

Plan Resolution Process: Public Plans and Programs

Stage	What Actions Occur at this Stage	Factors Potentially Causing Changes from Previous Stages	How Citizens Can Monitor Plan Resolution
Initiation	Initial work may occur within staff offices out of view of the public. Sometimes the project or program will appear on a City Council agenda early in the process.	A plan, program, ordinance change or other action may be initiated for many reasons. City Council may direct the action. An existing plan or ordinance may require the action. Usually staff of the affected agency will be aware in advance that the effort will occur in a given year.	Monitor city council agendas; monitor local planning boards, transportation boards, etc.; talk with staff about upcoming plans, programs and other actions that are of direct interest.
Early Staff Work	Much of the early work on plans, programs and ordinance changes may occur out of the public view.	This stage can be of critical importance because budgetary decisions are made about the scale of effort to be devoted and the type of process to be followed.	Monitor the agendas and minutes of relevant boards and commissions. Some city and county departments publish newsletters. Many also maintain web sites with information about ongoing activities.
Procurement of Consultant Services	Many projects are too large to be undertaken "in house" or may require special expertise. In such cases, a consultant services procurement process will be followed.	At this stage important decisions about the scope and budget of the effort are made. The selection of a consultant is important because different firms or individuals may approach the same assignment differently.	Most procurements are advertised. Agency web sites often provide information about the procurement process and about specific procurements. Sometimes the process allows citizens to be involved in the selection process.
Permanent Board or Commission	In most cities and counties, major plans, programs or ordinance changes are carried out under the direction of a permanent board or commission, such as a transportation advisory board, a planning commission, etc.	Depending on the local situation and the type of effort, a permanent board may have control over the outcome and may be the approval entity. In other cases, they will make a recommendation to the elected council or board.	Permanent boards and commissions can readily be monitored. Their agendas and minutes are public information and usually are published on agency web sites. Their meetings are open public sessions that anyone can attend. Normally there is an opportunity to address the board and it can be a good idea to submit written testimony or letters.
Advisory or Oversight Committee	On major plans, programs or ordinance changes, it is common for a special advisory or oversight committee of stakeholders to be established to guide the work.	Advisory and oversight committees play an important role in shaping the outcome, but normally do not formally approve or adopt plans, programs or ordinance changes.	Request appointment to the committee; attend committee meetings if possible; monitor committee activities on agency web site.
Draft Document	Normally, a draft of the proposed plan, program or ordinance will be made available for review and comment.	On almost any important plan, program or ordinance, significant changes will be made to the draft proposal.	Formal comment on draft documents is of critical importance for both practical and legal reasons.
Final Adoption	The plan, program, ordinance or other action may be approved by a permanent board or commission, but more often will be presented to an elected council or board for approval.	Most ordinances and other major actions will go through multiple "readings" and will require multiple votes. Often, changes to the proposed action are possible through first and sometimes second readings.	These actions will be taken in open public hearings before the elected body. Opportunity will be provided for public comment and testimony.

