

# Getting Involved in Local Projects

*A Quick-start Guide to Becoming a Community Advocate*



# 1. Why Your Voice Matters

Public projects—like parks, shade trees, safer crosswalks, and neighborhood flood protections—directly shape our daily lives. By staying informed and sharing your experiences early on, you can help ensure projects address real community needs and avoid costly mistakes. Your presence also widens the circle of who’s heard. When more residents speak up, their current communities are more likely to benefit, maintenance gets planned, and job opportunities can stay local.

It’s simple to start: sign up for notices, join one meeting, or send a short comment. You don’t need to be an expert - your lived experience is the expertise - and even just a few minutes of your time can have long-term, positive impact for you and your community.

## 2. Start here: pick your time budget



**If you have 5-15 minutes  
(no meeting needed)**

1

### **Subscribe to your city's alerts.**

- Go to your city website and navigate to "Notify Me," "Notifications," or "Sign up for Updates" and enter your email address to start receiving updates
- Also sign up for Community Development/Planning and Parks & Recreation updates, if available.

*Tip: If you're having trouble finding where to sign up, click or hover over the website menu option "How Do I..." or navigate to the website's search bar and type in "Notifications" or "Sign up."*

2

**Follow your local leaders and departments** on social media (Instagram, Facebook, X/Twitter) and sign up for newsletters (City Council, Public Works, Parks, Water, Transportation).

3

**Send a short email** asking how to participate using the ready-to-use template in Appendix A, or complete a project survey if available.

### **Stay in the Loop with the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC)**

#### **➤ Get updates in your inbox (2 minutes)**

- Subscribe to our e-newsletter at [rmc.ca.gov/Newsletter](http://rmc.ca.gov/Newsletter).
- This is the easiest way to hear about project updates, grants, jobs, and upcoming events in your community.

#### **➤ Track Board meetings (1 minute now; then as needed)**

- These are public meetings where park and open-space projects are reviewed and voted on for grant funding, project updates are shared, and upcoming plans are discussed.
- **Meeting hub:** The Rivers and Mountain Conservancy Board webpage lists dates and agendas/materials.
  - Typical cadence: The Board normally meets the third Monday of each month, but dates can change - always check the webpage before planning to join
  - Agendas are typically posted 10 days before each meeting.
- **Add it to your calendar.** Open the [Board page](#), note the next meeting date/time, and drop a recurring reminder on your calendar (with a 10-day "agenda posted" alert).



## If you have 30–60 minutes (a light introduction)

- 1 Attend a Commission meeting:** These are often smaller and less intimidating than full City Council meetings. Consider a Parks & Recreation or Planning Commission meeting as a good place to start.
- 2 Watch a portion of a public meeting:** You can drop into a virtual or in-person meeting for just 20–30 minutes to observe how things work.

### Not sure where to start? Join a Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Board Meeting!

➤ **How to attend:**

- Meetings are held in-person with the option to join virtually (online)
- Details and links are on each agenda, which can be found here: [rmc.ca.gov/Meetings](https://rmc.ca.gov/Meetings)

➤ **How to comment:**

- Agendas explain when/how public comment works (in person or virtual).
- If you prefer, submit a short written comment using the agenda's instructions.

➤ **Language or access needs?**

- Use the contact on the agenda to request Spanish interpretation or accessibility accommodations a few days ahead. See [Appendix A](#) for a ready-to-use email template that you can copy, paste, and send.



## If you have 90–150 minutes (the full picture)

1

### Attend a City Council or School Board meeting when your topic is scheduled.

- a. Skim the agenda the day before and mark any items about parks, trees/shade, schools, streets, safety, or new projects in your neighborhood. (5-10 minutes)
- b. Consider writing a 60-second comment or use the ready-to-use comment in Appendix B and invite a friend to join you. Giving a public comment is completely optional, but if you do choose to speak, you will be prepared with something you can read off of - no need to memorize!

2

### Participate in hands-on events:

- a. Open House: drop-in to see posters, maps, and other project materials where staff are available to answer questions one-on-one.
- b. Walking Tour/Walk Audit: Walk your neighborhood with staff to point out issues like heat, flooding, or dangerous traffic.
- c. Design Workshop: Join small-group activities to help design a project or set priorities.

## Follow Along Between Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Board Meetings (2-3 minutes/month)

- **Skim the next Board meeting agenda** when it's posted to our [Board Meetings](#) webpage; flag items about parks, open space, trails, shade/trees, or watershed projects.
- **Scan [our website](#) for news and project spotlights** under "Announcements"
- **Follow us on your preferred social media platform**
  - Instagram: @riversandmountainsconservancy
  - X: @RMConservancy
  - Facebook: @RiversMountainsConservancy (Facebook Page linked [HERE](#))



## 3. Know who represents you - and how to use their offices



### Find your Representatives

Use your home address to find out who represents you.

Tip: Save their names and phone numbers in your phone's contacts!

- State Level (CA Assembly & Senate) - official lookup tool: [findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov](http://findyourrep.legislature.ca.gov)
- U.S. House (Congressmember): [house.gov](http://house.gov) (see "Find Your Representative")
- U.S. Senate (California): [senate.gov](http://senate.gov) → "Senators/Contacting U.S. Senators."
- L.A. County (Supervisor & other districts): use the "LA County District Locator" [appcenter.gis.lacounty.gov/districtlocator](http://appcenter.gis.lacounty.gov/districtlocator)
- City of Los Angeles (if you live in LA City): [neighborhoodinfo.lacity.gov](http://neighborhoodinfo.lacity.gov)
- Orange County voters: [ocvote.gov/vlt](http://ocvote.gov/vlt) → verify registration and "View your Elected Officials."
- L.A. County voters: [lavote.gov](http://lavote.gov) → "Find My Election Information."



# Key staff to know – and who to share your concerns, priorities, or ideas with

Here’s a breakdown of who does what, from your neighborhood to the federal government.

## Your City Council Office (Start here for most local issues)

- **Who to contact:** Look for a **Field/District Representative** (also called a Community Liaison).
- **What they do:** This person is your main point of contact. They can walk the block with you and get your issues to the right city department.
- **Contact them about:** On-the-ground problems like heat, flooding, speeding, or park maintenance.

City Departments (topic experts and project leads)	What they do	Contact them about...
Public Works/ Streets	Handles physical infrastructure.	Potholes, sidewalks, lighting, and trash.
Transportation/ Mobility (may be overseen by Public Works)	Manages how people move.	Crosswalks, traffic calming, and bike safety.
Parks and Recreation	Manages green spaces.	Broken playground equipment or needing more shade trees.
School District (School Board or Facilities/ Operations Department)	Manages school grounds.	Shade on playgrounds or safe routes to school.

## County Supervisor’s office

- **Who to contact:** A **Field Deputy** or **Constituent Services** staffer.
- **What they do:** Helps with county services or if you live in an "unincorporated area" (not officially part of a city).
- **Contact them about:** Issues with county facilities, parks, or flood control.

## State & Federal offices (for bigger issues)

- **Who to contact:** A **Caseworker** or **Field Representative**.
- **Contact them about:** Help with state or federal agencies (like issues with benefits or paperwork), letters of support for grants, or info on big funding programs.



## Quick Guide: "I have a problem with..." → Who to Call

- ➔ **Flooding, graffiti, or potholes?**  
→ City Public Works + your City Council Field Rep.
- ➔ **Speeding or unsafe crosswalks?**  
→ City Transportation Department + your City Council Field Rep.
- ➔ **Broken park equipment, maintenance needs, or need more shade trees?**  
→ City Parks/Urban Forestry Department + Field/District Representative
- ➔ **Questions or input about a new development?**  
→ City Planning/Community Development Department
- ➔ **Need a letter of support for a project?**  
→ State/Federal Field Rep or Council Policy Deputy
- ➔ **How to find them fast:** On your elected's page look for "Staff," "District Office," "Field Team," "Contact." On department pages look for "Projects," "Who to contact," or a named project manager. If unsure, email the general inbox and ask who handles [your issue] at [your location].





## 4. Navigating Public Meetings



### The Brown Act & Your Rights to Participate

In California, the Brown Act requires local legislative bodies (like city councils and commissions) to do their business publicly - posting agendas in advance, allowing public attendance and comment, and recording actions taken. Officials aren't allowed to make decisions in secret, except for a few limited reasons (like personnel or lawsuits).

#### The Brown Act makes meetings public - here's what that means for you and how to use it.

- **You're allowed in.** Local meetings must be open to the public.
- **You can speak, but don't have to.** You have a legal right to "public comment" (usually 1-3 minutes) on any item on the agenda.
- **You can ask for help.** Request Spanish (or other language) interpretation or accessibility support - ideally a few days ahead. See the Appendix for a ready-to-send email template.
- **You can get information.** Meeting agendas must be posted in advance, and you can request relevant documents and staff contacts.
- **You can join online.** Many meetings offer Zoom or an online comment form - check the agenda.



## Your Mini Glossary

- ✓ **Agenda:** the list of topics for the meeting.
- ✓ **Staff Report:** the short write-up explaining what's being proposed and why.
- ✓ **Public Comment:** your chance to speak (usually 1–3 minutes per person).
- ✓ **Consent Calendar:** a bundle of routine items. If you want one discussed, you can say “please pull Item [#].”
- ✓ **Project Page:** a website with maps, timelines, surveys, and contact info.



## Where to find meeting details & project information

**Every city website looks a little different. Start with these common places:**

- City website → "City Clerk," "Agendas/Minutes," "Council Agenda Center," or "Meetings."
- Planning / Community Development → "Current Projects"
- Parks & Recreation → "Projects," "Park Improvements," "Urban Forestry/Tree Program."
- Public Works / Water / Stormwater → "Projects," "Neighborhood Improvements," or "Capital Projects."
- County (for unincorporated areas) → County Supervisor's page, County Public Works, and County Parks.
- School District → Board agendas (playgrounds, shade structures, joint-use fields, and campus greening).
- Transit → Metro or city transportation pages (open houses and workshops).

If website search is frustrating, paste these into Google (or any search engine):

- site:[yourcity].gov agenda parks
- site:[yourcity].gov planning commission
- "[your city]" "public comment" zoom

## Reading an agenda: keywords to look for

Agendas can be long. These plain-language keywords help you spot items that affect parks, streets, and daily life. If you see them, it's a good sign the topic may interest you.

- **Parks & Open Space:** park improvements, shade/trees, trails, community center, joint-use with schools.
- **Neighborhood Improvements:** safer crosswalks, lighting, traffic calming, bike/walk routes.
- **Streets & Sidewalks:** repaving, curb ramps, bus lanes, green streets, "complete streets."
- **Schools:** fields and playgrounds, shade projects, safe routes to school.
- **Water & Greening:** rain gardens, street trees, flood fixes, neighborhood beautification.
- **Funding & Agreements:** grants, timelines, and who will maintain the project.



## What usually happens (typical agenda flow)

1. **Call to order & roll call**
2. **Public comment (general)** - brief comments on items not on the agenda
3. **Consent calendar** - routine items approved together
4. **Regular items / presentations** - each item is introduced, staff presents, then public comment is taken
5. **Council/Commission questions & action** - discussion and vote or recommendation  
(Agendas vary - yours may have ceremonial items or reports.)



## Who's in the room

- **Elected officials:** City Councilmembers or Commissioners who vote or make recommendations.
- **Staff:** City/County employees (e.g., Public Works, Parks) who present items and answer questions.
- **Clerk:** Runs the meeting, takes public comment, posts agendas/minutes.
- **Community members:** Residents, students, business owners, and CBOs - just like you.



## How public comment works (etiquette made simple)

- **When you can speak:** The agenda or chair will announce public comment for either (a) any topic, or (b) a specific item.
- **How long:** Usually 1-3 minutes per person (posted on the agenda or stated by the chair).
- **How to sign up:** In person, you may fill out a speaker card; online, you may raise your Zoom hand or submit an eComment—follow the agenda instructions.
- **Keep it simple:** Say your name and city/neighborhood, state your point in plain language, and thank them. Reading from notes is totally fine.
- **Be respectful:** No interruptions or clapping during others' comments (some bodies prohibit it). Applause-free "thank you" is always okay.



## New to this? Totally okay

- **Your lived experience matters** - you don't need to be an expert to make a Public Comment.
- If you're nervous, submit an **online comment** and say you support similar comments.
- **You can leave early.** Attend just the start or the one item you care about.
- **Online is flexible.** Cameras **can be off** and your microphone stays muted until it's your turn to comment.



## Make it social (it's easier with a buddy)

- Attend with a friend; sit near folks interested in the same item.
- Start a small interest group (e.g., "Shade & Safe Streets [City]") to coordinate who attends and who emails.
- Share what you learn in WhatsApp/Nextdoor; rotate who gives the 60-second comment.



# 5. Next Steps



## When You're Ready...



**Join a walk audit or clean-up:** Check your city's Parks & Recreation calendar for events like planting days or neighborhood walks.



**Apply for a city commission:** Many cities need residents to serve on boards (like the Parks Commission or Planning Commission). Search your city website for "Boards and Commissions" to see openings.



**Partner with a school:** reach out to your school's principal or PTA to ask about shade trees, gardens, or safe-routes projects—and ask how neighbors can help.



**Invite staff on a walk:** Email your Council Field Rep and ask for a 20-minute walk to show them a problem spot (like a speeding hot spot or an area that floods).



**Keep a few questions handy for meetings, surveys, or design workshops:**

- "How will this project help the people who live here right now?"
- "Who will take care of it (maintenance)?"
- "Can local people be hired for the jobs?"



## Track what you care about (simple table to copy)

<b>Project or Place Name:</b>	
<b>Why it matters to me:</b>	
<b>Who to contact</b> (staff & dept):	
<b>Next step</b> (meeting or deadline/milestone):	
<b>My action</b> (email/speak/share):	
<b>Neighbors to loop in:</b>	

# Appendix A: Copy-and-Paste Email Templates

## **A. Subject: Info on [Project/Plan] and how to participate**

Hello [Clerk/Department/Team],

I'm a resident of [City/Neighborhood] interested in [Project/Plan]. Could you please share: the next meeting date/time and how to join (in person or Zoom), a link to the agenda and staff report, any project webpage or survey, and how to request Spanish interpretation or accessibility support? Please add me to future updates.

Thank you,

[Name]

## **B. Subject: Request for Spanish interpretation at [Date/Meeting]**

Hello Clerk's Office,

I plan to attend the [Board/Commission/Council] meeting on [Date] and would like to request Spanish interpretation for Item [#] / [Project].

Thank you,

[Name], [City].

*(Note: You can swap "Spanish interpretation" for another language or for "ADA accommodation" like wheelchair seating, assistive listening, or other needs.)*

# Appendix B: 60-second Public Comment Templates

You can read these exactly as written or adjust them to fit your style or tone of voice.

## A. Specific agenda item:

Hello, my name is [Name], and I live in [Neighborhood/City].

I support neighborhood projects that make our community safer, greener, and cooler - like more trees and shade, safer streets, and parks we can actually use.

For Item [#] [Project Name or Topic, as written on the meeting agenda], please (1) engage residents early and often with Spanish interpretation and easy-to-understand materials; (2) make sure current neighbors benefit and aren't pushed out; and (3) create local job and training opportunities. Thank you.

## B. General comment (not tied to an item):

Hello, my name is [Name], from [Neighborhood/City].

Please prioritize projects that help us stay safe and healthy - more shade and trees, safer crossings, and clean, welcoming parks. I'm happy to share photos or join a short walk to point out hot spots. Thank you.

## C. Short online comment:

Resident from [Neighborhood/City] in support of more trees/shade, safer streets, and well-maintained parks. Please engage residents early (with Spanish interpretation), protect current neighbors from displacement, and include local job/training opportunities.