

## **Community Engagement Task Force: FINAL REPORT TO NANAIMO CITY COUNCIL · JAN 14 2019**

### **Executive Summary**

In July 2017, the Community Engagement Task Force (CETF) was formed to assist Council to “*further community engagement and public conversation.*” 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.

From various perspectives, the work of the CETF in carrying out these 4 pilot project sessions was a success. Participants generally felt that their input was valued, that they understood how to participate and felt welcomed and respected while doing so. The task force demonstrated that even in an environment that was, at times, less than congenial, it was possible to have a mutually respectful conversation between residents and elected representatives. In this regard, we have opened the door to an improvement in citizen participation in the City of Nanaimo and demonstrated that Council and staff have little to fear from involving residents in the decision-making process.

Community engagement is more than a town hall meeting or an open house: it is a culture fostered within an entire organization and a community. It is a culture where communication is meaningful and authentic; and asking questions makes a resident feel heard and respected at all levels. We believe there are opportunities for Council to improve the culture of engagement in Nanaimo and by doing so enhance the relationship and level of trust between the community and the city. The following actions are recommended:

1. Be committed to working more closely with the community to improve engagement and participation in council decisions, so that residents feel empowered to be more active in shaping their community and future.
2. Begin with something as simple as a published calendar of what Council intends to engage residents about over the next year.
3. Ensure that existing methods for community engagement are fully understood and utilized.
4. Begin a process of strengthening and empowering neighbourhoods to better ensure that programs and projects are actually meeting community needs.
5. Consider how to improve community engagement through advertising, social media and online technology.
6. Consider establishing a central focus for community engagement within the city.

The CETF is pleased to have been a part of this process to make public engagement a part of everyday life in the city of Nanaimo. We encourage members of Council to consider not only our recommendations for the future but also the specific data that arose from each of the sessions. This information was created and presented by the citizens of this community and should be considered as critical input to the preparation of Council’s 2019 strategic plan and priorities as well as future programs and projects.

## 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 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 reviewed the results and began 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 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.

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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 <https://pub-nanaimo.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=8317>

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, on Thursday, November 23, 2017 from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Vancouver Island Conference Centre, 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 to acknowledge those 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. We also wanted to try this method as it was one of the five identified earlier. The session was facilitated by Pam Shaw, Director, VIU Master of Community Planning program, and the table discussions featured moderated notes taken by students of the graduate planning program. City Council’s role was to participate in the conversations, both listening and speaking. At the conclusion of the session, VIU table moderators presented a summary of the points discussed. There were 60 attendees at Session #1.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nanaimo.ca/your-government/boards-committees/community-engagement-committee>

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

Pilot Project Session #2, held on Thursday, April 26, 2018 from 6 to 9 p.m. at Beban Park Social Centre, utilized a “*micro town hall*” format with participants bringing their own questions on any topic that they wished to specifically ask of members of City Council again in a multiple dispersed 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, senior applications analyst, 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. The recent e-Town hall on the 2019 Budget is an example. Sometimes the answers can be lengthy, and so this restricts the number of questions that can be asked. As well, because the elected officials are often separated from the citizens by formality and authority, 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 tables with one member of Council per table. Residents were to come prepared with up to three questions they would like to ask members of council. At each table, residents would have a maximum one minute to ask their question and the member of council would have a maximum 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. There were 30 attendees at Session #2.

Pilot Project Session #3 held on Saturday, July 28, 2018 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Oliver Woods Community Centre demonstrated a collaborative type of community engagement where residents partnered with the city in developing actions 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 Dunsamor-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 knowledge building and 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.

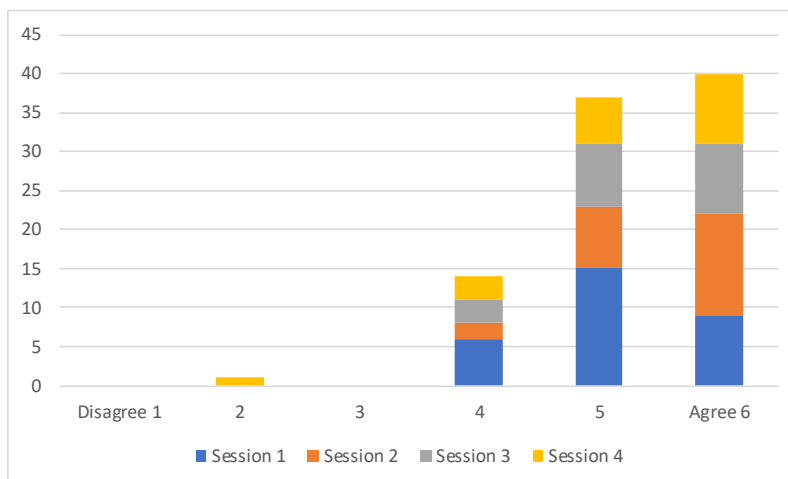
The role of council members was to see it as an opportunity to listen to a full range of perspectives on the topic; hear how citizens are processing the issue; and reflect on what the community thinks is important to focus on. At the time, the issue of homelessness was front and centre in Nanaimo. The 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. There were 60 attendees at Session #3.

The specific purpose of Community Engagement Pilot Project Session #4 held on Wednesday, November 21, 2018 from 6 to 9 p.m. at Beban Park Social Centre 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 enabled the new Mayor and most of Council to experience their first community engagement session. Our facilitator for the session was Larissa Coser with table moderation and notetaking by members of the Young Professionals of Nanaimo and members of the CETF. There were 68 attendees at Session #4.

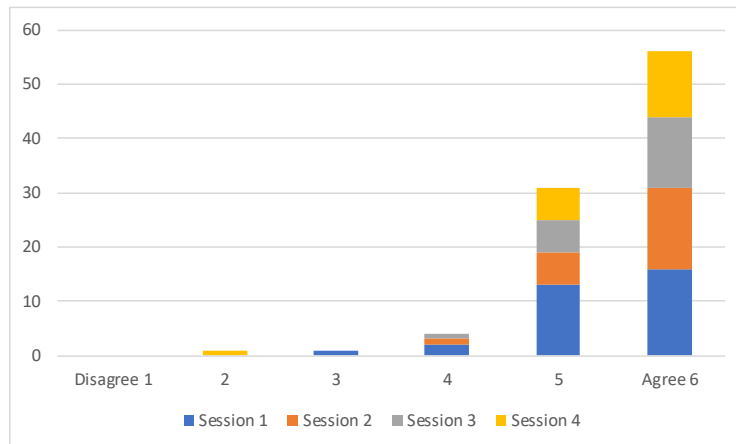
### Part 3a: Evaluation of the process -- criteria and assessment

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.

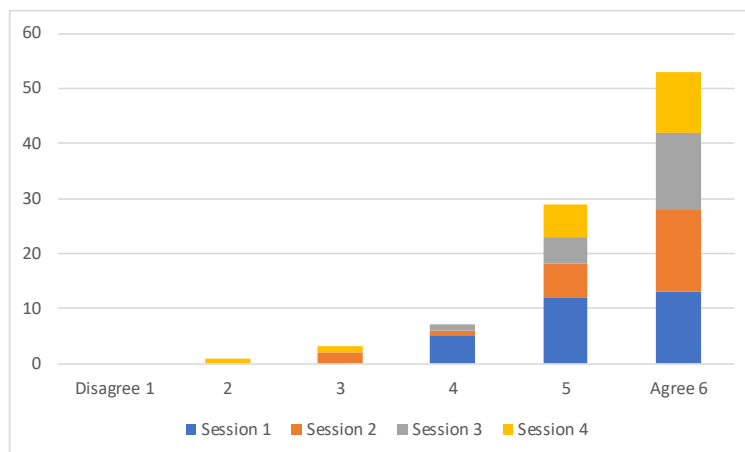
#### 1. I feel that I had influence in identifying which topics are important to me



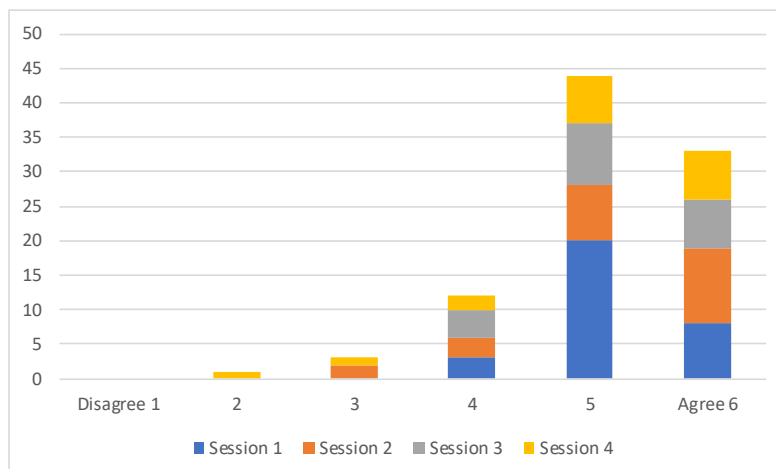
**2. I understood how to participate and felt welcome and respected while doing so**



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



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



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
- Little opportunity to truly engage with new councillors
- Needed more opportunity to discuss how neighbourhoods could really be empowered

At Session #4, since this was the last of our pilot projects, we also asked participants if they had any suggestions to help the CETF 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.

- Should be a follow-up meeting that truly discusses the details of how the structure, process, and transparency inhibits full and productive public engagement.

#### COMPARISON OF SOME DIRECT COSTS BY PILOT PROJECT SESSION (\$'s)

Location	Rent	Advertising	Supplies/Gift	Refreshments	Honourarium
1: VICC	\$1,852.50	\$909.28		\$1,636.48	\$1,000.00
2: Beban Park	376.72	869.78	946.08	217.88	700.00
3: Oliver Woods	356.53	1,362.55	82.22	1,334.29	400.00
4: Beban Park	166.23	1,269.33		231.00	1,100.00

Obviously, location has a significant impact on cost although some of the facility location expense will actually be returned to the City in the form of rental revenue that might have not otherwise been earned. Included in the cost of supplies for Session #2 is an expenditure of \$892.23 for live-streaming hardware which can continue to be used by the City in the future.

#### Part 3b: Content of Pilot Project Sessions for Council's consideration

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 green space projects like the waterfront walkway; and to tourism opportunities like the proposed Ocean Discovery Centre. Out of these ten themes, we asked those attending the session to pick their top three. The five topics with the most votes were then selected for detailed discussion at round tables. The top five topics chosen, in order of priority, were: Downtown Revitalization; Transportation; Community Engagement; Garbage/ Recycling; and Social Issues. We also had a "wildcard" table for those who wanted to pursue an alternative topic.

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;

<sup>5</sup> Website link to flip chart detailed and summary notes from November 23, 2017 Pilot Project #1 <https://www.nanaimo.ca/docs/your-government/boards-and-committees/nov-23-discussion-notes-transcribed.pdf>



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> At 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 emotions. From this initial discussion, seven themes emerged which in a second round of discussion resulted in a number of recommended actions which are transcribed here from the original flip charts.

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

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<sup>6</sup> Website link to video of Session #3 <https://www.nanaimo.ca/get-involved/community-engagement/community-engagement-archive/public-engagement-pilot-archive>

- 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;
  - 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:

- 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

From various perspectives, the work of the CETF in carrying out these 4 pilot project sessions was a success:

- Participants generally felt that their input was valued, that they understood how to participate and felt welcomed and respected while doing so.
- The task force demonstrated that even in an environment that was, at times, less than congenial, it was possible to have a mutually respectful conversation between residents and elected representatives.
- We also demonstrated that we should not be afraid, as a community, to have a compassionate and action directed dialogue about a highly contentious issue like homelessness.

In this regard, we have opened the door to an improvement in citizen participation in the City of Nanaimo. Neither Council nor staff have little to fear from involving residents in the decision-making process.

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<sup>7</sup> Website link to flip chart results of Session #4 <https://pub-nanaimo.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=19332>

The number of attendees ranged from 30 to 60 at any one session. This is not at variance with other public participation sessions held by the City of Nanaimo. It was not the intention of the task force to attract the maximum number of participants possible from within the city but rather to demonstrate how to have an effective dialogue with residents no matter how many there are. It is interesting to note that the session which was the least attended was the micro town-hall which was the only session where participants did not have an opportunity to develop solutions or actions to mitigate an issue.

As for the costs, the location of the sessions played a large part in the budget with the Vancouver Island Conference Centre being the most expensive. The task force felt, although not unanimously, that the facilitators deserved some monetary recognition for their participation and that, along with venue, was a large part of the cost of any one session. An effort was made to vary the locations throughout the city to involve different parts of the city and equalize the transportation burden. In regard to venues, the task force would not recommend holding a round table discussion in the Social Lounge at Beban Park: it is too noisy and, even in November, extremely cold.

One of the byproducts of this process was bringing various groups into active engagement with the community such as Vancouver Island University's Master of Community Planning program students and facilitating professor; numerous stakeholders involved in the discussion of homelessness; Toastmasters and Young Professionals of Nanaimo members to assist with table facilitation. There are numerous groups such as these who are quite willing to assist with engagement activities, and learn from this. By involving them, it demonstrates that they are valued, and it showcases their contribution to the city and democracy.

Effective table discussion facilitation played an invaluable part in the success of these sessions. Training of the facilitators as to the purpose and process of the session was extremely important. We observed that the process at each of the tables was more varied in sessions where we didn't have consistent training. Having citizens learn to facilitate community discussions is an important development of social capital that comes from bottom up community engagement.

The CETF also made an effort to incorporate online technology such as *Facebook Live* for citizens who wish to engage but find attending in person a challenge. For all sessions, video recordings of the results were provided online as were complete transcripts of the discussion.

## **Part 5: Recommendations moving forward**

Throughout this process, the task force gained a greater understanding and perspective of what community engagement is and can be. Community engagement is more than a town hall meeting or an open house: it is a culture fostered within an entire organization and a community. It is a culture where communication is meaningful and authentic; and asking questions makes a resident feel heard and respected at all levels. We believe there are opportunities for Council to improve the culture of engagement in Nanaimo and by doing so enhance the relationship and level of trust between the community and the city.

1. Council should start with the premise that:

- it is committed to working more closely with the community to improve engagement and participation in council decisions, so that residents feel empowered to be more active in shaping their community and future.<sup>8</sup>
- there should be some level of community engagement on every subject and project considered by Council and
- what requires definition is the level and intensity of the engagement **and, most importantly, how will the information gained from the process be used by staff and Council.**

The broadly recognized expertise of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) suggests that there is a continuum of increasing levels of public participation which range from merely “informing” the public to “consulting” to “involving” to “collaborating” and finally to “empowering.” Each level of participation involves different techniques for achieving its goal. As a result, determining the goal of the community engagement initiative is an important first step in identifying the most appropriate public participation format or technique. Open Houses, for example, are extremely useful for informing while, at the other end of the scale, referendums are useful for empowering. Many communities have adopted this spectrum as a framework for their consultation strategies.<sup>9</sup> In all instances, the purpose of the consultation should be decided first before determining the method of consultation since the latter is highly dependent on what you want to accomplish as a result of the consultation.

A particular challenge for communities is communicating clearly about the role and impact of citizen input on decision-making. Some communities have provided examples of specific opportunities when and how citizens can engage.<sup>10</sup> This would be useful for Nanaimo but identifying and defining these opportunities needs to be done through a community engagement collaboration process. When, for example, is it appropriate to engage the community in the development of a new bylaw? Is it during the drafting? Is it when it is discussed at the committee level? Or, is it only at a public hearing when a decision is made on the bylaw immediately following the hearing?

Community engagement is not one-way communication unless the purpose of the engagement is just to provide information and not to obtain feedback in any way. Real consultation is meaningless when it excludes from the outset any form of accommodation and is only designed to tick a box in an approval process whose outcome has already been decided. This is why it is also important to evaluate the consultation process and ask participants to rate its success. The answers may be surprising: what one individual thought was collaboration, for example, was seen by the participant as just providing information.<sup>11</sup>

2. Council should start with something as simple as a published calendar of what it intends to engage residents about over the next year.<sup>12</sup> This provides an opportunity for the city to clarify and prioritize engagement activities and reduce participant fatigue. It also demonstrates that this has

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the community engagement framework of “let’s talk Niagara Falls”

<sup>9</sup> City of Victoria: A Strategy to Improve Civic Engagement at the City of Victoria

<sup>10</sup> City of Victoria Engagement Framework: “Opportunities to participate”

<sup>11</sup> City of Pitt Meadows, Alberta: Civic Engagement Framework particularly “the input zone versus the engagement zone”

<sup>12</sup> City of Victoria Public Engagement Road Map

<https://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Communications/Documents/PE%20Road%20Map%20Illustration%20FEB2018e.jpg>

been planned, and is not merely opportunistic politics. There are opportunities in 2019 for some major community engagement events in Nanaimo:

- The Chief Administrator of Nanaimo has recommended that in the first quarter of 2019, Council develop a new strategic plan to set out priorities for the term. This represents the first opportunity since 2012 for Council to embark on a major community engagement process to develop a plan that is representative of community priorities. This cannot be a mere updating of the current plan which has been adjusted only by Council since 2016. It is time for all of us together to consider the direction we want to go as a municipality over the next four years and how we want to get there. Our suggestion is that the engagement be comprehensive but that the plan be clear, simple and contain action items that are able to be implemented.
- There are two other major projects for 2019 under Council's purview which are of special interest to the community at large: development of 1 Port Drive; and the Waterfront Walkway. The current budget proposes, for example, that we incur new debt in the amount of \$29 million for construction of the Waterfront Walkway over the next five years making this our largest capital project during that time period. Council must be assured that they understand the community's wishes with regard to these two projects before proceeding to implementation. In regard to 1 Port Drive, our waterfront is our major asset and we must ensure that the vision and values that were developed in 2013 as part of the South Downtown Waterfront Initiative are respected.
- And, finally there is the City of Nanaimo Official Plan which is also scheduled to begin to come under review in 2019. This will guide development for the next ten years and requires innovative community engagement strategies to ensure that residents and businesses feel part of this important conversation.

3. Council should ensure that existing methods for community engagement are fully understood and utilized.

- Community engagement is not just applicable to the "big" projects. How Council and Committees of Council handle delegations is an important part of the engagement process. Community engagement begins at the Advisory Committee level and residents and businesses should be encouraged to make presentations or be a delegate. Speaking before Council often comes too late in the process to have any meaningful impact.
- All reports going to Council and Committees should include a section on community engagement identifying level of engagement based on the IAP2 spectrum; how the engagement was or will be undertaken; what were the results; and how they would be taken into consideration.
- Feedback on the results of engagement should be provided online indicating what people said and how it impacted the final product or recommendation.
- Committee and Council meeting minutes need to be made available as soon as they are drafted so that decisions are clear and easily accessible.

- Council needs to clarify its correspondence practices to ensure that there are realistic expectations about feedback to and from the city. There is no point in encouraging residents to write to the mayor and council if there is no reply to their letters or emails.
  - Real consultation needs to take place not just at the visionary level of policies and programs but also when it comes to implementation. Community engagement doesn't stop when it comes to implementation of City projects that may have been approved without scrutiny as part of a larger capital project program. In the absence of Ward Councillors, there is nowhere for a resident to turn to express concern about or want to appeal the details of certain engineering projects.
  - Consultants employed to drive and/or support major city projects and initiatives should be made aware of the City's community engagement policy and process, and make efforts to use these and act in ways that align with them.
4. Council should begin a process of strengthening and empowering neighbourhoods to better ensure that programs and projects are actually meeting community needs.
- City programs and projects function better when neighbourhood associations and other community and stakeholder groups (such as businesses, environmental groups, arts groups, etc.) are involved in engagement efforts.
  - Neighbourhood associations can provide advice about neighbourhood priorities for engagement to City Staff and Council and be engaged in developing systems for gathering public input on these engagement priorities
  - Neighbourhood associations need to be consulted about how to manage difficult land use issues such as the placement of supportive housing before projects are initiated not when they are ready to be implemented
  - Councillors can represent their constituents by staying in touch and working with citizens to determine top priorities for engagement. Staying in touch could include at least two regular annual community engagement sessions similar to our micro town hall "meet your councillors" and the empowering neighbourhood sessions
  - Neighbourhood associations need to take responsibility for their credibility and ensure that they are representative of all interests. Council should require that associations have annual meetings and elections of officers.
  - Community engagement also only works when promises are honoured. Developing a neighbourhood plan becomes a contract between the city and its residents with the hope that some of it might be implemented - a promise that is not very often kept.
5. Council should consider how to improve community engagement through advertising, social media and online technology:

- Establish a plan for using social media to increase citizen participation;<sup>13</sup>
- Try new technologies which are fun and visual to get ongoing feedback from residents;<sup>14</sup>
- Understand the purpose of online surveys and the use of the captured information before creating them;
- Create effective online surveys to seek feedback on topics/ details incorporating digital identification and residency requirements to ensure legitimate and defensible engagement;
- Publish City Council minutes online earlier;
- Improve existing newspaper advertisements concerning zoning and official plan amendments to make them more accessible to the reader;
- Allow questions from home to City Council in question period;
- Improve SAR audio and video during Committee of the Whole meetings;
- Video record committee meetings;
- Create an online engagement panel where citizens sign up to receive regular emails to provide opinions;
- Establish a Twitter town hall.

6. Council should also consider establishing a central focus for community engagement within the city by:

- Creating an Office of Community Engagement to help implement these activities across the city and shift resource focus from one-way communications to formalized two-way dialogue.<sup>15</sup>
- Establishing a more formal Community Engagement Committee which would:
  - Work from recommendations of the CETF
  - Liaise with council and staff on community engagement matters
  - Help to organize future engagement sessions
  - Continue to explore new worlds of community engagement
  - Produce a community engagement charter for Nanaimo
  - Help to produce a community engagement handbook for Nanaimo
  - Build on the entire concept of community interaction by residents, staff of Nanaimo and Council Members further than the task force was able to do.

## Part 6: Conclusion

The CETF is pleased to have been a part of this process to make public engagement a part of everyday life in the city of Nanaimo. We encourage members of Council to consider not only our recommendations for the future but also the specific data that arose from each of the sessions. This input was created and presented by the citizens of this community and should be considered critical to the preparation of Council's 2019 strategic plan and priorities.

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<sup>13</sup> Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal District and Counties Social Media Resource Guide  
[https://www.auma.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs\\_Initiatives/citizen\\_engagement/social\\_media\\_resource\\_guide.pdf](https://www.auma.ca/sites/default/files/Advocacy/Programs_Initiatives/citizen_engagement/social_media_resource_guide.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> For example: MetroQuest Public Involvement Software Company in Vancouver. <https://metroquest.com/>

<sup>15</sup> City of Penticton: Community Engagement Builder position. <https://www.penticton.ca/assets/Departments/16-50E%20Community%20Engagement%20Builder.pdf>