

DATE OF MEETING February 8, 2021

AUTHORED BY THE REIMAGINE TEAM

SUBJECT REIMAGINE NANAIMO PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide the Governance and Priorities Committee with an update on the REIMAGINE NANAIMO Coordinated Strategic Plan Review process and the Phase 1 Public Engagement Summary report.

## **BACKGROUND**

The REIMAGINE NANAIMO Coordinated Strategic Plan Review is a comprehensive update of several City of Nanaimo strategic planning policy documents. Central to this project is an update of Nanaimo's 2008 Official Community Plan (OCP) that incorporates an updated Climate Action Plan; an update of the 2005 Parks, Recreation and Culture Plan; and the creation of a new Active Transportation Plan.

Planning and engagement on these plans is being carried out through a broader process that encompasses the review and update of other strategic plans, including the Economic Development Strategy (now complete) and the Water Supply Strategy. Coordinated community engagement on these interrelated policy documents aims to maximize community participation, ensure consistency between the plans, ensure efficient resource use, and avoid public confusion and potential engagement fatigue from multiple overlapping planning processes.

Foundational technical studies completed as part of Phase 1 included a *City of Nanaimo Population, Housing and Employment Projections* report prepared by Vann Struth Consulting Group Inc., and *City of Nanaimo Land Inventory and Capacity Analysis* prepared by Colliers International Consulting. These reports were presented to Council on 2020-JUN-22 with a high-level summary of findings. To facilitate communication of report data, the project team has prepared user-friendly infographics summarizing the key messages (see Attachments A and B).

Phase 1 of the REIMAGINE NANAIMO public engagement process wrapped up at the end of December 2020, and the summary of its findings is now complete (see Attachment C). Following is a brief overview of the activities undertaken and key findings that will inform developing options to evaluate in Phase 2 of the process. Overall, the Phase 1 engagement resulted in the largest response to date of any City engagement process. Moreover, the majority of those who responded to the statistical survey and just over half of those responding to the public questionnaire indicated that this was their first experience participating in a City planning process, demonstrating that engagement reached beyond people who typically provide input to the City.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Summary of Activities**

The Phase 1 Public Engagement Summary outlines the REIMAGINE NANAIMO engagement activities that took place between the launch in July 2020 until the surveys closed at the end of November 2020. Due to some scheduling conflicts, a few stakeholder meetings also took place in December 2020.

In order to reach as many people as possible, particularly given the limitations on public gatherings in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a wide array of engagement activities were undertaken collaboratively across departments. These included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Launched a project page on the *Get Involved Nanaimo* website;
- pop-up information booths in city parks and local shopping centers;
- a statistically valid mail-out survey;
- online questionnaires (one general Ideas Questionnaire and six shorter topic-specific questionnaires);
- sidewalk chalk message boards;
- a creative community contest;
- over a hundred stakeholder meetings or workshops with community groups and organizations;
- an online mapping and ideas bulletin board;
- a VIU campus promotion led by students;
- letters sent to every School District 68 (SD68) parent via Parent Advisory Committee e-mails;
- virtual visits to SD68 school classrooms; and
- a robust social media campaign that included Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

REIMAGINE NANAIMO was also advertised on City of Nanaimo vehicles and RDN Transit buses; on several radio stations; through regular emails to subscribers; through business licence renewal notices; on a banner in front of the fire station construction site; on decals in window shops; on face masks worn by Staff; in the newspaper; in one direct mail out to residents; and as banners on emails and information to the public from Staff/departments. The City's Culture section also commissioned an image, a song, and a poem from professional artists and promoted these through the media and online to raise project awareness.

### **Community Participation and Representation**

The level of public interest and engagement in this process has been very high, with 5,855 statistically valid surveys and online questionnaires completed (the number of unique participants is unknown as some people filled out both the general Ideas Questionnaire and a shorter questionnaire, and after the requirement to register was dropped, there was no way to track unique users).

While demographics could only be collected for the survey respondents and not for the other forms of public input, overall participation in this process was strong from a range of ages and demographics, with the following exceptions:

- Renters were underrepresented and homeowners overrepresented (relative to their proportion of the general population).
- Most age groups were well represented, with the exception of the 15-24-year-olds age group.
- Women were more likely to fill out the online questionnaire; men and women were equally likely to complete the statistically valid survey.
- Indigenous, racial minorities/people of colour, and people self-identifying as having a disability were underrepresented relative to their proportion of the general population.
- Low-income individuals and single parents were underrepresented.

The low participation rate for youth and others with barriers was anticipated and addressed by efforts to work directly with schools, VIU, and organizations and individuals representing diverse social, cultural, and economic groups. Based on interim analysis that indicated additional areas of underrepresentation, the project team took the following actions:

- Removed the requirement for registration in order to complete the online questionnaires.
- Created an additional low-barrier survey with simpler language that was also easier to use with text-to-voice software (for the visually impaired).
- Sent the survey links to organizations that operate affordable and supportive housing.
- Reached out to organizations that serve the urban Indigenous community, immigrants, and people with disabilities and other barriers to both promote awareness of the process and to engage through online discussions.
- Where possible, provided honoraria to workshop participants with barriers to acknowledge their contributions.

Geographically, the responses came from a relatively representative distribution of census population across the city's neighbourhoods. The statistically valid survey feedback was extremely representative (within 1% of the actual proportion of the census population). For the public questionnaire, there was slightly higher participation from the Departure Bay/Mid-Town and Downtown University Districts, and slightly lower participation from the North Town District. There was no significant underrepresentation from any area of the city.

## **Key Themes and Emerging Priorities**

There was general consistency between feedback gathered from the statistically valid survey and input from the online public questionnaires. Additional input was provided at the workshops and meetings facilitated by City Staff, which tended to be focused on the area of the interest group being engaged (e.g., neighbourhood association, recreation user group, social service non-profit, arts organization, etc.). That said, similar issues tended to be identified by stakeholder groups as reflected in the surveys and questionnaire responses. The two charts following summarize some of the key themes in each domain.

Theme	Strengths/Successes	Concerns/Areas for Improvement
<i>Overall</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to nature</li> <li>▪ Beautiful waterfront</li> <li>▪ Geographic 'hub' location</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Homelessness</li> <li>▪ Social challenges (public drug use, crime)</li> <li>▪ Affordable housing and basic needs</li> </ul>
<i>How We Live (Neighbourhoods)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good access to parks and trails</li> <li>▪ Lots of trees and vegetation</li> <li>▪ A typical feeling of safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Routes for children to walk to school</li> <li>▪ Stores for daily needs within walking distance</li> <li>▪ Good places for riding a bicycle</li> </ul>
<i>How We Connect and Play (Inside)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Top Facilities:</u> Aquatic centres; cinemas; fitness centres, and gymnasiums</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Facilities Needing Improvement:</u> Outdoor performance venues; arts and cultural workshop spaces; large and small performance spaces</li> </ul>
<i>How We Connect &amp; Play (Outside)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Top Parks &amp; Open Space:</u> Walking/hiking/running trails; neighbourhood and waterfront parks; playgrounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Parks &amp; Open Space Needing Improvement:</u> Community and edible gardens; urban plazas; waterfront parks</li> </ul>
<i>How We Care</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to educational opportunities to support family needs</li> <li>▪ Access to health services</li> <li>▪ Affordable access to transportation services and amenities to get around</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Progress being made towards addressing homelessness</li> <li>▪ People from all walks of life being able to feel safe and enjoy public amenities</li> <li>▪ Ability to easily find housing that suits individual needs</li> </ul>

Theme	Overall Priorities
<i>How We Adapt and Stay Green</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Managing impacts to environmentally-sensitive areas</li> <li>▪ Improving solid waste management of organics and reducing, reusing, and recycling</li> <li>▪ Managing impacts to urban streams and wetlands related to human activities other than development</li> </ul>
<i>How We Move</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feeling safe from vehicles</li> <li>▪ Creating dedicated cycling routes</li> <li>▪ Improved bicycle &amp; pedestrian infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Having safe walking routes</li> <li>▪ Having good transit service frequency</li> </ul>

Theme	Overall Priorities
<i>How We Work</i>	<u>Top Economic Development Goals:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creating quality, sustainable jobs</li> <li>▪ Improving residents' overall quality of life</li> <li>▪ Encouraging economic growth</li> </ul>
<i>How We Work (continued)</i>	<u>Top Economic Development Objectives:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving local infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Expanding existing businesses</li> <li>▪ Assisting entrepreneurs and startups</li> </ul>

Additional detail on the inputs provided is included in the Public Engagement Appendix, a 1000+ page document that contains stakeholder meeting notes, sticky notes from the pop-up events, verbatim comments from the online submissions, and the Creative Community Contest entries. This document, along with the Public Engagement Summary, will be posted on the City's website following today's meeting.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Phase 1 of REIMAGINE NANAIMO targeted broad public engagement and idea generation. Phase 2 is focused on identifying key priorities and choosing between scenarios that meet the City's environmental, social, and economic objectives. The next steps in Phase 2 are:

- Staff analysis of the public engagement results;
- Drawing on public input from Phase 1 to develop the City Portrait for the Doughnut Economics Framework that Council has directed Staff to use as the foundation for REIMAGINE NANAIMO; and
- Developing scenarios and options to bring forward for public feedback and Council consideration.

The development of scenarios will involve opportunities for Council consideration of Official Community Plan amendment applications that are currently in stream. Council will also be given an opportunity to consider a moratorium on future applications that may be received during the May 2021 or November 2021 intakes.

The public engagement component of Phase 2 of REIMAGINE NANAIMO is scheduled to begin in April 2021 with the target of completing Phase 2 by the fall. The completion of Phase 2 will be the foundation of Phase 3, which involves drafting plans for public and Council feedback prior to final Council adoption. As the project progresses, the team remains committed to improving the accessibility, equity, and inclusivity of the process to ensure that resulting City plans consider the priorities and aspirations of all Nanaimo residents regardless of age or background.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- Phase 1 of REIMAGINE NANAIMO, the City's Coordinated Strategic Plan Review, is now complete and a report summarizing all engagement activity and input is available for review.
- Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the project has generated significant public input, including a record number of survey responses from people participating in a City planning process for the first time.
- The feedback gathered during Phase 1 of the REIMAGINE process provides the foundation for the scenarios and options that will be developed during Phase 2 and subsequent drafting of plans in Phase 3.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

ATTACHMENT A: Growth Projections Visual Summary

ATTACHMENT B: Land Capacity Visual Summary

ATTACHMENT C: REIMAGINE NANAIMO Phase 1 Public Engagement Summary |

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