:

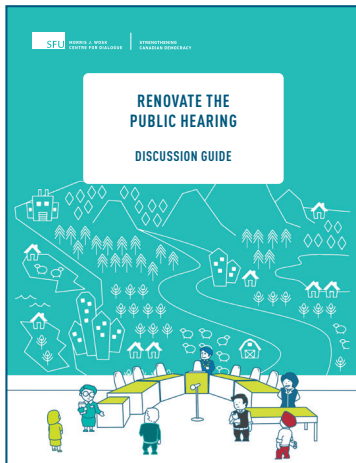
- TRY: a [test MURAL board](#)
- WATCH:
 1. [Tutorial video](#) (1 min)
 2. [3 things you need to know in a MURAL](#) (2 min)
 3. [A quick introduction to MURAL](#) (5 min)
- Or READ: [MURAL quick guide slides](#)

Zoom

We will meet on Zoom:

- For the best user experience, please upgrade your Zoom app
- If you are not familiar with Zoom, you are invited to join a test meeting prior to the workshop at zoom.us/test

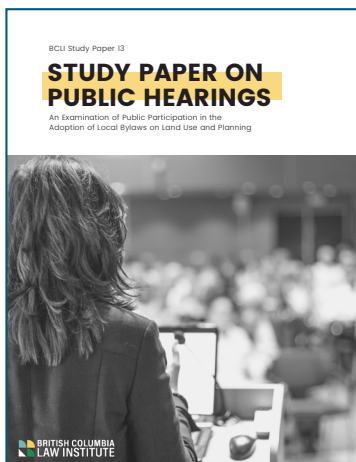
FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES



Renovate the Public Hearing Workshop Discussion Guide, SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

This Discussion Guide presents an overview of public hearing legislation in BC, its origins, current practice, and some considerations for adjustments and alternatives. The appendices also lists 72 relevant research, legal, historical, and contemporary commentary resources related to public hearings.

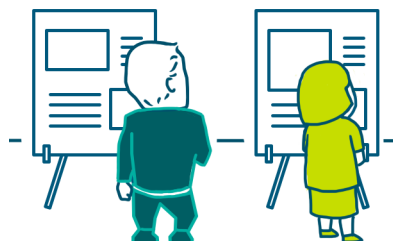
[Click here to read the Discussion Guide Discussion Guide.](#)



Study Paper on Public Hearings: An Examination of Public Participation in the Adoption of Local Bylaws on Land Use and Planning, British Columbia Law Institute

The study paper addresses the origins of this requirement in the Local Government Act and the use of public hearings in land use regulation, how this legislation has been interpreted and developed in the case law, and the goals and purposes of this legislation. This study paper was published on April 6, 2022.

[Click here to read the Study Paper](#)



Slide decks of workshop presentations

All slide decks and presentation materials can be made available upon request. Please contact dialogue@sfu.ca for more information.

[DEMOCRACYDIALOGUE.CA/PUBLICHEARINGS](https://democracydialogue.ca/publichearings)