

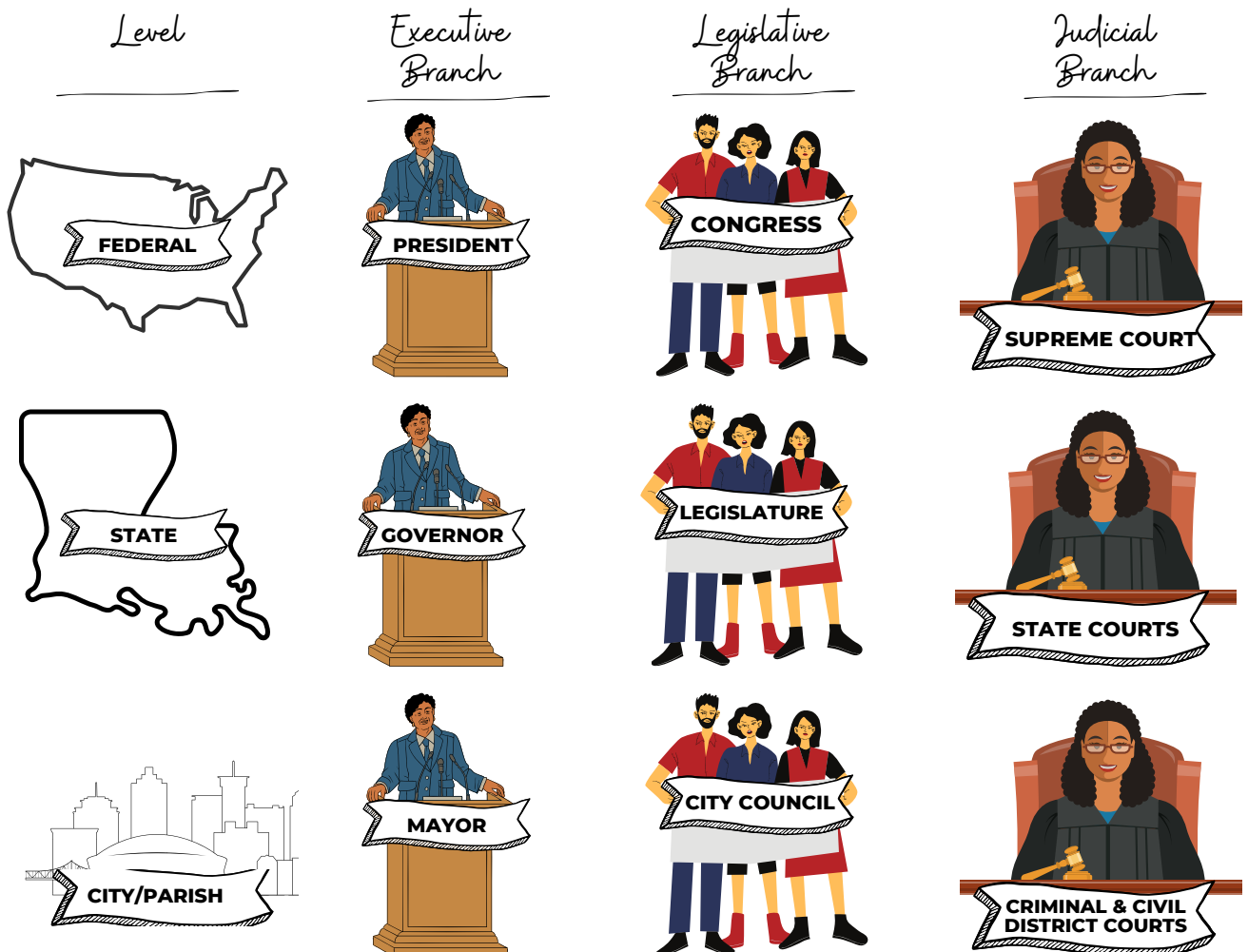
Resident's Guide to City Government

Fall 2023

CIVICS 101: GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

In American Democracy, we have three branches of government, replicated at the local, state, and federal levels. The separation of powers between these three branches is a fundamental principle of the U.S. government:

- The **Executive** Branch enforces laws,
- The **Legislative** branch makes laws, and
- The **Judicial** branch interprets laws.



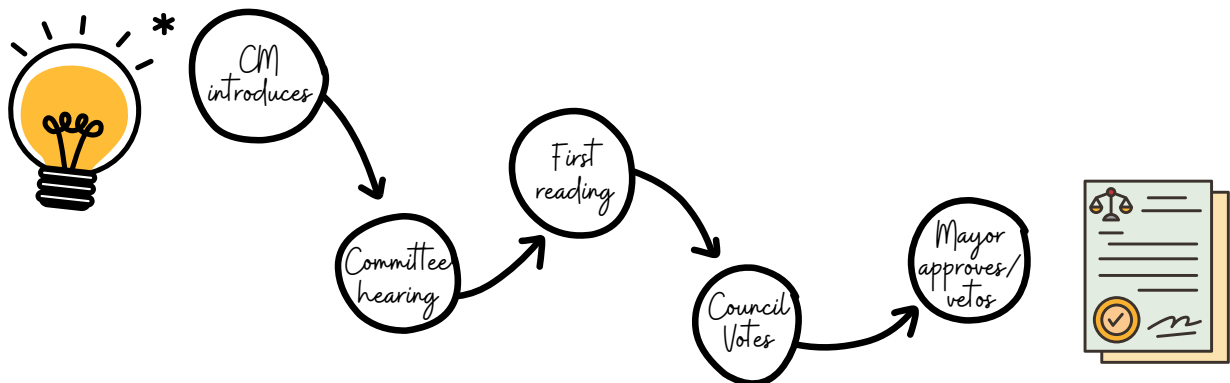
The City of New Orleans has a **consolidated government**. This means our Parish and City governments are one and the same. By contrast, Kenner falls under separate local (City of Kenner) and Parish (Jefferson Parish) governments.

How to Engage

- **Vote!** Less than 30% of registered voters participated in the 2021 municipal election, when we last elected our Mayor, Sheriff, and City Council. Only 48,750 votes were cast in the mayor's race.
- **Run for office** at the local, state, or national level.
- **Serve on a board or commission.** There are thousands of board and commission seats in the City of New Orleans that have a direct hand in decision making on a wide range of issues.
- **Advocate.** Get involved in the decision making process by showing up where & when decisions are made. Learn more in the “How to Engage” sections throughout this guide.

LAWS

Local laws, called “Ordinances” are the responsibility of City Council. On the City Council Agenda, they appear as “Cal. No. xx-xxx.”



Who decides? Here's the process of passing an ordinance:

1. A council member introduces an ordinance (law). It can only discuss one subject.
2. The potential ordinance goes to its designated committee for discussion. The Council staff work to make any needed changes to the language before it's sent to Council.
3. It's heard for the first time at council, then it has to “lie over” (wait) for at least 6 days before it can be brought to a vote.
4. Council votes on the ordinance. Ordinances pass with a simple majority (4 votes).
5. The Mayor can then approve or veto.

** These ideas have to come from somewhere! Sometimes the idea originates within a Council Office. Other times, it's proposed by a resident, organization, or City Department, or*

required by a court ruling.

City Council also adopts **Motions** and **Resolutions**, which serve a different purpose.

Motion: The Council sometimes uses a written "motion" to approve certain actions: appointments, public hearings, amendments to rules, declarations of emergencies, and other things. 4 votes pass a motion. It doesn't have to lie in and can't be vetoed. On the City Council Agenda, they appear as "M-xxx"

Resolution: This is a way for the Council to express an opinion on a matter or request action. It could be to ask the Mayor to take action, to recognize an outstanding community member, to express condolences, etc. Resolutions are less formal and less permanent than ordinances, and they can be voted on without lying over. 4 votes pass a resolution. On the City Council Agenda, they appear as "R-xxx"

How to Engage:

- **Email, call, or meet with your council members** to tell them what matters to you. Remember that 3 people represent you, your district councilmember and both at-large members. If you want to introduce a new idea to City Council, it helps to start with a one-on-one meeting with the Council member or a member of their staff.
- **Follow & attend committee meetings** Engaging in committees is generally the most impactful way to engage in City Council decisions. You can ask to be added to the agenda, show up and make comments, or comment online.
- **Show Up** at committee meetings and general council meetings and speak on issues.
- **Submit an online public comment.** The agenda is released at council.nola.gov/meetings a few days before the meeting. The comment form closes at 8am the morning of the meeting.



Make sure that your message is clear and memorable.

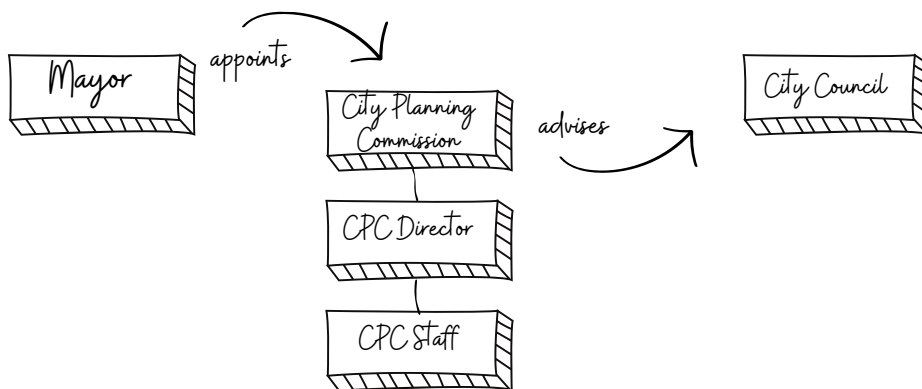
- **Start strong** with a powerful statement or story that grabs the attention of the audience and the council members.
- **Stay focused:** Make sure that your comment is focused on one or two key points. Don't try to cover too much ground or you may dilute the impact of your message. Keep your comments concise and to the point.
- **Use persuasive language to make your point.** Make sure that your language is respectful and inclusive, even if you're passionate about your cause.
- **Be prepared:** Practice your comment ahead of time so that you feel confident. Consider bringing notes or an outline to help you stay on track.
- **Follow up:** If possible, follow up your comment with additional information or resources that support your message.

LAND USE

These are rules that dictate how different areas of land are utilized in the City. This includes residential areas, commercial areas, industrial areas, parks, and open spaces.

Zoning laws regulate land use to ensure that it is both efficient and appropriate. They can be used to prevent conflicts between different types of land uses (e.g. heavy industry beside a school or senior living) and to ensure that the city is a safe and pleasant place to live, work, and play. It can also encourage economic development, residential development, or high-density & affordable housing. Proper land use planning is essential for creating sustainable cities that are inclusive, livable, and resilient.

Who decides? Land Use decisions are made by City Council, with advice from the City Planning Commission. The City Planning Commission is composed of seven members, who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.



Other Entities

Zoning Changes are made by the Bureau of Zoning Adjustments (BZA). The BZA and the City Planning Commission (CPC) are two separate but interrelated bodies in the City of New Orleans. The BZA is composed of five members, who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. When a developer or property owner wants to change their property's Zoning, or request a "variance," it goes to the BZA. The BZA is placed under the management of the CPC, and the CPC Director serves as the BZA Secretary. The BZA meets once a month to hear and decide cases.

The relationship between the BZA and the CPC is complementary. The BZA provides a forum for property owners to request relief from the zoning ordinance, while the CPC provides a framework for developing and implementing long-term land use policy.

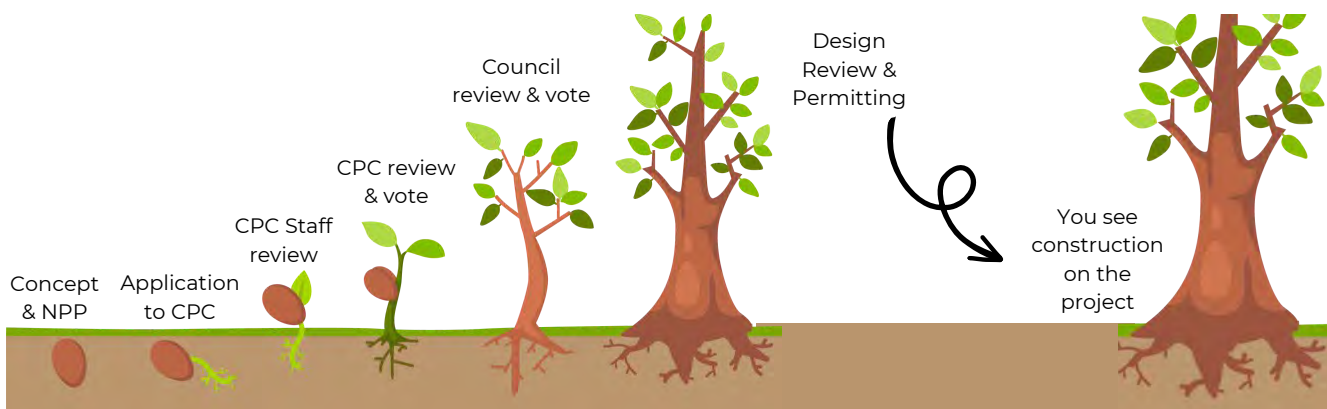
There's a handful of other boards and commissions who engage in certain land use decisions, including the Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC), Downtown Development District

(DDD), Vieux Carre Commission (VCC), Architectural Review Commission (ARC) and more. Learn more at <https://hola.gov/boards/interest/thinking-about-public-service/>

How to engage:

- **Attend a hearing:** All City boards and commissions all have public hearings. The CPC and BZA both hold public meetings to evaluate the applications they receive, and accept public comment in person and online. You can be notified of planning meetings in your community by signing up for the CPC and BZA newsletters.
- **Attend a Neighborhood Participation Program (NPP) Meeting:** The NPP process requires developers to hold a public meeting to discuss their proposal with neighbors before submitting an application to the City Planning Commission. You can sign up for notices for your neighborhood on the CPC's "Notice Me" Platform.

The best place to get involved is at the root of decision-making.



BUDGET

The City budget is about \$1.47 Billion each year. About half of the City's income comes from grants and other restricted funding sources. The rest comes from taxes and fees.

This money is discretionary. The City can use it how they want.

\$1.47 Billion

Sorted into two funds:



The General Fund
~ \$736 M



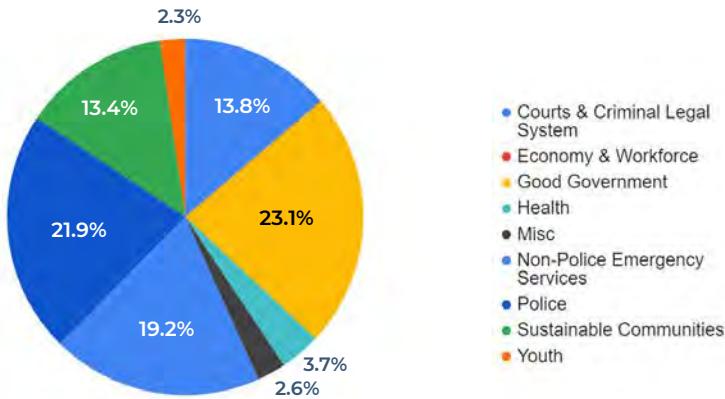
"Other Funds"
~ \$737 M

This money is from state and federal grants, millages, etc. It's restricted to certain uses.

Who decides? The City Council has the power of the purse strings.

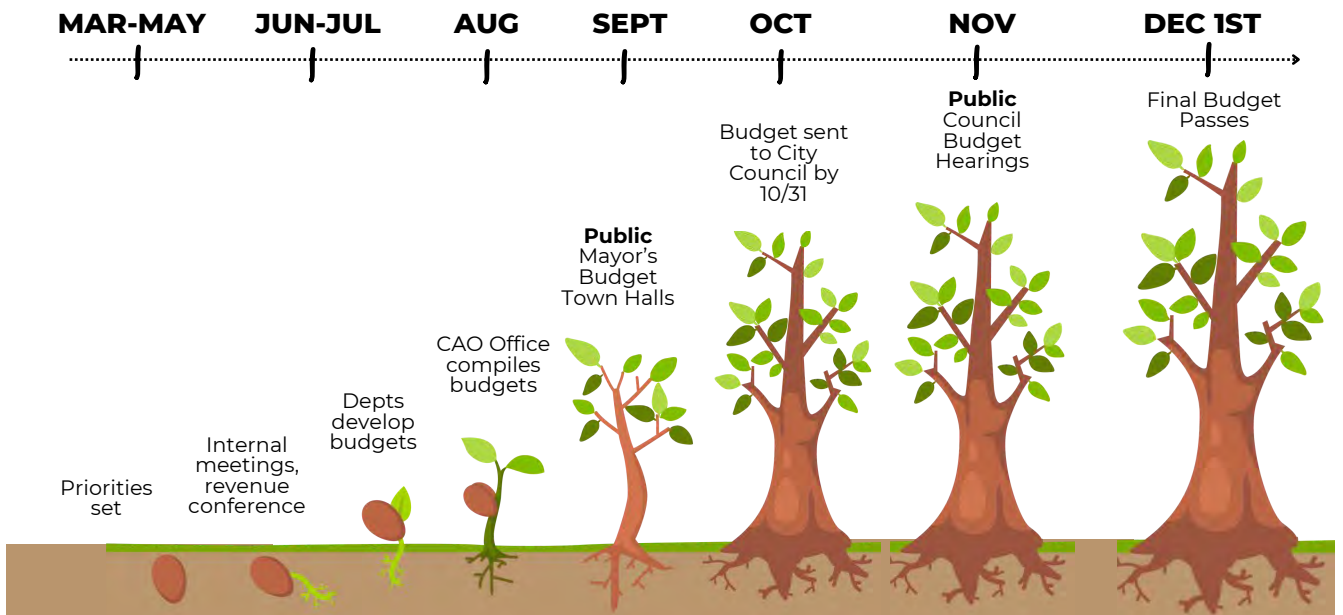


Where does the money go? Most of the general fund goes to police, emergency services, the criminal legal system, and keeping the govt. running. Visit cbno.org/budget for a breakdown.



* Our general fund looks different from other cities, because our Schools, Transit system, and utilities are not part of the City's budget.

Budget Process:



The budget is developed by the Administration, and ultimately approved by the City Council. The process is dictated by the City Charter. The process has drawn criticism from advocates because the budget is created before public input, and it's difficult to point to how public input influences the final budget. Though the budget is passed on December 1st, the final budget is typically not published publicly until early spring.

How to track the budget:

The budget changes *A LOT* throughout the year. At every council meeting, you will see ordinances that make changes to the budget. **Unfortunately, budget changes and City spending are very hard to track.** The Chief Administrative officer (CAO) gives monthly updates on spending at the City Council Budget Committee, and presents more detail at mid-year budget hearings 1-4 times per year. You'd have to be very attentive to these meetings to have a clear point-in-time picture of City spending. The information (PDF slides) is in the City Council meeting record for each meeting. There is no centralized, public facing dashboard of budget changes, or of actual City spending.

How to engage:

- **Tell your councilmembers** what's important to you. You don't have to be an expert! Start with what you care about broadly (like less flooding, or more affordable housing) and keep in touch.
- **Show up and submit public comments to Mayor's** Budget Town Halls, held annually in the summer.
- **Show up and submit public comments to City Council's** monthly budget committee meetings, and annual budget hearings.
- **Advocate for more transparent, inclusive budgeting practices** that make spending & budget information easily accessible, and make clear how public input is used, and proactively engage left-out communities.

RESOURCES

Get to know your City & stay informed

Subscribe to City
Newsletters



City Council
Website



Boards &
Commissions



NoticeMe: Land
Use Notices



Roadwork NOLA



VOCABULARY

Administration - the Executive branch of City Government: The Mayor and the departments & individuals who report to her.

Appointment - selecting a person to serve in an office (i.e. Police Chief) or on a board or commission. As of this year, Mayoral appointments must be approved by the City Council.

Allocate - distribute funding for a particular purpose. This is a function of the City Council. Once funds are “allocated” to a particular use, they are authorized to spend on that use. To use them for a different purpose, they need to be “reallocated.”

Boards & Commissions - The City has over 100 boards and commissions, each with an appointed membership. Each commission has its own rules about how members are nominated and confirmed; and about how they engage with decision making.

Bureau of Zoning Adjustments (BZA) - The body that makes recommendations to City Council on changes to a property's Zoning. The BZA is composed of five members, who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Their decisions are passed to Council for review & vote.

City Council - The legislative branch of the City Government. Composed of seven elected council members: Five are District Councilmembers, who each represent a geographical district of the City (A, B, C, D, and E), and two are At-Large members, who represent the entire City, and alternate in filling the roles of President and Vice President of City Council.

City Council Committees - are each composed of some, but not all members of the City Council. Committees discuss & refine ordinances, motions, and resolutions before they go to the full council for a vote. Standing Committees meet on a regular basis: Budgets, Audits and Board of Review; Climate Change & Sustainability; Community Development; Criminal Justice; Economic Development and Special Development Projects; Governmental Affairs; Public Works, Sanitation & Environment; Quality of Life; Transportation & Airport; and Utility, Cable, Telecommunications & Technology. There are also Ad Hoc committees that form to manage a particular issue for a defined period of time.

City Planning Commission (CPC) - The City Planning Commission is composed of seven members, who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. They are responsible for hiring & firing the Executive Director of the CPC Staff, and make recommendations to City Council about land use policies.

Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) - a set of guidelines for land use and development within the city. It outlines zoning regulations, building codes, and other guidelines that must be followed by law.

Debt Service - Loan repayment

Future Land Use Map (FLUM) - a long-term plan that outlines how land within the city will be used in the future. It takes into account factors such as population growth, economic development, and environmental concerns. It's technically part of the Master Plan.

General Fund - The City's discretionary money, that can be allocated to any use. The City raises this money, mostly from taxes and fees. Most years, it is about half of the annual budget.

Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) - responsible for preserving and protecting the city's historic landmarks and districts. This includes overseeing any changes or renovations that are made to these properties. The HDLC is composed of representatives from each of the City's historic districts.

Home Rule Charter (Charter, City Charter) The City's version of a "Constitution," this document outlines the basic structure of city government and the rights and responsibilities of both the government and its citizens. It serves as the foundation for all city governance and decision-making.

Lie over - Wait to be voted on. City of New Orleans ordinances must lie over at least six days after first reading.

Master Plan for the 21st Century ("Master Plan") - a comprehensive roadmap for the city's long-term development. It outlines goals and strategies for improving quality of life for residents, addressing economic and social challenges, and promoting sustainable growth and development. It alone is not a legally binding plan. The CZO and the FLUM are made based on the Master Plan.

Motion - A proposal put forward by a member of City Council that requires a vote by the other members. Motions can be used to introduce new ideas or proposals, to amend existing policies or procedures, or to take action on a particular issue.

Ordinance - a law or regulation that is passed by City Council. Ordinances are typically used to govern specific areas, such as zoning, traffic, or public safety. They can also be used to create new departments or programs within the government. Ordinances are usually more formal and permanent than resolutions, and they require multiple readings and public hearings before they can be passed.

Other funds - Restricted money that the City is required to spend in a particular way, or on a particular use. Most of these funds are from grants or millages. They cannot be spent on anything other than their intended use, which is designated by law or contract. In a typical year, this is about half of the City's total budget.

Personal Services - City personnel expenses.

Resolution - a formal statement of a decision or opinion passed by City Council. Resolutions are often used to express support or opposition to a particular issue, to endorse a particular policy or program, or to recognize the achievements of individuals or organizations. Resolutions are less formal and less permanent than ordinances, and they are typically passed with a single vote.