

April 23/20 CAO Remarks

Good Morning Mayor and Council.

Emergency Operations Centre

We are continuing to triage all COVID-19 related City responses through the EOC with daily check ins at 2pm for the entire EOC and various working group calls at other times during the day.

In a time of pandemic – neighbourhoods are coming together.

Neighbourhood Team

Beginning this week some neighbourhood associations have moved their meetings to the **Zoom platform** to connect virtually. The Neighbourhood Liaisons are participating to provide their updates with a focus on the **'Neighbours Helping Neighbours' page** created with tools & resources to support residents with things like; ideas on how to help your neighbours, staying connected, ideas to stay active, and access to food. This page will continue to be updated with new information and programs.

<https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/neighbourhoods.html>

The **City of Victoria's Local Champions program** continues to thrive in these uncertain times with 28 active participants. **Day long weekend learning sessions have been pared down to three hour workshops** and will increase in frequency as we continue to deliver the course curriculum online via Zoom mtgs. Classmates who share common themes within their projects have been put into **Learning Pods**, and are able to use the break out group function in Zoom to facilitate learning and supporting their projects. **A number of classmates have taken on Covid 19 response as a theme to their practicums, and are actively reaching out to their neighbours to provide support.**

Business Hub / Economic Development

To further support business, **an online campaign** has been created to focus on locals supporting those businesses who are still operating and/or have pivoted to an online retail platform. Called **ShopYYJ**, ads should be seen in the next few days on a variety of social media channels and media. Similarly another **campaign to promote the tools and resources available to businesses** will be created called **yyjbizsupport** to provides additional support to the Provincial and Federal programs.

Victoria Conference Centre

Several upgrade projects have started to take advantage of the closed facility such as the accessibility door installed off the Atrium, and meeting rooms refreshed with paint and new LED lighting, these efforts will further support our recovery when business returns to normal.

Get Growing

Get Growing, Victoria! is an initiative run by the City of Victoria's **Growing in the City program** in partnership with community-partner, non-profit organizations to grow and distribute vegetable and herb seedlings to communities in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated renewed interest in community resilience and food security, and **many residents have expressed interest in learning to garden to supplement their food supplies.** In April of 2020, City of Victoria Council directed staff to temporarily reprioritize the municipal nursery and

greenhouses for the growth and distribution of food starts to be shared over the 2020 growing season. Using existing Parks nursery operations, as many as 75,000 edible plant starts will be grown in 2020.

The City of Victoria's role in this program primarily as the "supplier" as we can provide our existing infrastructure (greenhouse, costs of inputs, soil, peat pots, locally sourced organic seeds, etc.) paired with our existing staffing time and expertise to help start these seeds. The City can operate this initial phase of Get Growing Victoria at such a scale that it provides a substantial impact on reducing barriers such as upfront costs and limited transportation for community members who might be facing financial impacts during COVID-19.

City staff in are the midst of finalizing some exciting partnerships with various organizations who match the description of both types of distribution hubs. There are some innovative programs that are emerging that look to help fill the gaps of where vulnerable populations need support.

My Fed Farm is an example of program that has emerged since the pandemic hit – the program operated by Food-Eco District will support 500 families and laid off workers by **providing home-based start up food gardens in raised fabric bags ideal for growing on balconies or small spaces**. The program will also provide all the supplies and offers an initial online consultation and education materials necessary to get started. **This program is a partnership between TOPSOIL Innovative Urban Agriculture, FED, City of Victoria and other partner organizations.**

We look forward to working with other partner organizations who are seeking innovative and collaborative solutions to localizing our food systems and acting as conduits to provide fresh food to those who need it most.

Get Growing Victoria is rapidly moving to keep up with the growing season, so we will continue to scale up as we learn here, as long we have interest and demand from partners organizations.