

Engaging with Local Governments

A Guide for Tenant Leaders



About Us

The Canadian Centre for Housing Rights (CCHR) is Canada's leading non-profit organization working to advance the right to housing. Founded in 1987, CCHR has worked tirelessly for 35 years at the intersection of human rights and housing. We advance the right to housing by serving renters to help them stay housed, providing education and training about housing rights, and advancing rights-based housing policy through research, policy development, advocacy and strategic litigation.

About this guide

This document guides tenant leaders on how to effectively engage with their local government to advance the right to housing in their communities. It includes information on how City Councils address housing issues, and guidelines for how tenant leaders can make submissions and deputations at City Council meetings so that they can advocate for the issues that are most important to them.

Table of contents

- 4 Advocating to City Council**
- 5 Looking up Board and Committee Meetings**
- 6 Making a Deputation**
- 6 Making a Submission**
- 7 Writing a Submission or Deputation**

ADVOCATING TO CITY COUNCIL

Written submissions and deputations to City councils are instrumental in bringing the attention of local governments to the housing issues their communities experience.

A deputation is a short verbal or written presentation that residents and community groups can bring to the council's committees. Deputations should address specific items of a meeting's agenda. If interested parties want to bring forward a new issue, it is best to provide a written submission.

A submission is a written document that provides recommendations from community groups on the municipality's housing initiatives. Submissions can be made to either support or oppose those initiatives, and recommend ways to address the needs of the groups most impacted. Submissions can also be made by communities to propose new policies and bylaws.

LOOKING UP BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Every municipality creates different council committees to look at specific issues such as housing and planning, economic development, etc. These committees are formed by several city councillors. Making a submission or deputation at a council committee meeting involves some planning. While written submissions are less constrained in their scope, deputations should be aligned with municipal priorities, and this requires monitoring the discussions happening around the specific policy you are interested in challenging or championing.

Not all council committee meetings will provide the opportunity to make an impactful or meaningful contribution. Sometimes, the discussion will simply be an update, a request to postpone, a vote to validate the content of a report, or it could be a confidential item. The best times to depute at council committees are when a motion is introduced, in sessions during which a policy is reviewed and when budgets and implementation plans are voted on.

Looking at the voting history of a policy or bylaw is also useful in identifying the councillors and committee members most likely to support your request. Before registering to depute, you can write to these councillors - including your ward, borough, or district councillor - and ask them to consider voting in favour of your proposal and provide the rationale for why they should do so.

MAKING A DEPUTATION

A well-structured written or verbal deputation can convince councillors on committees to revisit or amend the policy you wish to discuss. A checklist at the end of this guide can help you present your arguments. [This deputation](#) by the Right to Housing Toronto (R2HTO) network is an example on how to make changes to the City's proposed inclusionary zoning policy using a rights-based approach.

MAKING A SUBMISSION

A written submission can be made to council committees for the same purposes as a deputation. They can also be made to any City council meeting and in the context of public consultations.

Submissions to support or challenge a specific policy or bylaw should be sent to the relevant council committee, preferably a few days before the meeting takes place. Unlike a deputation, you do not need to register for a meeting or wait for the meeting agenda to be published to send your submission.

For public consultations, municipalities will publish an announcement in communities or on their webpage, with an email or a link to upload and send your document. Take note of the dates during which the consultation takes place and send your submission preferably a week before the closing date.

A written submission is usually longer than a written deputation and should provide more details while following the same base structure, which is provided in the checklist. A submission made in the context of a City council or council committee meeting should not exceed five pages, while a submission in response to a public consultation can be as long as 30 pages, depending on the scope of the policy discussed.

WRITING A SUBMISSION OR DEPUTATION

CHECKLIST

Introduction

- Start with your name, the name of your organization, group or association.
 - Address your submission to the committee holding the meeting or leading the consultation you wish to participate in.
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Background

- Briefly introduce yourself and your organization or group.
 - Clearly state the issue you wish to address and why it is important to your community.
 - Try to include facts, numbers and references on the causes and impacts of the housing issues your community is facing.
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Recommendations

- Highlight the gaps you wish to address in the policy or bylaw at hand. Explain how those gaps impact the enjoyment of your community's right to adequate housing.
 - Give examples of solutions or approaches to bridge those gaps and offer recommendations on the policy.
 - Clearly state what you would like council to do and by when.
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Written submissions also provide a good opportunity to inform and educate your councillors and City staff on the right to adequate housing and can therefore contribute to strengthening the legality of governmental housing initiatives.

[Learn more about a human rights-based approach to housing.](#)

In the “Background” section of your submission, include an overview of the right to adequate housing and how much the policy or bylaw you wish to discuss with council is aligned (or not) with the standards and principles of the right to housing.

You can find two examples of rights-based submissions to council below, both made by the Right to Housing Toronto (R2HTO) network.

1. Supporting Toronto City Council’s decision regarding a [renoviction bylaw](#)
2. Consultation process for Toronto’s 10-year housing strategy - [HousingTO 2020-2030](#)



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