



THE RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING INITIATIVE

MEDIA KIT 2024

RPHI@SFU.CA

[@RPHSFU](https://www.instagram.com/RPHSFU)

WWW.RENOVATETHEPUBLICHEARING.CA



ABOUT US

OUR PURPOSE

The Renovate the Public Hearing Initiative (RPHI) is a collaborative initiative exploring improvements and providing evidence-based recommendations for British Columbia's local government land use public hearing requirements.

As municipalities explore better ways to gather feedback from communities and leaders are asked to make an increasing number of land use decisions, it has been demonstrated that BC's current public hearing process is not designed to support an inclusive practice for strong decision-making. Instead, public hearings are often viewed as performative exercises that exacerbate societal divisions and leave people angry or apathetic toward local government.

This indicates a critical opportunity for change, and many voices are now asking to revisit the purpose and process of BC's public hearings. In response, Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue created the Renovate the Public Hearing Initiative to act as a convener and catalyst in the public hearing space.

Our project is evaluating and piloting changes to BC's public hearing requirements and exploring alternatives for public engagement on land use decisions, in order to enhance social justice and community building and strengthen our democratic culture.

OUR PARTNERS



MORRIS J. WOSK
CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE



THE SFU MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE:



Renovate the Public Hearing is an initiative at SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. The Centre for Dialogue (the Centre) creates real-world impact for society's most pressing challenges by using dialogue and engagement to co-create solutions, exchange knowledge, support community-engaged learning, and build the capacity of others in the knowledge and practice of dialogue.



CANADA MORTGAGE HOUSING CORPORATION (CMHC):

RPHI received CMHC Housing Supply Challenge funding for the purposes of project development, collaboration building, and developing ways to identify evidence-based solutions.

CMHC exists to make housing affordable for all Canadians and ensure the health and stability of Canada's housing system. The CMHC Housing Supply Challenge targets housing experts and professionals, aiming to remove or reduce barriers that hinder housing supply and awarding \$300 million in funding over 5 years.



BRITISH COLUMBIA LAW INSTITUTE (BCLI):



As one of our key partners, BCLI has worked collaboratively to specifically explore legal reform for BC's legislation on public engagement. BCLI published an initial study paper on the origins and legal landscape of public hearings and has collected public input online for their Consultation Paper on Renovating the Public Hearing.



OUR GOALS

OUR GOAL IS TO **IMPROVE MUNICIPAL LAND USE PLANNING EFFICIENCIES AND INCREASE TRUST IN DEMOCRACY** BY:



Identifying evidence-based recommendations for updating local government public engagement and BC's Local Government Act public hearing requirements

Creating stronger public engagement practices and supports for reconciliation

Creating more effective local government pre-development approval processes



We are working for public engagement that is 'upstreamed', value-based, streamlined, and more deeply democratic and reflective of community values and priorities.



SCALING UP: RENOVATING THE PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS

This video summarizes the goals of our work and why we do what we do

**WATCH
THE
VIDEO**



OUR WORK

Our work has taken three fundamental, co-ordinated approaches:

1. RESEARCH AND ANALYZE

To inform change, we needed a deep understanding of how public hearings evolved and their effects, benefits and critiques.

We researched and analyzed financial, environmental and public health impacts of the public hearing process, barriers and costs, their colonial history, global examples of alternative public engagement practices and best practices for evaluation.

We completed 60 informal scoping interviews, reviewed more than 150 academic research articles and archive documents, and held two major generative dialogues to gather public input.

Our partners at BC Law Institute (BCLI) analyzed existing legal frameworks and relevant case law, and prepared both a study paper and a consultation paper on BC law and policy regarding local government public hearings, with a focus on opportunities and implications for reform.

2. COMMUNITY BUILDING & PARTNERSHIPS

We have built partnerships across British Columbia, in Canada and internationally, collaborating with several municipalities and community organizations and hosting or participating in many conferences, panels, workshops, dialogues and community events centered on public engagement and democracy.

We intentionally partnered with and involved young people in our work. Youth in BC will inherit the communities we are creating now, yet young people are widely underrepresented in land use decisions.

We believe democratic decision-making is improved by building stronger trauma-informed and culturally respectful relationships.

Youth participants in the Civic Innovators Program, a collaboration with CityHive



3. PILOT AND EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES & MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS

We have piloted and evaluated alternative options for public input that meets the needs of local governments and communities, testing alternatives to public hearings in four local governments in British Columbia.

We created a principles and values based rubric to evaluate pilot alternatives. Evaluations tracked opinions, emotions and knowledge changes created during the pilots via ethnographic observation, surveys, and interviews.

Pilots were evaluated and results compared to current public hearing procedures to identify best practices and inform recommendations for evidence-based reforms that support more meaningful public input in land use decision-making.

“By engaging our community in the early stages of updating the Official Community Plan (OCP), we have ensured that the voices and values of our residents are at the forefront of our planning processes. This collaboration allowed us to integrate diverse perspectives, clarify housing options, and prioritize community needs for the future.”

— *Silas White, Mayor of Gibsons*

“People who have real power don’t go to public hearings—they go behind the scenes. The people who go to public hearings are those who have no other option.”

— *Chinatown Community Dialogues Participant*

“The facilitated deliberative process seems to provide a bottom-up, non-traditional way of providing representative input of citizens for town planning.”

— *Gibsons Residents Assembly Participant*



WORK HIGHLIGHTS

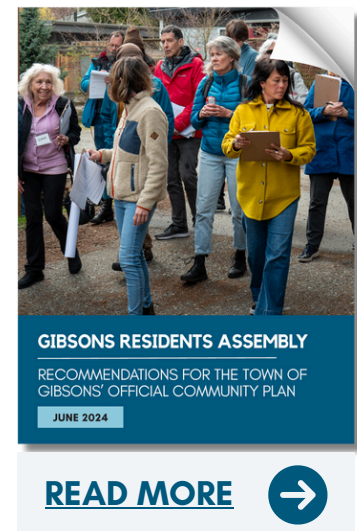
FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE COSTS OF PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Our latest report details our research quantifying the economic, social and environmental costs of the current public participation system, especially regarding affordable housing projects, and offers recommendations for policies and practices to improve the quality of public engagement while increasing the housing supply.



TOWN OF GIBSONS RESIDENTS ASSEMBLY:

The Gibsons Residents Assembly is a groundbreaking case study: Canada's first residents' assembly to make recommendations for an Official Community Plan, and one of the smallest municipalities ever to host an assembly process. Feedback and insights from Assembly Members ultimately shaped a set of recommendations for the Town of Gibsons' new OCP that reflect the values of their community and address the housing needs of their growing population.



PUBLISHING:

We are currently collaborating with educators and local youth to produce and publish engaging educational materials regarding public hearings and civic engagement for teens and children, including a comic book and a children's storybook.



FINANCIAL ANALYSIS REPORT

AFFORDABLE HOUSING & THE COSTS OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING: FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS OF PUBLIC HEARINGS IN LAND USE PLANNING

Supplying affordable housing is a major component of land use decision-making today, yet feedback gathered throughout our work has highlighted how the supply of affordable housing projects has often been negatively impacted by the current public hearing process.

To better understand this challenge, Renovate the Public Hearing partnered with City Squared Consulting to deep dive into the direct and indirect costs of the public hearing process, especially when it comes to affordable housing projects. Through financial analysis of eight case studies, this study aimed to highlight the importance of good public participation by measuring the costs to society when the system is not meeting these objectives.

This exciting new report details this research quantifying the **economic, social and environmental** costs of the current public participation system and offers recommendations for policies and practices that can improve the quality of public engagement while addressing the housing crisis and increasing the housing supply.

[READ](#) 
[THE](#)
[REPORT](#)



GIBSONS RESIDENTS ASSEMBLY

A CASE STUDY ON COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES & THE VALUE OF UPSTREAM ENGAGEMENT

GIBSONS RESIDENTS ASSEMBLY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TOWN OF GIBSONS' OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN

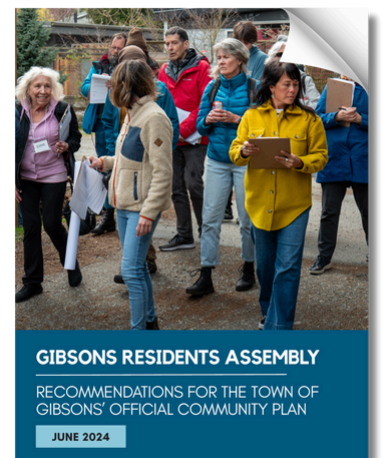
The Town of Gibsons Residents Assembly broke new ground this spring as Canada's first residents' assembly tied to an Official Community Plan and one of the smallest municipalities ever to host an assembly process. Designed and facilitated by RPHI through a public-non-profit partnership with the Town of Gibsons, this assembly is a national and international case study modelling how an 'upstreamed' assembly process that takes place at the very beginning of a community plan update can be hugely effective as a democratically legitimate, evidence-based and sustainable alternative to local government public hearings across cities and towns.

Our report on the Gibsons Assembly details the assembly process and learnings, and explains how the feedback and insights from Assembly Members ultimately shaped a set of recommendations for the Town of Gibsons' new OCP that showcase the values of their community and thoughtfully answer the question: "How can Gibsons best plan for the future and meet the housing needs of our growing population?"

Assembly Chair & RPHI Director Amina Yasin writes that it "stands as a testament to the power and promise of participatory democracy. It shows how ordinary residents, given the opportunity, can come together to address complex challenges, find common ground, build social cohesion and contribute meaningfully to the future of their community."

ARTICLES & REPORT

- > [Gibsons Assembly Report](#)
- > [Article: Centre for Dialogue](#)
- > [Article: The Coast](#)
- > [Residents Assemblies](#)



PUBLISHING PROJECTS

ENGAGING EDUCATION FOR KIDS AND TEENS

Youth civic engagement is a cornerstone of vibrant and functioning democracies. Engaging young people in decision-making is crucial to ensure that the perspectives and needs of emerging and future generations are represented, leading to more comprehensive and forward-thinking policies. Opportunities for youth civic engagement at a local government level can also pave the way for a lifelong habit of informed and active citizenship at all levels of government.

RPHI is collaborating with creators and educators to produce and publish engaging educational materials regarding public hearings and civic engagement, including a comic book for teens and a children's storybook.

GOALS

- To enhance youth knowledge about local government, land use and public hearings, and how they can take part
- To inspire and encourage civic engagement in young people
- To include youth in the future of public participation in land-use planning

COMIC BOOK

This comic is based on the true events of a contentious affordable housing decision in New Westminster. Our story is told from the perspective of a family who would benefit from the new housing and the community that supported them, specifically a group of young teens.

Our goal is to educate teens on land use decision-making and inspire them to participate in civic action within their communities by highlighting the significance of their involvement.

CHILDREN'S BOOK

On their walk home from school, a group of children ideate on what they would like to see built on an empty lot in their neighbourhood. They hope for a new playground, but the parent prompts them to consider what their neighbours would like to have and envision a space that could have something for everyone.

Our goal is to encourage kids to notice and think about the diversity of people and spaces in their neighbourhood, to consider the needs of others in their community, and to imagine new uses for neighbourhood spaces.

OUR REPORTS

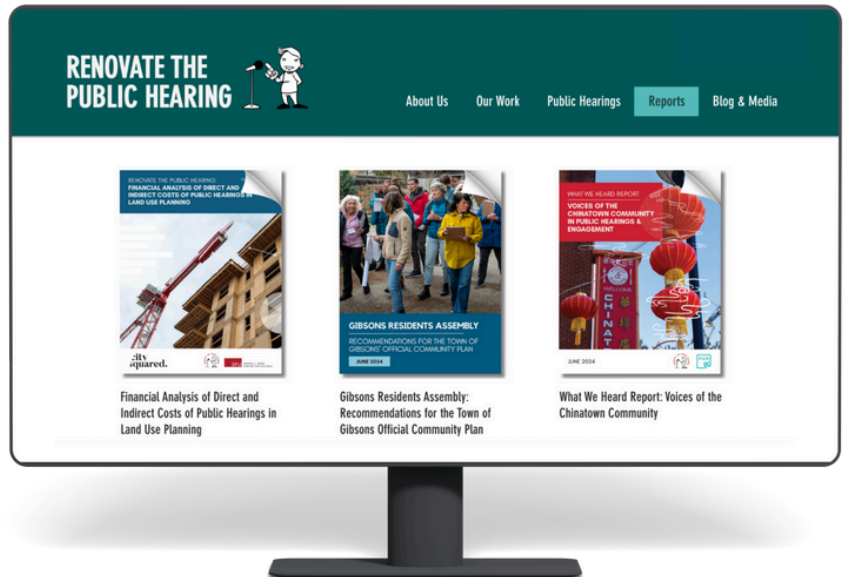


RPHI IN THE NEWS



> [Article: North Shore News](#)

> [Article: Vancouver Sun](#)



TERMINOLOGY

THE RENOVATE THE PUBLIC HEARING INITIATIVE:

Also written as: Renovate the Public Hearing

Acronym: RPHI

THE SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY (SFU) MORRIS J. WOSK CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE:

Also written as:

- SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
- The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
- The Centre for Dialogue

Abbreviated as 'The Centre'

PUBLIC HEARINGS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public hearings are just one form of public engagement, but for over 100 years, public hearings have been the main form of public engagement when it comes to local government land use decisions in BC.

'UPSTREAMED' ENGAGEMENT:

We use the term 'upstream' or 'upstreamed' to refer to engagement that happens earlier in the planning process. Early engagement (even before any planning begins) gives decision-makers an opportunity to hear from the community about their priorities and values and make plans that reflect this insight.

CONTACT

MEDIA AND COLLABORATORS –
REACH OUT DIRECTLY TO RPHI
DIRECTOR AMINA YASIN:



Amina Yasin (she/her)
DIRECTOR

ayasin@sfu.ca



WWW.RENOVATETHEPUBLICHEARING.CA



RPHI@SFU.CA



OUR
TEAM

Jocelyn Wong (she/they)
ADMIN RESEARCH
COORDINATOR

jocelyn_wong_2@sfu.ca

Karis Chitty (she/her)
COMMUNICATIONS
ASSOCIATE

kchitty@sfu.ca

