

TAKING PART IN PUBLIC CONSULTATION  
**BECOMING INFORMED,  
ASKING QUESTIONS  
AND EXPRESSING OPINIONS**

A PRACTICAL GUIDE  
FOR CITIZENS



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A PROJECT OF THE



SOMMET DE  
**MONTREAL**

IN COLLABORATION WITH



OFFICE  
DE CONSULTATION PUBLIQUE  
DE MONTRÉAL



## A Message from the Mayor

Montréal's implementation of its *Public Consultation and Participation Policy* seeks to provide citizens with the best possible conditions for the exercise of democracy at the municipal level, and in turn help promote a quality living environment for all.

It was from this perspective—and out of a willingness to respond to needs expressed by Montrealers—that a project to create a guide to public consultation and participation processes emerged out of the Montréal Summit, and was then taken up by the Task Force on Democracy. The purpose of the guide is to help citizens who are interested in participating effectively in consultations and in expressing opinions that will prove helpful to the decision-making process.

This guide contains a series of practical tips on how to get informed, ask questions, express one's concerns and submit proposals.

I am convinced that it will be most useful to you, and I wish you a pleasant read.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Gerald Tremblay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Gérald Tremblay  
Mayor of Montréal



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## FOREWORD

*I would like to take part in a Montréal public consultation. I have things to say, but I'm unsure of how to proceed. I would like to have help preparing for the consultation and expressing my point of view.*

The idea for this guide grew out of a consensus reached at the Montréal Summit: that ways should be found to foster effective citizen participation and help them properly express their opinions during public consultations.

The guide offers a series of practical tips that we hope will prove useful to you. It is designed for people who plan to make only a short comment as well as those who will be filing a more formal brief.

After reading this document, you will:

- ▶ be ready to take part—*What to do?* (Module 1);
- ▶ be familiar with the process of a public hearing—*How does it work?* (Module 2);
- ▶ have learned about consultations in the form of working groups—*What other ways are there?* (Module 3);
- ▶ understand the basic rules of public consultation—*What exactly is it?* (Module 4).

You may make use of all or only some of the four modules, depending on your specific needs.

This guide was prepared by the Task Force on Democracy, created as part of the Montréal Summit, in collaboration with the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*. It is also part of the framework of *Montréal's Public Consultation and Participation Policy*.

We wish you every success in getting ready for and, most important, participating in a public consultation process.



## MODULE 1

### GETTING READY BY BECOMING INFORMED, ASKING QUESTIONS AND EXPRESSING AN OPINION

To help you prepare, this practical guide describes three suggested steps that can be applied to any public consultation formula.

The approach suggested here is applicable to any public consultation; for example, one held to discuss a construction project, development of a park or bicycle path, or a planned policy or programme.

The goal of the approach is to enable citizens to express informed opinions, having had the chance to consult the project documentation and ask questions to ensure they properly understand the issues subjected to consultation.

The three steps are described below.

- ▶ **Step 1. Prior to public consultation: *Become informed.***
- ▶ **Step 2. During public consultation: *Ask questions.***
- ▶ **Step 3. During public consultation: *Express your opinion.***

Montréal is interested in the participation of the greatest possible number of citizens, whatever their opinion. Any contribution, no matter how modest, is worthy of interest and will help elected officials make more informed decisions.

If you are interested in a particular public consultation, don't hesitate to take part in the process to the extent that your time and energy allow.

Remember: you are the specialist when it comes to the area you live in. No one is in a better position than you to explain what you want, as well as the scope of the project's potential impact on your life and your neighbourhood.

Even if you are not used to speaking in public, rest assured that you will be heard and your opinion will be respected by everyone in attendance.

## STEP 1 PRIOR TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION: **BECOME INFORMED**

- Read through the documentation;
- Write down your initial observations;
- Prepare questions whose answers will provide any information you need to fully understand project;
- Formulate your position and structure your arguments.

### *Helpful hint*

#### **WRITE DOWN YOUR INITIAL OBSERVATIONS.**

In the case of a project:

- What do you find acceptable and/or unacceptable about the project?
- What positive and negative impacts do you perceive right from the start?
- In what way does the documentation support your initial observations? How does it shed new light on them? What information are you missing?

In the case of a programme or policy:

- Do you agree, at first glance, with the proposed objectives? With the suggested orientations?
- What criteria and principles should be prioritized?

### **READING THROUGH THE DOCUMENTATION**

Insofar as is possible, acquire documentation related to the project at hand to familiarize yourself with its contents ahead of the public consultation.

If necessary, don't hesitate to seek out more detailed information from your borough office, the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*, or the *Direction du greffe* (City Clerk's office) at City Hall, as the case may be.

### **WRITING DOWN YOUR INITIAL OBSERVATIONS**

Start by writing down, in a few words (i.e., about a half-page):

- ▶ what you feel concerned about; and
- ▶ what you find interesting when reading the project submitted for consultation.

If necessary, make a list of the issues you as a community are currently dealing with and that would either be exacerbated or, on the contrary, solved if the project were to go through.

Having these notes handy will help you direct your reading of the documentation as well as your search for information according to aspects that are more important to you. The questions and comments that you formulate will, in turn, be focused on the points you deem most important.

Also, having made a short list of your concerns ahead of time, you will be able to add or remove points to or from the list according to information gleaned during the consultation process.

### *Helpful hint*

Ask, if necessary, who the promoter is:

- Montréal?
- A not-for-profit organization?
- A citizen?
- A private company?
- A teaching institution?
- A public agency?
- Etc.

### *Helpful hint*

Ask, if necessary, who is making the decision:

- City Council?
- The Montréal Executive Committee?
- The borough council?
- The executive of a municipal department?
- Etc.

### *Helpful hint*

Specify what kind of information you wish to obtain:

- Data; e.g., statistics, costs, timetable?
- Legal or contractual information (e.g., agreement between the parties, city's contribution)?
- Technical information?
- General information; e.g., the project orientations, the guiding principles?
- Etc.

## PREPARING QUESTIONS

Your questions can be aimed at:

- ▶ obtaining facts or clarifications on certain points or adding to the knowledge you already have of the project;
- ▶ confirming an aspect of the project about which you may have doubts.

If your time is limited, write down your questions and organize them into categories; e.g.:

- ▶ Questions related to understanding:  
“What is meant by this word? What does this technical jargon (zoning, density) mean?”  
“Which law(s) will govern the decision-making process? Which municipal by-law(s)? Which administrative guideline(s)?”
- ▶ Questions that seek clarification:  
“The promoter presented the results of a traffic study. I’m not familiar with the terminology used in such studies. Would it be possible for the promoter to explain the results in simple language, so that I can be sure I understand the study, especially in terms of what it means for my neighbourhood?”
- ▶ Questions asked because the documentation provides no information about a particular issue:  
“The documentation refers to a government programme. Could we have an explanation of the nature of this programme?”

List the questions in the order of the importance you ascribe to each (maximum one page). Consider that, depending on the context, you may not be able to ask all of them.

If you feel it is useful, ask neighbours to help you flesh out your questions, and then ask them if they understand what it is you need to know, whether you could be more clear, if you have left out anything important, etc.

### *Helpful hint*

The suggested approach is presented in a detailed manner, but conducting it usually does not require much preparation time and it may be succinct.

## **FORMULATING YOUR POSITION AND STRUCTURING YOUR ARGUMENTS**

(around one page)

As you familiarize yourself with the documentation and write down your concerns and questions, your position will gradually begin to take shape.

Specific arguments will also begin to take shape. Write them down in a few words and rank them in a certain order (e.g., most to least important, things that appear fundamental to you vs. things that seem trivial). This will help you refine your arguments during the actual consultation phase, as you hear answers to questions from the public that are asked before yours.

### **TO SUM UP:**

#### **STEP 1 PRIOR TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

##### ***BECOME INFORMED***

Read the documentation, writing down initial observations and questions as you go.

Sort your questions:

- according to aspects of the project that are of particular interest to you;
- in order of the importance you ascribe to each.

The idea here is to make sure you fully understand the project before formulating your final opinion.

## STEP 2 DURING PUBLIC CONSULTATION: ASK QUESTIONS

- Listen to the presentation of the project;
- Ask questions;
- Listen to questions from others.

### LISTENING TO THE PROJECT PRESENTATION

Listen to the person(s) in charge of the project give a brief presentation of it.

Add to your list any new questions that come to mind on hearing the presentation of the project, and cross off any that the presentation has answered.

Under the usual procedure, you will register on-site and have the right to ask two questions, each with sub-questions. This method is designed to give all participants the opportunity to ask their questions. If need be, however, you may register a second time.

### ASKING QUESTIONS

This point in the process is your opportunity to ask for clarifications and make sure you have fully understood the project.

Since your questions are already prepared, it will be much easier for you to ask them in public.

#### ***Some suggestions***

- Feel free to ask questions that might seem unimportant at first: the answers can sometimes be instructive.
- Avoid prefacing your questions with comments.  
By doing so, you don't use up time allotted to other questions—both yours and those of the other participants. Also, you avoid the risk of the answer being a response to your comments, not your question.
- If you feel the need—e.g., because of “information overload,” new aspects that need to be considered, or a large number of citizens who still wish to speak—you can ask if it would be possible to continue the session the next day.

#### *Helpful hint*

If the consultation is to be held in a single session, remember that during that same session you have the chance to ask questions, study the answers to those questions, and then express an opinion. In this regard, the preparations you made in Step 1 (i.e., become informed prior to the public assembly) may come in very handy.

After the question period has ended, organize the observations you have written down into:

- what you approve of;
- what bears further investigation;
- what you would suggest;
- what worries you;
- what you disapprove of.

Select the key messages you wish to convey over all others.

### *Helpful hint*

#### ASK CLEAR QUESTIONS; HERE'S HOW

Asking clear questions will help you obtain answers that will in turn help you fully understand the project submitted for public consultation.

Example: Mrs. Therrien has learned by reading a summary of a development project that there will be changes to street traffic patterns. Her concern is that this will have an impact on safety for the children in the neighbourhood.

She can word her question one of two ways, but one will provide the most informative answer.

#### *FIRST QUESTION*

What would be the changes in traffic patterns on my street?

#### *SECOND QUESTION*

What would be the changes:

- During the hours when children are on their way to school, between 8 and 8:30 a.m.?
- ... and when they are on their way home, between 3:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.?

By asking the reworded (second) question, Mrs. Therrien will get an answer that is precise enough to either reassure her or enable her to focus attention on neighbourhood children's safety when the time comes to make her opinions known.

## LISTENING TO QUESTIONS FROM OTHERS

The answers of the questions asked by citizens may provide you with new information and might contain some of the clarifications you are seeking. You will then be able to reword your questions or even get rid of some.

Also, answers to questions from other participants might still lead you to fine-tune your point of view and give your presentation more impact. Therefore, avoid giving an opinion immediately after you get the answers to your questions.

Listen to the answers without making any judgments. It may be that the person(s) in charge of the project cannot provide you with a satisfactory answer. You can take this into account when it comes time for you to present your opinion.

### *Helpful hint*

You are taking part in a public consultation meeting and opinions are expressed before the citizens have finished asking questions...

You can ask for that the part reserved for questions be completed and that the opinions phase follow afterward.

**TO SUM UP:**

**STEP 2  
DURING PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**ASK QUESTIONS**

- Listen carefully to the project presentation.
- Listen to others' questions and the answers they are given.
- Ask concise, clear questions. Clear questions demand clear answers.

The idea here is to refine your knowledge of the project by asking questions, and to verify whether your perceptions are well founded.



**TESTIMONIAL**

*“In a public consultation, the questions from the public form an extremely useful phase. This is when citizens obtain clarifications about things they may not be covered in the documentation, make sure they understand, have an opportunity to ask for complementary information, and become familiar with the various facets of the decision-making process or the constraints that may be affecting it. Following this—that is, after they have heard the responses to all the questions, citizens can formulate more clear or nuanced opinions.”*

—Raymond Levac, citizen, Borough of Verdun,  
and member, Task Force on Democracy

### STEP 3

## DURING PUBLIC CONSULTATION: EXPRESS YOUR OPINION

- Refine your arguments and your position;
- Prepare your presentation, targeting the essential points;
- Express your opinion.

The consultation process must allow citizens to express their opinions, whatever they may be.

#### *IMPORTANT*

Are you unused to speaking in public and afraid of the reactions from people in the room or the people leading the public assembly?

You may rest assured that, whatever your opinion, you will be heard and your point of view will be respected by everyone present in the room.

### REVIEWING YOUR ARGUMENTS AND YOUR POSITION

Remember that during the presentation of the project and following the answers to citizens' questions, you will have jotted down suggestions that came to mind.

Based on everything that you now know about the project, you can revisit the observations and concerns you wrote down originally.

Depending on whether the information provided has the effect of easing or reinforcing any reservations you have about the project, state whether you agree or do not agree with the project, and explain why.

Try to specify, insofar as is possible, your position, your arguments and your recommendations:

- ▶ Does the project have any benefits in your eyes?
- ▶ Do you have suggestions to make that are likely to improve the project?
- ▶ Do you have reservations about the project?
- ▶ Are you worried about certain impacts the project may have?
- ▶ Would you like to see more verifications conducted? Changes to the project?
- ▶ Do you disagree with the project?

Keep in mind that you are not obligated to respond to each and every aspect of the project.

## PREPARING YOUR PRESENTATION AND TARGETING THE ESSENTIAL POINTS

**Prepare an outline of your presentation** (around one page)

If you will be giving your presentation orally, it's a good idea to prepare notes—simple, direct remarks written in your own words. It will be useful for you to have a written outline that fits on one page. Not only will it help you properly convey your key message; it may be a help to you in controlling any nervousness you might feel.

Remember: the main thing is to express your opinion.

### *Helpful hint*

If you are getting ready to express an opinion out loud...

Since you will typically have between 5 and 10 minutes, start with one or two points on which you wish to focus attention because they contain your key messages.

You can then outline your point of view according to the following scenario:

#### **PREFACE**

"My name is [...].

I am here today as a neighbourhood resident [...].

A number of us in the neighbourhood discussed the project amongst ourselves..."

#### **ACKNOWLEDGE**

"We thank you [Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman], for this opportunity to speak here today and express our opinion."

#### **INTRODUCE**

State your position: "We are favourable [somewhat favourable, rather unfavourable, etc.] to..."

#### **DEVELOP**

Present the main points of your message:

- What you feel is beneficial or non-beneficial and why;
- What you are concerned about;
- What you feel should be preserved or something to which you ascribe importance in your neighbourhood or on your street;
- The problems you are currently dealing with;
- What you are suggesting as ways to improve the project, if need be.

#### **CONCLUDE**

Remind your listeners of your position and go over the one or two points that encompass the main idea of your message; e.g., a specific recommendation, concerns that have not been given sufficient consideration (or have not been considered at all) in the project planning.

## Prepare a brief

If you will be presenting a brief, remember that there are no standards to respect in terms of its length or format. What is most important is that the opinion and arguments you present in the brief are relevant to the issue submitted for consultation. In preparing your brief, you can proceed as follows:

- ▶ Identify the aspects of the project about which you wish to express an opinion.
- ▶ Write down all of the information you have and then write down the considerations that occur to you.
- ▶ Sort your notes into: your opinion, your arguments and criteria and, lastly, your recommendations.  
Use the contents of your notes to map out a plan, based on which you will write your brief.  
If you feel it is useful, have people you know read your text and use their comments to refine your point of view.

### TO SUM UP:

#### STEP 3 DURING PUBLIC CONSULTATION EXPRESS YOUR OPINION

If need be, in light of the documentation and the answers provided to the various questions, review your arguments and reconsider your opinion.

When you speak or present your brief, target the essential points with which you agree or disagree, and explain why.

The idea is for your argument and point of view to be heard and well understood.



### TESTIMONIAL

*“When there is a public hearing into a major project, I appreciate it when we are given enough time to prepare a brief. There are always so many elements to consider after the project is presented and in consideration of the answers we have obtained, and I want to set forth my point of view properly. Expressing my opinion on projects makes me feel I am a full-fledged citizen.”*

—Niki Messas, citizen, Borough of Ahuntsic-Cartierville,  
and member, Task Force on Democracy

## MODULE 2

### THE PROCESS OF A PUBLIC HEARING HOW IT WORKS

#### MODEL PRESENTED

Public consultation held by an advisory commission made up of a chairperson and commissioners from civil society—as, for example, the commissions held by the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*.

When the meeting is a commission of the City Council or one of certain kinds of public meetings held by the boroughs, the chairperson is an elected municipal official.

There are also other types of participation in which, for example, the expertise of citizens is solicited with regard to a project, programme or policy.

Such participation can, for instance, be in the form of a working group (see Module 3).

Some citizens prefer to familiarize themselves with the process of a **public hearing** so that they are more comfortable when they attend one.

The process described below applies generally to the formula of a hearing with **two distinct sessions**, separated in time, in which citizens are invited to ask questions during the first session after listening to a presentation of the project, and then submit briefs or express their opinions orally during the second session.

**By making the necessary adjustments**, the process described here can also be applied to public consultation meetings consisting of a single session.

#### OPENING OF THE HEARING

The chairperson calls the meeting to order and then explains:

- ▶ the mandate and subjects of the public consultation, as well as the timetable;
- ▶ the two-part process; and
- ▶ how citizens can participate in each part of the hearing.

#### FIRST PART

##### **Presentation of the project submitted for public consultation**

- ▶ The chairperson invites those in charge of the project to present a broad outline of the project.

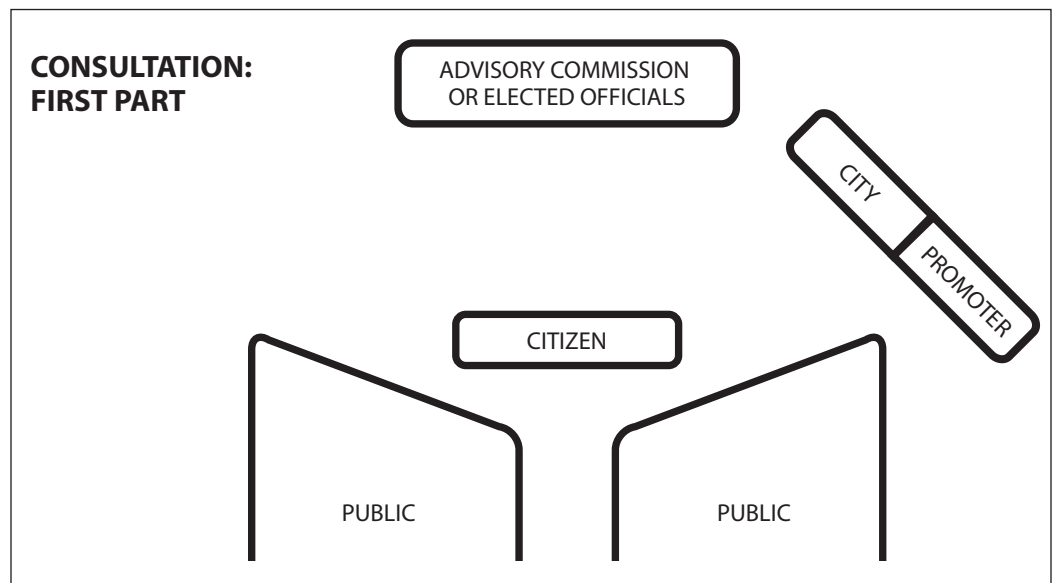
##### **Question period**

- ▶ The chairperson invites citizens in attendance to ask questions in turn. The chairperson will take steps to ensure that citizens who ask questions feel comfortable, and ask them to address their questions to him/her directly.
- ▶ The representatives of the City or, as the case may be, the promoter are then asked to respond to the questions. It is possible to ask for clarifications. The answers and requests for clarifications must also be addressed to the chairperson.
- ▶ For each intervention, the number of questions is usually limited to two, so as to give everyone a chance to ask their questions. You may be able to speak again if there is time.
- ▶ When there are no more speakers, or if after a certain amount of time the same questions are being repeated, the chairperson will announce that the question period is over.
- ▶ The number of sessions is determined by the number of participants.

- ▶ The people heading the public hearing are also entitled to ask questions seeking clarifications about the project.
- ▶ The chairperson informs the citizens in attendance of how much time they have to prepare their presentations and write their briefs (e.g., one or two weeks), explains how to register for the next session, and specifies the deadline for doing so.

For this first part of the consultation, the room layout is usually as follows:

- ▶ A citizen who is asking questions is seated in the centre, at a table with a microphone or standing, with the public behind him or her, and may be accompanied by one or two other people.
- ▶ The chairperson and, as the case may be, the commissioner(s) are seated facing the citizen to listen to the questions.
- ▶ The representatives of the City, if need be, or the project promoter are seated at tables laid out along the sides of the room; they listen to the questions and prepare their answers; the chairperson, meanwhile, ensures that the public's questions have been properly answered.



## SECOND PART

### **Public opinions**

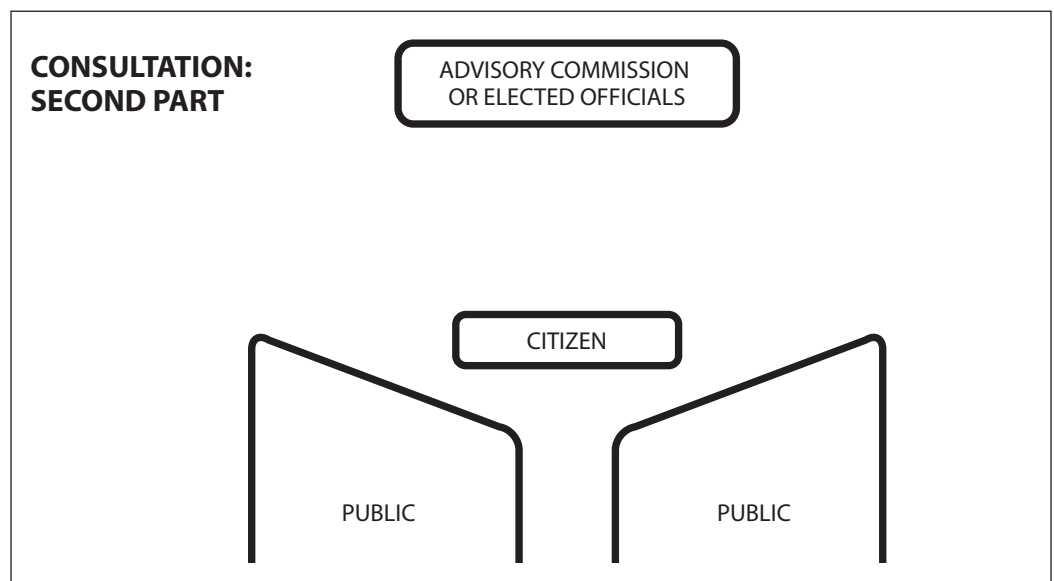
- ▶ The chairperson invites citizens to come to the microphone or sit at the table reserved for members of the public, in turn, to express their opinions orally or submit their briefs.
- ▶ Each citizen may be accompanied by one or two other people and usually has between 5 and 10 minutes in which to speak. This period may seem short, but when properly used, it is enough time to express an informed opinion.
- ▶ After each presentation, the people leading the public hearing, and only those people, may ask questions to make sure they have fully understood the meaning.
- ▶ The representatives of the City or the promoter do not intervene during this second part, which is reserved for the presentation of public opinions.

This way of proceeding enables citizens to express their opinions under optimum conditions.

During this second part of the consultation, the room layout is usually as follows:

- ▶ A citizen who is speaking is seated at a table with a microphone, or standing, with the public behind.
- ▶ The chairperson and, as the case may be, the commissioner(s) are seated facing the citizen to listen to him/her.

At the end of this second part, the chairperson thanks the citizens as well as the representatives of the City and, if need be, the promoter, and then informs the public of the next steps in the process; e.g., the scheduled date for filing of the report.



### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING OR PUBLIC HEARING?**

These two consultation formats are those most frequently used by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal. City Council commissions and borough meetings most often use the public consultation meeting format.

#### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING**

Single-session consultation that includes the presentation of the project, questions from citizens, and expression of opinions. If need be, there may be one or more extra sessions.

#### **PUBLIC HEARING**

Consultation held in several sessions, in two distinct blocks. The time period between the two must be sufficiently long to allow citizens to finalize their points of view and, as the case may be, write a brief for presentation during the second block, which is reserved for the expression of opinions.



### **TESTIMONIAL**

*“I regularly attend public consultations, and often see citizens who don’t have much experience speaking in public. At first, they are a little embarrassed, but the chairperson quickly puts them at ease and makes their task easier. They are listened to very carefully and non-judgmentally.”*

Jean Hubert, citizen,  
Borough of Rosemont–La Petite-Patrie, and member, Task Force on Democracy

## MODULE 3

### CONSULTATION IN THE FORM OF A WORKING GROUP

#### *MODEL PRESENTED*

This module refers to a citizen consultation process in which a working group is set up.

There are also more formal public consultations held by elected officials or advisory commissions (see Module 2).

In the search for practical solutions, a working group will often be set up.

The working group is usually made up of citizens, elected officials and municipal civil servants.

With some adaptation, the same basic three steps we have been referring to—become informed, ask questions, express an opinion—also apply to the working group format.

#### **STEP 1. WORKING GROUP: BECOME INFORMED**

With other citizens, draw up a list of problems that you have encountered and sort them in order of importance.

At this stage in the work process, inform the representatives of the City. Keep to the facts. Later on you will have the opportunity to speak up about the possible causes of the problems you describe. At this stage the municipal authorities will listen without making any justifications.

It will then be the turn of the City representatives to provide the information in their possession; e.g., complaints received, the resources they have, how operations are organized, standards, and budgets. Listen without being judgmental. Do not intervene during this stage.

Make sure that all participants—citizens, elected officials and civil servants—have arrived at the same understanding of the situation. This will make it easier to reach agreement on solutions.

#### *Helpful hint*

Seek agreement that the reports presenting the committee's observations is transmitted before the next meeting of the group. It will be useful in preparing for the next step.

#### **STEP 2. WORKING GROUP: ASK QUESTIONS**

Ask your questions and listen carefully to those of the other participants as well. Don't hesitate to ask for clarifications to make sure you understand properly.

You can ask, for example, that newly provided information be written on a board so that everyone can keep it in mind.

**STEP 3.**  
**WORKING GROUP: EXPRESS AN OPINION**

Throughout the work process, gradually write down the suggestions that come to mind. This will ensure that you do not forget them when it comes time to explore possible solutions.

Share your proposals, as well as your ideas and observations about other participants' proposals.

Make sure, jointly with the City representatives, that there is consensus about the chosen solutions and their methods of application.



**TESTIMONIAL**

*“I’ve had the pleasure of taking part in a working group with citizens, elected officials and civil servants to find solutions to a neighbourhood issue. It’s an enriching experience: you learn a lot about how things work at the municipal level, and the city also learns about the problems that we face and our expectations with regard to municipal services. By working together, it’s much easier to find solutions that are acceptable to all.”*

Delfino Campanile, community organizer,  
Borough of Villeray–Saint-Michel–Parc-Extension, and member, Task Force on Democracy

## MODULE 4

### SOME BASIC RULES OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS

#### CITIZENS' CONTRIBUTION

Quite a few citizens are unused to speaking up in a public forum, and wonder whether they have the skills required to intervene in such a context.

Remember: citizens have wide-ranging knowledge of the area in which they live—knowledge that is particularly rich in information about their neighbourhood. As well, one does not have to be an expert to take part in a consultation and express one's point of view.

#### A FEW BASIC RULES

Generally speaking, a public consultation is:

- ▶ a dialogue between citizens and decision-makers (elected officials, administrators or heads of businesses), during which the public is invited to become informed about a project, ask questions, and express informed opinions.
- ▶ a sort of *contract* whereby decision-makers agree to be influenced by public opinion.

Following some rules helps foster a relationship of trust with citizens. These will mainly cover:

- ▶ the announcement of the consultation;
- ▶ the documentation;
- ▶ the process of public consultation;
- ▶ the post-consultation report;
- ▶ the follow-up to the public consultation.

### *Helpful hint*

You have learned that a public consultation will be held on a subject that is important to you, and some questions come to mind...

- What format will the consultation take?
- Who will lead it? An elected official? A commissioner from the Office de consultation publique de Montréal?
- Will the consultation be in a single session?
- Is there a summary of the documentation?
- How does one go about participating?
- What will the various stages be?
- What will the timetable be?

For answers to the questions you have, contact, as the case may be:

- your borough office;
- the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*;
- the *Direction du greffe* (City Clerk's office).

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CONSULTATION**

Most of the time, citizens are informed that a public consultation is to take place via an announcement in the local newspapers. They may also receive an invitation distributed door-to-door.

The notice of public consultation is published 7 to 15 days ahead of the consultation; its purpose is to explain to the public:

- ▶ the subject about which they are invited to give their opinions;
- ▶ the date(s) and location of the consultation;
- ▶ where they can get more information and, as the case may be, acquire documentation;
- ▶ the steps and timeframe of the public consultation.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

The documentation useful to a proper understanding of the project is made public and accessible at the time the notice is published.

The documentation contains relevant information written in clear language that citizens are able to understand. It may include studies of various kinds, plans, etc. A summary of the project may also be available.

The documentation is usually made available at one of three places: the borough office, the Montréal municipal Web site or the Web site of the Office de consultation publique de Montréal.

### *Helpful hint*

Allowing sufficiently long, reasonable time limits helps ensure the success of a public consultation; e.g., by enabling citizens:

- to become aware of the documentation;
- to prepare a brief following the presentation of the project and the question period.

## **PROCESS OF A PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

To enable citizens to base their opinions on the most comprehensive information possible, a consultation takes place in two distinct parts:

- ▶ First, the *question period*, during which the project submitted for consultation and citizens' questions is presented.
- ▶ Second, the *expressing of opinions*, whereby citizens put forward their various points of view.

In the first part, the answers to the questions enable citizens to obtain additional information or clarifications that will help them fully understand the project and prepare to formulate their opinions.

### ***A process that is respectful of citizens***

The people directing the public consultations are happy to welcome all citizens who wish to speak up. They will make sure the process is respectful of them and allows for the expression of a full range of opinions.

## **POST-CONSULTATION REPORT**

Usually, the report will include:

- ▶ a summary of the project submitted for public consultation;
- ▶ a record of citizens' comments;
- ▶ an analysis of the project and of citizens' comments;
- ▶ opinions or recommendations.

The report is signed by the people who were assigned to organize the consultation and led the public meetings. For example, in the case of the *Office de consultation publique de Montréal*, the commissioners responsible for holding the consultation write the report, add opinions or recommendations, and sign the report.

After it has been filed with the decision-making body, the consultation report is made available to the public.

### *Helpful hint*

If the session has ended and you still do not know when or how the final decision will be made public...

You can ask for that information before the end of the session. Those in charge of the meeting will be happy to respond.

### **FOLLOW-UP TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

It is a good idea for citizens to be informed of the outcomes of a public consultation as well as the ensuing decisions and the reasons for them. This information can be transmitted to the public in different ways.



### **TESTIMONIAL**

*“I believe that citizens who take part in public consultations are driven by a desire to play an active role in their community. Consultation leads to a mutual willingness on the part of the city and its citizens to work together toward the development of community that is more pleasant, more secure and full of life. I have noticed that, when citizens have all the information they need and consensus is the goal on all sides, more often than not we arrive at a situation where there are no losers, even though not all parties will have gained everything they wanted. The simple fact of having been able to take part in the debate makes all the difference.”*

Suzanne Lalonde, citizen,  
Borough of Saint-Laurent, and member, Task Force on Democracy

## CONCLUSION

This practical guide is the concrete expression of a commitment made at the Montréal Summit. We invite you to make use of it according to your needs.

The guide suggests a three-step approach—become informed, ask questions, express your opinion—that is a worthwhile one to adopt for any citizen wishing to state an opinion and sway decision-makers. This approach is not the only one that can be used, however; there are other suitable ways of preparing for a public consultation process.

With that in mind, your comments and suggestions on how this guide might be improved are most welcome. You may transmit them to the following people:

► Montréal Summit (Task Force on Democracy):

- Pierre Chevalier (872-7802 or [pchevalier@ville.montreal.qc.ca](mailto:pchevalier@ville.montreal.qc.ca))
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► Office de consultation publique de Montréal:

- Alain Cardinal, Secretary-General (872-3568 or [alaincardinal@ville.montreal.qc.ca](mailto:alaincardinal@ville.montreal.qc.ca))



**TAKING PART IN PUBLIC CONSULTATION:  
BECOMING INFORMED, ASKING QUESTIONS  
AND EXPRESSING OPINIONS**

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CITIZENS

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