



Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

REPORT

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

To: Mayor Côté and Members of Council **Date:** 12/14/2020

From: Lisa Spitale **File:** 05.1035.10
Chief Administrative Officer

Item #: 494/2020

Subject: Recommended Actions in Response to Public Engagement Results on COVID-19 Recovery

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse the following actions that aim to address the findings of the recent COVID-19 Recovery Engagement process:

- 1. Continue to support staff resources related to the City's COVID-19 response and various community supports;*
- 2. Ensure the City's COVID-19 Task Forces are aware of the engagement results, and ask that they consistently consider this community input in their work;*
- 3. Take an organization-wide approach to creatively consider outdoor services and programming that can be offered to the community, even in poor weather and through the winter;*
- 4. Continue to prioritize all affordable housing development applications;*
- 5. Continue to advocate for affordable and accessible transit in BC, such as the All on Board initiative, which Council supported with a motion in December 2018.*

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of recommended actions following the recent community engagement process on COVID-19 recovery.

BACKGROUND

In May 2020, New Westminster City Council passed a motion directing City staff to “prepare a public engagement strategy for involving the community in COVID-19 recovery planning with particular focus on addressing systemic inequities and building a stronger, more vibrant and connected, climate change resilient community.”

Following a collaborative engagement planning process, active community engagement took place from July through early October 2020. Approximately 1,300 community members provided input across a variety of engagement activities: a City-wide online survey, small-group discussions, direct outreach and interviews, and a youth survey. The purpose of the engagement was to hear from community members about what was important for the City to focus on during COVID-19 recovery, and to seek ideas and suggestions for building a stronger New Westminster coming out of the pandemic.

The summary report of engagement results was circulated to Council at its November 9, 2020 regular meeting. See Attachment 1 for the What We Heard Summary Report. At the November meeting, Council endorsed the proposed next steps to seek feedback and recommendations for possible actions in response to the engagement input from the New Normal Committee, the City’s COVID Task Forces, and the Mayor’s Task Force on Reconciliation, Social Inclusion and Engagement.

ANALYSIS

Over the last few weeks, Public Engagement staff provided a brief overview of the COVID-19 Recovery Engagement findings and sought feedback on potential actions from the following groups:

- New Normal Staff Committee
- Mayor’s Task Force on Reconciliation, Inclusion, and Engagement
- COVID-19 Task Force on At-Risk and Vulnerable Populations
- COVID-19 Task Force on Seniors and Persons with Disabilities
- COVID-19 Task Force on Childcare
- COVID-19 Task Force on Business and Local Economy

Based on this feedback, the following recommendations are provided for Council’s consideration:

1. Continue to support staff resources and budget requests related to the City’s COVID-19 response and various community supports.

Those who provided feedback said the engagement findings demonstrate a high level of community support for the measures the City has taken to date to respond to the pandemic, such as the various community supports and initiatives spearheaded by the City’s COVID

Task Forces, and the work of various City departments to adjust and pivot their efforts to COVID response and service delivery within the COVID context. The engagement input shows support for the City's role in helping the community in different ways during the pandemic.

Council has continued to support this work through supporting budget requests from the COVID Task Forces, and the need for ongoing COVID supports in the community is reflected in the Draft 2021 Operating Budget of \$472K from the Provincial Safe Restart grant. The City's COVID response should continue to be guided by the [Recovery Plan Principles](#) that Council developed in the spring and were highly supported by engagement participants.

2. Ensure the City's COVID-19 Task Forces are aware of the engagement results, and ask that they consistently consider this community input in their work.

Applying the engagement findings to the City's pandemic response efforts should primarily be done through the COVID Task Forces. The community input is an important context for helping to shape the work of these inter-departmental and multi-agency groups.

This ongoing consideration of the community input by Task Force leads and members should also include reflection on whether there are any gaps, additional response measures, or community supports required. In reviewing the engagement findings, the Task Forces should identify any areas where more supports may be needed.

3. Take an organization-wide approach to creatively consider outdoor services and programming that can be offered to the community, even in poor weather and through the winter.

One of the prominent themes from the engagement input was the importance of outdoor public spaces during the pandemic, as health officials have identified that transmission of the virus is much lower outdoors. In response, all City departments should continue to identify opportunities for delivering services and programming outdoors. It's important to acknowledge that this work is already underway or on work plans in many City teams – with a few examples including plans by Parks & Recreation for additional outdoor seating and outdoor fitness equipment, reallocation of road space for sustainable transportation by Engineering, and a resource in development by the Childcare Task Force of local outdoor areas for families to explore, etc. However, across the organization, teams should be encouraged to identify creative ways to deliver more services outdoors – even in poor weather and during winter months.

City teams should be supported in making this corporate shift and taking innovative approaches. Existing covered outdoor spaces and other existing resources can be maximized

so as not to incur major costs. Increased access to free, public Wi-Fi should also be considered as part of this recommendation.

While all City departments should consider how they can deliver more services and programming outdoors, two groups in particular that are requested to discuss and consider this recommendation are the Mayor's Task Force on Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm, and the associated Advisory Committee.

4. Continue to prioritize all affordable housing development applications.

The need for more affordable housing was another strong theme in the engagement input. When asked how we can build a stronger, more equitable New Westminster coming out of the pandemic, participants identified the importance of access to safe, affordable housing for all community members.

In reviewing the engagement findings, COVID Task Force members identified that several local faith-based organizations are currently pursuing affordable housing projects on their properties. They expressed concerns that disruptions due to the pandemic could potentially have an impact on development application timelines at the City. They requested that development applications for affordable housing be prioritized by the City's Development Services department.

5. Continue to advocate for affordable and accessible transit in BC, such as the All on Board initiative, which Council supported with a motion in December 2018.

Another prominent engagement theme on the topic of building a stronger, more equitable community was increasing access to and safety of active transportation – including transit. Task Force members recalled that Council previously endorsed the All on Board program, which calls for free transit for all children and youth ages 0-18 and a sliding scale monthly pass system based on income. Given that transit is a Provincial responsibility in BC, this recommendation is that Council and the City continue to advocate for affordable and accessible transit.

As identified in some of the recommendations above, it is important to note that there are many existing work plan and capital project items that respond to the engagement findings and are already either underway or part of the City's plans for 2021. Some of these items are being led by departments, while others are spearheaded by the City's COVID Task Forces and other groups. The Draft 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets have also been developed through a COVID-19 recovery lens.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from across all City departments, as well as Task Force members from the community and other agencies, were asked for feedback on recommended actions in response to the COVID-19 Recovery Engagement results.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:

Option 1 – Endorse the five actions that aim to address some of the findings of the recent COVID-19 Recovery Engagement process.

Option 2 – Provide staff with further direction.

Option 1 is recommended.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Covid-19 Recovery Public Engagement Summary Report
(previously circulated at the November 9, 2020 Council meeting).

This report has been prepared by
Jennifer Miller, Manager of Public Engagement

This report was reviewed by:

Approved for Presentation to Council



Lisa Spitale
Chief Administrative Officer