

## Navigating City Processes – Long Range Plans

An invitation to an open house, one more online survey, another notice in your mailbox?!? It can be tough to tack and weigh in on all the projects going on at the City of Portland's bureaus in charge of land use planning (Bureau of Planning and Sustainability ([BPS](#))), transportation planning (Portland Bureau of Transportation ([PBOT](#))), and development activities (Bureau of Development Services ([BDS](#))). Navigating the landscape of planning processes and development projects can sometimes feel like an endless maze of information, website links, and acronyms. In a city as busy as Portland has been over the last decade, getting back to the basics can sometimes provide clarity in the chaos and help residents and community groups prioritize what livability issues mean the most to them.

This article is intended to help any neighbor or land use representative understand the process for long-range planning and, therefore, be an effective resource and advocate.

**What are we talking about?** This article will be focusing on the legislative process for planning projects administered by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS).

### ***...Let's break that down:***

- “Legislative” makes this title seem very formal, and that’s because it is! The City is required, by Oregon state law, to move projects which meet legislative criteria through a planning process with minimum requirements relating to time periods, notices for residents and affected businesses, and draft releases to the public for review.
- The “process” is the steps taken (as required by law) from big idea to final completion with all the details worked out.
- The “planning projects” are those long-range plans that typically set goals and policies for future development and growth in the city. This can be broad, such as setting a goal to improve health and livability in the community, or it can be specific such as stating all homes in a specific area may not exceed 30 feet.

**Examples include:** Portland’s Comprehensive Plan, Transportation System Plan, and Central City 2035 Plan are all large city-wide projects. Other examples include projects like the Map Refinement Project or Historic Code Project that may only impact specific properties.

**The Legislative Planning Process does not include:** Development by right and quasi-judicial processes like new home or business construction, alterations to existing homes, or addition of an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU).

However, if you care about these issues, legislative processes often create the rules that new development, alterations, as well as commercial development must follow. In essence, BPS is creating the rules that the Bureau of Development Services *implements* through the development process.

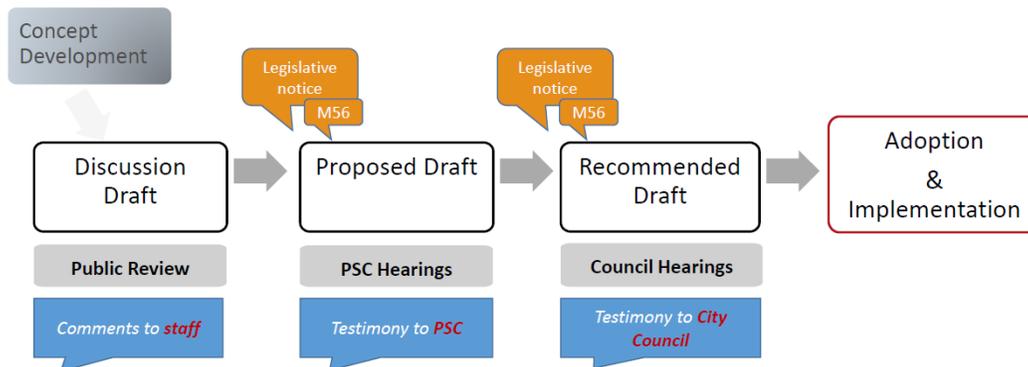
**Why are Legislative Planning Process plans/projects so important?** Most of what gets approved and attention in these plans will be refined and eventually shape what we see in our community. Plans

from the past create the rules or priorities for what gets built today and tomorrow. These plans and projects shape the new homes we see, commercial spaces that make up our main streets, parks, high rises in own downtown, and even dictates the process of demolition and new construction. While sometimes it seems like things are changing overnight, most of the time, it's been on the shelf, waiting for funding or market forces for years before we see it in our community. This [video](#) provides an overview of how the planning process works for long-range plans.

While it can be challenging to conceptualize the outcome of some of these long-range planning projects and plans, they are a crucial step in making your priorities and values a reality in your community.

In order to impact planning projects, it is critical to understand how the process works.

## Legislative process for planning projects



*Note: Development by right and quasi-judicial processes have a different path.*

### Initial Phase: Concept development

This phase is where residents, bureau staff, policy makers, and committees come up with ideas to address challenges or meet the vision of a changing and growing City. It's a time for brainstorming, exploration, and early conversations that will shape the first draft, the discussion draft. The concept development phase technically falls outside the Legislative Process but, as mentioned above, is an area which the City may choose to go above and beyond the bare minimum requirements to start community engagement. Therefore, there are not specific rules around what this phase has to look like, comment periods, or notice. The outcome from this phase may be a concept report, a set of recommendations, or no formal documentation at all.

## Phase 1: Discussion Draft.

A Discussion Draft is the first required phase of the legislative process; it is crafted and shared out by BPS staff from the concept phase brainstorming, their expertise, and specific direction from policy makers and City leadership (i.e. City Council, the mayor etc.). When a Discussion Draft is released it's an opportunity for the community to comment in the early stages of the planning process. During the Discussion Draft phase, comments will be taken **by staff**, who will make edits based on feedback and bring a Proposed Draft to the Planning and Sustainability Commission for public hearings in the next phase.

- **How to be an effective advocate in this phase of the process:** As a community member or group crafting your comments, consider the audience. Comments to staff should focus on items like methodology and technical fixes. Use data or city goals or other policies to back up your argument whenever possible. Staff do not have the ability to make value-based judgements or alter goals or policies in the city, therefore, if you have overarching concerns about the policy, the Planning and Sustainability Commission and City Council are a better audience for these types of comments/concerns/advocacy efforts. As always, providing information in a clear and respectful way will get you or your advocacy group further in your effort. Typically comments to staff on the various projects can be made directly to the project staff or on the Portland Map App. The project website will provide project due dates, list any outreach events, and to who to submit your comments.

## Phase 1.5: Notification

Between the time the Discussion Draft period closes and before the release of the Proposed Draft, property owners (residents and businesses) impacted by proposed changes will be notified by mail. This is often referred to as *Measure 56 notification* because that is the measure that put this notice into place. The intent of the notice is to let property owners know a land use change is proposed for their property.

## Phase 2: Proposed Draft

Staff share information, collect feedback from the community and stakeholders and update the Discussion Draft as they determine is appropriate. An updated draft, called the Proposed Draft is developed for the [Planning and Sustainability Commission](#). The Planning and Sustainability Commission (PSC) is composed of 11 volunteer members with expertise in a range of areas and its charge is to act for the benefit of the people of Portland. As a group, they have a variety of viewpoints, and together they work to balance and optimize the goals of the City. The PSC often holds work sessions and hearings to discuss the Proposed Draft and hear from the community. The PSC debates the proposal, collects feedback, and makes edits to the project/plan.

- **Actions:** If there is an aspect of the plan that is important to you, it is important to check that what was in the Discussion Draft is still in the Proposed Draft, and then to advocate for that to

the PSC by submitting written testimony and/or presenting at a Hearing. It's important to note that any aspect of the project may change as it goes through these three draft phases.

- **How to be heard:** Comments that are effective and helpful during this phase include both technical and broader policy and/or methodology-related comments. For tips on how to make a difference at a PSC or City Council hearing, go [here](#). Keep in mind, this is also an opportunity to voice your support for projects or specific changes you support. This gives these committees and decision-makers' confidence in moving forward with what is being proposed.

### **Phase 2.5: Notification**

Between the time the Proposed Draft period closes and before the release of the Recommended Draft, property owners (residents and businesses) impacted by proposed changes will be notified by mail. This is often referred to as *Measure 56 notification* because that is the measure that put this notice into place. The intent of the notice is to let property owners know a land use change is proposed for their property.

### **Phase 3: Recommended Draft – Council Hearings**

The PSC has incorporated their changes into the Discussion Draft and are making a formal recommendation, via the Recommended Draft to the City's decision-making body – City Council – to adopt city policy. The City Council will review this updated draft, the Recommended Draft, in the final phase of the planning process. City Council will review and either edit, approve outright, or not approve the Recommended Draft. Deliberation is done primarily during City Council Meetings, where the public is invited to attend and provide testimony in person. View upcoming City Council agenda items [here](#). Community members and groups may also submit written testimony or comments during this phase.

- **Actions:** If there is an aspect of the plan that is important to you, it is important to verify it is still in the Recommended Draft, and then to advocate for that to City Council by submitting written testimony and/or presenting at a Hearing. It's important to voice support of projects or specific aspects of the project/plan you support to ensure it passes as written. It also helps during budget time, for city leadership to know that this particular effort is supported and, therefore, needs to be funded.
- **How to be heard:** Comments that are effective and helpful during this phase include both technical and broader policy and/or methodology-related comments. For tips on how to make a difference at a PSC or City Council hearing, go [here](#).

### **Post-project Phase: Implementation**

Even after a project has been approved, implementation can consist of many small projects and funding allocations. Large planning projects require tracking and support to assure funding is provided and goals are achieved.