



For the Council to Follow Committee of the Whole March 14, 2024

To: Council to Follow Committee of the Whole Date: March 8, 2024
From: Mayor Marianne Alto
Subject: **Mayor's Report to Council – Community Safety and Wellbeing Initiative**

Background

When City Council endorsed its 2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan, it identified eight priorities. Among those priorities is Community Wellbeing and Safety. To begin that work, the strategic plan mapped six paths to actioning community wellbeing and safety:

- Support a range of civilian, bylaw and policing crisis response and prevention services.
- Beautify, support, and enhance Victoria's downtown and urban villages.
- Advance City policies that support accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion through a social justice lens.
- Develop and implement a community safety plan.
- Support innovative, well-being solutions to reduce harm for housed and unhoused people living in neighbourhoods where there are shelters.
- Work with partner agencies and governments to create life opportunities for unhoused people.

On June 1, 2023, the mayor proposed a council member motion that outlined a mechanism to achieve the fourth path to community wellbeing and safety, while supporting and complementing the other 5 paths. Council endorsed the mayor's council member motion, and work began to develop a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

The Plan will identify opportunities and recommendations for the City of Victoria, and note for its multi-sectoral partners actions they might consider, in support of local, enhanced, integrated, complementary systems, processes, and initiatives with a specific focus on increasing community safety and well-being.

The resulting plan will encompass an intentional, balanced, practical re-imagination of community safety and wellbeing. It aims to enhance the quality of life for our community, residents (housed and unhoused) and businesses. The plan is intended to address a broad range of social issues, embracing a continuum of solutions, from conventional and common to innovative and novel.

Recommended actions arising from the work will come to city Council for consideration, deliberation and, as Council determines, implementation. Council will be challenged to embrace

change, innovation and alternatives encompassing a new definition, and delivery, of community wellbeing.

Mayor and Council recognize that increasing community safety and wellbeing for people living in every Victoria neighbourhood requires a collective approach to multiple complex issues, such as declining civility and social cohesion, increasing social disorder, inadequate housing supply and homelessness, poverty, inequality, addictions, mental and physical health challenges, criminal activity, socioeconomic challenges facing seniors, youth and newcomers, and other factors. These efforts should include interventions to reduce crime and chaos while creating longer term system-wide solutions.

Development of the plan was initially being supported by the Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention (now known as the Canadian Centre for Safer Communities, or CCSC) – a community of practice created to support municipalities to invest in effective, evidence-based, and collaborative crime prevention strategies. We're also working with Muflehun – a resource center in preventing hate, extremism, and violence by conducting research and analysis of current hate and extremism challenges. Muflehun is sponsored by the federal government and is providing data and analysis on some target areas relating to crime and public safety.

Work began in August 2023, and will conclude with presentations and recommendations to Council in September 2024.

Community Leaders' Panel

Development of the Victoria CSWB Plan is guided by a 10-member Community Leaders' Panel (CLP), convened by the mayor, and comprised of local service provider, business, public health, housing, law enforcement, fire and emergency response, neighbourhood and local Indigenous, leaders.

The CLP is developing a shared vision for change, re-imagining the concept and reality of community safety and wellbeing, including a common understanding of the role of and relationship between conventional police and civilian services, local public safety challenges and joint approaches to solving them, and how to leverage regional resources to act. Since the initial launch in August, the CLP has continued to meet monthly, learning, sharing, conspiring, working collectively to embrace wicked problems and their solutions.

Panel gatherings have been productive and focused on discussion about current community wellbeing discourse within the city, and how to use that understanding to develop an engagement framework that will feed recommendations that will realize redefined community wellbeing and describe the actions the city needs to undertake to realize that vision.

Engagement

The engagement process is a method to understand people's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and opinions about wellbeing and safety. It is designed to ensure spaces for diverse voices and experiences, in settings and ways that enable free flowing conversation while limiting the chance for inadvertent participant harm. The ideas, information, and commentary received will inform and be reflected in the final report. Participants' voices will be heard and seen.

Engagement will allow an understanding and clarification of what we think we know, and identify what we don't know, so we can blend all that knowledge into a practical blueprint for action. Engagement will be undertaken through a public survey and in-person sessions facilitated by

third party facilitators, in partnership with host organizations, to create a dialogue that is directed by the organizations and participants themselves.

The Solicitor General has indicated that he is supportive of this work, and we continue to update provincial counterparts as the CSWB initiative progresses.

Facilitation

The city has partnered with five local facilitators, each with diverse backgrounds and connections to various communities within the city, to be in-person facilitators for engagement. Just begun, facilitators are reaching out to community organizations to arrange in-person sessions. The facilitation will reach as many corners of the community as possible. The facilitators will reach more than 40 organizations in a variety of sessions, including a range of interests from the Victoria Labour Council, the SD61 PAC, the Victoria Police, the Victoria multifaith society, neighborhood associations, community service provider staff and users, and many more.

Survey

The general survey is one part of the engagement process and is open for participants who reside in Victoria and in the CRD (questions will explore respondent's relationship with the City of Victoria). The survey is approximately 30 questions long and can be completed online using the City's *Bang the Table* platform, or via a paper form that can be picked up and dropped off at City Hall. Residents will see posters around the city, and small take-home style cards with survey information will be widely distributed. Information about the survey will be on the City's social media, in a media release, and sent directly to local organizations, facilities, businesses, and outreach groups. As with the facilitated sessions, the list of organizations receiving the survey is widespread and diverse – from local businesses to youth sports leagues to food banks, and many more. The survey will be widespread and accessible, providing a solid base of quantitative and qualitative data. The survey, crafted in partnership with the Community leaders panel, CCSC, and the city, will open on Tuesday, April 2nd, and close Sunday, May 12.

Data

Muflehun – a resource center in preventing hate, extremism, and violence by conducting research and analysis of current hate and extremism challenges – is working with the CSWB initiative by way of a partnership with Public Safety Canada. Muflehun is deriving data from a variety of Canadian sources to compare data on crime, safety, violence and hate in six communities, to create comparators for local data. The identified research targets for Muflehun include intimate partner violence, human trafficking, gang violence and recruitment in schools, street violence, and random assaults.

A project team, which may include CCFSC, will work in conjunction with City staff to aggregate the data collected through all forms of engagement. That collective information will be considered and inform the context and content of recommendations.

General Timeline

From August to February, the Community Leaders' Panel has reviewed, probed, debated, in service to a reimagination of community wellbeing and safety. CSWB community engagement is launching now, with the survey wrapping May 12th, and in-person engagement wrapping in late May. A comprehensive public event, to hear, consider and comment on initial findings, will occur

in June, followed by consolidation and reflection on all the findings, leading to a report to Council in September.

Finally

The Community Safety and Wellbeing (CSWB) initiative is a launch point, providing Council with data, resources, and city residents' counsel on what is, and how to enhance community wellbeing.

We need avant garde, cooperative, innovative approaches to create the safe, welcoming, and inclusive city in which we all want to live. Victoria's Community Safety and Wellbeing Mayor's Initiative will outline what work will craft that city.

More information can be found at [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan | City of Victoria](#)
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For the Council to Follow Committee of the Whole, August 1, 2024

To: Council **Date:** July 26, 2024
From: Mayor Alto
Subject: Mayor's Report to Council- Update on the Community Safety and Wellbeing Initiative

Background

On March 8th, 2024, the Mayor reported to Council on the work then completed in creating a community safety and wellbeing (CSWB) plan, one of the actions identified to support Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. Council had endorsed a resolution on June 1, 2023, that initiated this work. The City's CSWB plan will encompass intentional, balanced, and practical-reimagination of community safety and wellbeing, to support and enhance the quality of life of residents, housed and unhoused, businesses, and organizations. It will identify opportunities and recommendations for the City of Victoria, and its multi-sectoral partners, to improve local, enhanced, integrated, complementary systems, processes and initiatives to increase community safety and wellbeing in the City.

The Community Leaders Panel, convened by the Mayor, has met monthly since August, 2023. The Panel has guided the direction and process in creating this plan. The public engagement process of the plan commenced in March, 2024, and while engagement has for the most part concluded in July, 2024 – some specific engagements remain underway, and the engagement process remains fluid and adaptive.

The plan and its recommendations will be presented to Council, for their consideration, in the fall of 2024, and will form part of the program of a national conference on community safety and wellbeing hosted by the City in late October.

Engagement

To help inform the development of Victoria's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, public input was sought over a five-month period (April to August 2024) through two surveys, facilitated community and sectoral dialogues, conversations with First Nations, and a series of pop-up events in community. The City engaged four local facilitators with specific knowledge and expertise in working with diverse communities. Facilitators connected with various target groups and sectors in community to facilitate local discussion sessions.

Opportunities for public input were advertised online through boosted posts on the City's social media channels, print ads in the Times Colonist and the Victoria News, community posters, a public service announcement, stakeholder emails, a range of City e-newsletters, the City's website and Have Your Say engagement platform.

All communications directed the community to visit engage.victoria.ca/cswp to learn more and to share their concerns, experiences and suggestions to help inform Victoria's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

Public Survey

A public survey, written by the Community Leaders' Panel, was available to the public through the City's Have Your Say engagement platform, and through print copies. The survey was open from April 5 to May 12. In total, 1,660 people completed the survey. Questions focused on belonging, perceptions of safety, and participants' understanding of safety.

Systemic Change Survey

The Systemic Change Survey was written by the Community Leaders' Panel, and was a closed, invite-only survey, hosted online. This survey asked participants to comment on their understanding of the systemic barriers and challenges to wellbeing for vulnerable populations in the City. Those who work in the social service sector, those who directly support vulnerable or unhoused individuals, and those with an otherwise identified expertise in the field of service provision and societal barriers, as identified by the community leaders' panel and facilitators, were invited to participate. In total, 136 people completed the systemic change survey.

Facilitated Dialogues

Facilitators worked with community groups to set up conversations with various agencies, sectors, and communities within the City. These guided sessions provided participants with a safe, confidential, and culturally-sensitive space to share their observations of safety and wellbeing. The questions asked in each group differed, and were dependent on the group and facilitator, to minimize any risk of causing inadvertent harm through targeted questioning. Topics included specific safety and wellbeing observations, potential actions, and perceptions of community safety. Honorariums were provided to participating individuals at their request, in accordance with the City's honorarium policy.

20 sessions were hosted, with approximately 160 participants. Groups included immigrants and newcomers, youth, service providers, neighborhood associations, the business community, faith groups, seniors, the francophone community, medical and mental health care providers, police, and people with lived experience of homelessness and drug use.

First Nations Conversations

In recognition of the unique and important relationship that the City has with the Songhees Nation and the Xwsepsum Nation, and the relationship between the Nations and the land on which the City of Victoria sits in its entirety, special care and consideration must be given in allowing the two Nations the space and opportunity to comment freely on safety. Given this, the Mayor and City staff are working with the Nations to host sessions in accordance with the wishes and direction of the Chief and Council of each Nation. These sessions will occur throughout the summer.

Pop-up Events

Five pop-up events were hosted in community in June and July. They were drop-in style sessions where participants were asked to share their thoughts anonymously on post-it notes, by answering six guided questions about safety, such as ‘where they feel safe and unsafe’, and ‘what they would recommend to the City to improve safety and wellbeing’. These sessions were facilitated by City staff, facilitators, and members of the Community Leaders Panel.

These events were hosted at the Fernwood Community Centre, Moss Street Market, Victoria West Community Centre, the Victoria Public Market, and the Atrium. In total, approximately 200 people participated.

Content & Data Analysis

The City has contracted HelpSeeker, a Canadian data analyst firm that specializes in social sector solutions, community wellbeing, and social service delivery. A challenge with this project is that the data collection questions were unique and different in most situations. That, combined with over 35,000 individual lines of data, has pushed the boundaries of traditional social data analysis. HelpSeeker has built a custom data ontology – which refers to the method, mechanisms, and taxonomy to understand, assess, and categorize data. The data collected through engagement, with additional pre-existing quantitative data about crime, safety, and community demographics, will be categorized according to one of several hundred identified themes. From there, HelpSeeker will identify the frequency in which each theme occurred in the data collected. HelpSeeker will submit a data report, including analysis and commentary, which will be provided as an appendix to the final Community Safety and Wellbeing plan.

Next Steps

Some targeted engagements will continue over the summer. These identified groups, including the Songhees Nation and the Kosapsum Nation, will take place over the month of August. All data sources will be compiled, analyzed and presented to the Community Leaders Panel to help formulate recommendations and discussion. Data is one component of many complex considerations reflecting the larger real-world context of living in Victoria, encapsulating the experiential stories of Victorians, including the broad experiences of the Panel. All this information will inform the report and recommendations that will be presented to Council in the Fall.