

## Purpose of Report

To present for City Council's consideration a summary of the results of the four pilot sessions undertaken by the Community Engagement Task Force (CETF); an evaluation of what we have learned; and some recommendations to assist City Council and staff in enhancing's Nanaimo's community engagement culture.

## Part 1: Introduction:

The Community Engagement Task Force (CETF) consisting of nine volunteers from the community supported by City staff was put together following a Council motion on Sept 12, 2016 to create a public engagement pilot program to "*further community engagement and public conversation*" in a less formal setting than a Council or Committee of the Whole meeting. Four pilot community engagement projects were to be undertaken. Specifically, the motion said that:

*Council direct Staff to prepare a report pertaining to starting and hosting informal community engagement and public conversation sessions, which must meet all procedural requirements, with the intent to further community engagement and public conversation by the accommodation of a regularly scheduled, open topic, facilitated dialog in a setting distinct from council's formal business meetings with the following parameters:*

- *An ad hoc committee of Staff, Council and the public be struck to assist in the development of the format, schedule and launch of the initiative;*
- *Sessions will be held on a three-month schedule; and*
- *After four sessions a follow up review will take place with the intent to evaluate the success, participation and accomplishments of the engagements.*

Some of the discussion around this motion during the Council meeting was useful to the CETF in interpreting its mandate: These included "*dialogue not a monologue*"; "*facilitate more general dialogue*"; "*better environment for people to get up and talk*"; and "*more opportunities to hear from the public.*"

Although the original council motion was made in 2016, the CETF was not formed until July 11, 2017. By that time, City communication staff had already put in place a set of information boards as well as an online survey to obtain feedback from residents about five method options of community engagement. The five methods up for discussion were: Open Houses, Town Hall meetings, Revolving Conversations (also known as Samoan Circles), Open Space Meetings and World Cafes. Once the survey was closed, the CETF would review the results and begin work on forming a structure for this "public engagement pilot program".<sup>1</sup>

While these information sessions provided some interesting results in terms of which methods of engagement the community might prefer, there was no attempt to link the purpose of the engagement with the type of methodology that might be appropriate in that circumstance.<sup>2</sup> It was only late in these

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<sup>1</sup> News Release: City of Nanaimo, August 28, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Community Engagement Consultations July-August 2017: Open Houses and Online Survey Feedback Analysis

information sessions that the concept of what the community wanted to engage about, as opposed to how they wanted to engage, was asked of residents.

Two basic questions were not asked at this time:

1. What kind of issues/ topics do the public want to engage city council about?
2. What would be the purpose or outcome of the engagement on these topics?

This connection between determining the purpose and scope of community engagement before deciding on the methodology is central to the work of the CETF. The task force recognized the need to widen the consultation process, and to engage with residents not just on their preferred engagement methodologies, but on which topics they wished to engage.

At its initial meetings, the CETF drafted a mission statement as well as indicators of success for the pilot program:

***Mission Statement:*** *Our mission is to work alongside fellow residents, City Council and staff to design, implement and refine a community engagement pilot program which provides a clear and accessible means for citizens to discuss their thoughts and ideas with the community and its leaders*

***Indicators of Success:***

- *Residents feel that they have influence in identifying which topics are important to them.*
- *Residents understand how to participate and feel welcomed and respected while doing so; and*
- *Residents feel that their input is valued.*

**Part 2: The public engagement pilot program sessions:**

The CETF held four pilot community engagement sessions between November 2017 and November 2018. Each one had a specific consultation purpose around which the format was designed. Complete reports on each session are available online.<sup>3</sup>

Pilot Project Session #1, in November 2017, was an open space technology discussion centred around “*Building Nanaimo for the Future: What are your priorities?*” where five topics chosen by the community at large were debated and discussed in a round table format. The purpose of pilot project session #1 was to allow for some positive input by residents on issues and opportunities which they felt were facing the community. The goal was simply to obtain feedback on issues of concern to residents and the promise was to listen and acknowledge their concerns.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of this first pilot project was intentionally broad and positive. The CETF determined that the best engagement technique or methodology to accomplish this intent was open space technology the goal of which is to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern to them. The session was facilitated by Pam Shaw, Director, VIU Master of Community Planning program and the table discussions were moderated by students of the planning program. City Council’s role was to participate in the conversations.  
attendees and locations

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<sup>3</sup> Need link to appropriate web page

<sup>4</sup> Based on the Spectrum of Public Participation developed by the [International Association of Public Participation](#) (IAP2)

Pilot Project Session #2, held in April 2018, utilized a “*micro town hall*” format with participants bringing their own questions that they wished to specifically ask of members of City Council again in a round table format. The purpose was to engage residents in a direct dialogue with members of City Council about issues of concern to the community in a mutually respectful and helpful way. Our facilitator for the session was Reed Botwright, City of Nanaimo.

Many are familiar with the usual public town hall events where citizen questions are directed at the elected officials and they answer them. Sometimes their answers can be lengthy and so this restricts the number of questions that can be asked. And, because the elected officials are often separated from the citizens, this can often give the appearance of a “*we-they*” mentality. In addition, some people feel intimidated by speaking in front of a crowd. The “*micro town hall*” format sought to reduce the amount of disruption and grandstanding and instead provide an environment that would be safe, comfortable and conducive to dialogue between residents and members of council.

Participants were seated at a table with one member of Council. Residents were to come prepared with up to three questions they would like to ask members of council. At each table, residents would have one minute to ask their question and the member of council would have two minutes to respond. If other people at the table wished to contribute to that discussion then there would be five minutes allowed for this collective participation before the next person was able to ask their question. The process would be repeated until time was called for members of Council to switch tables and another round would begin. Each table had a facilitator whose job was to manage the timing of the questions, ensure fairness for all participants and maintain decorum.

attendees and locations

Pilot Project Session #3 held in July 2018 demonstrated a collaborative type of community engagement where residents partnered with the city in developing a strategy to meet an issue of importance selected by the community in an online poll which, in this case, was *Homelessness: How do we increase understanding and move towards action?* Our facilitator for this session was Dyan Dunsmor-Farley, Wave Consulting Ltd of Gabriola Island.

The intent of this process was to dive deeply into a single issue of importance to our community, examine it from all angles and collectively identify potential solutions. This being the third Pilot Project Session of the Task Force, it was intentionally designed to move beyond conversation and into action planning. The session would begin with a panel of relevant experts to provide a common ground of information about the issue for all participants. This would be followed by multiple table discussions on various aspects of the issue to potentially arrive at viable solutions.

To select the topic, the CETF reached out to the community at large for input asking for a single topic ‘problem’ statement, which allowed participants to think about the current situation (where are we?), the ideal state (where do we want to go?) and what is needed to bridge the two (how do we get there?). Forty-six responses were received with the most popular topic being homelessness with thirteen responses.

The role of council members was to see it as an opportunity to listen to a full range of perspectives on the topic; hear how citizens are processing the issue; and reflect on what the community thinks is important to focus on. At the time, the issue of homelessness was front and centre in Nanaimo. The CETF knew that it might not be an easy conversation to have, but those participating more than rose to

the occasion and the results were an outpouring of community support for solutions to what had been described at the beginning of the day as a complex topic.  
 attendees and locations

The specific purpose of Community Engagement Pilot Project Session #4 held in November 2018 was to *build relationships between Council and neighbourhoods by sharing what residents love about their neighbourhoods, identifying issues of concern and working together on solutions.* By organizing a session geographically around neighbourhoods, the CETF provided an opportunity for a diverse group of residents of each neighbourhood to identify the issues that were of concern to them and perhaps, common across neighbourhoods. It also gave the new Mayor and Council to experience their first community engagement session. Our facilitator for the session was Larissa Coser with moderation by members of the Young Professionals of Nanaimo.  
 attendees and locations

**Part 3a: Evaluation of the process -- criteria and assessment**

Prior to the first pilot project session the CETF established four evaluation questions for participants to answer at the end of each session based on the Task Force’s indicators of success. The answer to each question was on a continuum of 1 – 6 with #1 being disagree the most and # 6 being agree the most.

**1. I feel that I had influence in identifying which topics are important to me**

|           | Disagree 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | Agree 6 |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|----|---------|
| Session 1 |            |   |   | 6 | 15 | 9       |
| Session 2 |            |   |   | 2 | 8  | 13      |
| Session 3 |            |   |   | 3 | 8  | 9       |
| Session 4 |            |   |   | 3 | 6  | 9       |

**2. I understood how to participate and felt welcome and respected while doing so**

|           | Disagree 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | Agree 6 |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|----|---------|
| Session 1 |            |   | 1 | 2 | 13 | 16      |
| Session 2 |            |   |   | 1 | 6  | 15      |
| Session 3 |            |   |   | 1 | 6  | 13      |
| Session 4 |            |   |   |   | 6  | 12      |

**3. I felt that my input was valued.**

|           | Disagree 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | Agree 6 |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|----|---------|
| Session 1 |            |   |   | 5 | 12 | 13      |
| Session 2 |            |   | 2 | 1 | 6  | 15      |
| Session 3 |            |   |   | 1 | 5  | 14      |
| Session 4 |            |   | 1 |   | 6  | 11      |

**4. Please rate you overall satisfaction with this event.**

|           | Disagree 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5  | Agree 6 |
|-----------|------------|---|---|---|----|---------|
| Session 1 |            |   |   | 3 | 20 | 8       |
| Session 2 |            |   | 2 | 3 | 8  | 11      |
| Session 3 |            |   |   | 4 | 9  | 7       |
| Session 4 |            |   | 1 | 2 | 7  | 7       |

Some additional comments made at the sessions are indicative of the desire and willingness of residents to participate in discussing issues of concern to them:

Session # 1 *“Building Nanaimo for the Future: What are your priorities?”*

- Opportunity to speak to what is important
- Opportunity to listen to others’ views
- Opportunity to share opinions with members of my community on a variety of important, current issues
- I felt like my opinion mattered.
- Citizens need to feel like they are involved rather than passive participants

Session #2 *Micro-Town Hall*

- Respectful discussion
- Non-threatening atmosphere
- Enjoyed having the Councillors rotate tables
- Enjoyed intimate conversational opportunity
- Low pressured, respectful conversation with Councillors
- Great opportunity to listen to each Councillor
- Saw Councillors as ‘real’ people with high commitment to the City of Nanaimo

Session #3: *Homelessness: How do we increase understanding and move towards action?*

- Having panelists was excellent as it centralized the whole forum
- Respectful discussion – great exchange of ideas
- Sense of shared purpose, compassion shown
- Diverse attitudes and participation
- Listening to the community on issues

Session #4: *Empowering Neighbourhoods*

- Meeting people/ connecting from my neighbourhood
- Open dialog and hearing other communities’ successes and struggles
- Met councillors – positive and creative thinking
- Having this opportunity with guided discussion and Mayor and Council present
- Got an overview of neighbourhood associations and their issues

At Session #4, since this was the last of our pilot projects, we also asked participants if they had any suggestions to help the CEFT prepare a report to Council on community engagement:

- Be forthright – don’t avoid difficult issues, don’t sugar coat” – communicate with them clearly and respectfully
- Give suggested actions with a positive focus

- Do this once a year – please continue what this committee has begun. Engagement with Council and other neighbourhoods is so valuable.

**SUMMARY OF COSTS**

Add description and discussion of costs

| Session | Cost | Items |
|---------|------|-------|
| 1       |      |       |
| 2       |      |       |
| 3       |      |       |
| 4       |      |       |

**Part 3b: Content of Pilot Project Sessions: important information for this Council to consider**

In pilot project session #1, we asked the public to submit topics in answer to the question *Building Nanaimo for the future: what are your priorities?* Ten general themes emerged from the submitted topics ranging from social issues like affordable housing; to parks, trails and greenspace projects like the waterfront walkway; and to tourism opportunities like the proposed Ocean Discovery Centre. Out of these 10 themes, we asked those attending the session to pick their top three. We then chose the five topics with the most votes for detailed discussion at round tables plus a wild card table. The top five topics chosen, in order of priority, were: Downtown Revitalization; Transportation; Community Engagement; Garbage/ Recycling; and Social Issues.

A comprehensive summary of the conversations which took place at session #1 can be viewed online under the CETF tab of the City’s webpage. However, the task force wants to ensure that this City Council is aware of these six high-level priorities which emerged from the discussion:<sup>5</sup>

1. Downtown Nanaimo is important to this community and support should be provided to stimulate development;
2. The need to enhance biking/ walking/ transit in Nanaimo through connectivity and improving safety on community streets is seen as a priority;
3. Nanaimo needs to assess the need for a one-stop recycling facility;
4. An affordable housing strategy is a must;
5. We need to ensure that new development, including south downtown waterfront, reflects community values; and
6. We need to provide a more concerted and direct effort to support economic development

While a specific count of the nature and type of questions was not made at Session #2, many of the issues raised revolved around housing for the homeless; development of 1 Port Drive; relations with Snuneymuxw; and the 2018-2019 budget with a few questions relating to better walking, cycling and transit and proposed and approved parking variances.

A full transcription of the panel presentations and group discussions at Session #3 is also available online.<sup>6</sup> The first break out session after the panel presentation the participants were asked to reflect on what they felt as they listened to the panelists and identify what needs were underneath these

<sup>5</sup> Website link to flip chart detailed and summary notes from November 23, 2017 Pilot Project #1

<sup>6</sup> Need website link to report on Session #3

emotions. From this initial discussion, seven themes emerged which in a second round of discussion resulted in a number of recommended actions:

1. Building an inclusive community:
  - Share information/ stories about homelessness with everyone
  - Create neighbourhood drop-in centres
  - Actively engage and include the homeless on assessing their needs and future planning
2. Safety: overcoming fear:
  - Address the issues of nimbyism
  - Build and strengthen our forums for community discussion and integration
  - Know whom to mobilize to address these issues
3. Addressing gaps in health care:
  - More mental health and substance abuse education
  - Collaboration between various levels of government, across cultures and health authorities
  - Self-care for citizens and other strategies to restore humanity
4. Housing and homing solutions:
  - Better understanding of definition of homelessness
  - Identify specific housing solutions for needs of individuals
  - Engage local First Nations and find out how we can work collaboratively
  - Investigate tenancy and insurance barriers for renters
5. Targeted focus and supports for youth:
  - Make a personal commitment to support youth
  - Recognize gap for youth 19-21 aging out of care
  - Provide alternative home share options
  - Increase collaboration between service providers
  - Child help phone 24/7
  - Enhance life skills programs for youth
6. Addressing the economic impacts of homelessness: and
  - Top priority is to provide affordable housing
  - Island Health to deal with drugs and mental health
  - Personally, support homeless issue organizations
  - Keep our elected officials' feet to the fire
7. Improved processes for public engagement and accountability of all players:
  - City leadership and key stakeholders (e.g. Homeless Coalition; Chamber of Commerce) take out a full-page advertisement in the newspaper which acknowledges that this is a big issue in our community; commit to having regular conversations with the community about the issue; to establishing a set of shared values about the issue; and to communicating a plan. Included in the ad would be the sharing of stories about how this person got to this place as a really powerful mode of communicating a complex issue; re-humanizing those who are having an experience of homelessness; and collectively beginning to see ourselves in the issue.

We would encourage members of Council to read the document in its entirety as a guideline for future directions to implement the City's affordable housing and homelessness strategies.

In pilot program session #4, we asked neighbourhoods what were their most pressing issues many of which were in common with other neighbourhoods. These are key and often basic

neighbourhood issues which members of Council may wish to consider when looking at current and future municipal programs, services and budgets are:

- too much traffic;
- not enough safety;
- need for diversity and affordability;
- lack of amenities;
- need for improved transit services; and
- threats to the environment.

Again, the complete results of the discussion are available online.<sup>7</sup>

**Part 4: What we learned**

To be completed.

**Part 6. Recommendations moving forward based on looking back**

To be completed

**Part 5. Conclusion**

To be completed

**Part 6. Data and Appendices**

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<sup>7</sup> Need link to online web page