

Address to Council – 13 May 2021

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Trauma-Informed Training for Council members and senior city staff

1. Proposal: To include trauma-informed training for city staff and council to ensure public commentary is appropriate, empathetic, and inclusive of the population in order to not cause undue harm to citizens and society as a whole.
2. Background:
  - a. What is Trauma Informed Practice and why is it important?
    - i. Trauma-Informed Practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.
    - ii. Traumatic stress has profound impacts on multiple domains of life and increases the risk of many adverse outcomes — such as mental and physical health problems, academic difficulties, arrest and incarceration, food insecurity, and homelessness.
    - iii. Four “Rs”: realizing the widespread impact of trauma and pathways to recovery, recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma among consumers of services and staff, responding by integrating knowledge about trauma into practice and policy; and proactively resisting re-traumatization. Trauma-informed approaches to practice have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing the use of seclusion and restraint, improving substance use and mental health outcomes and enhancing the quality of environments.
  - b. What is the relevance for government institutions?
    - i. Trauma-informed practice initially gained traction in human and mental health service sectors at the local level, but has recently been embraced by a wide array of sectors at multiple levels of government.

- ii. Increases in legislative attention to trauma-informed practice signal a need for a trauma-informed workforce and integration of knowledge about trauma into the core curricula in public health, education, and criminal justice programs.
- iii. Many social problems are linked to trauma, a trauma-informed perspective is relevant to a range of local, provincial, federal, and international policies.

### 3. Context:

- a. City councillors as elected officials' need to ensure their actions and commentary are made with comprehension of the core issues faced by our society and the issues that disproportionately affect marginalized populations. Lack of knowledge and understanding can lack thoughtful consideration of the effect on the public in four ways:
  - i. Invalidation through denial. Denying the existence of rape culture discredits survivors of sexualized violence and causes harm by invalidating their lived experiences;
  - ii. Barriers to reporting. Suggesting all survivors must report in order to allow for perpetrators to be brought to justice disregards the many barriers that discourage survivors from reporting and further upholds a narrative that accountability is the responsibility of a survivor, placing additional burden on a person who should be focused on their healing;
  - iii. Limit of accountability. Supporting harmful narratives that maintain accountability is only executed through use of our legal system, which is in desperate need for reform, limits impressionable youth who may be exposed to such comments from comprehensive education on greater issues at play that they are likely to experience if they haven't already.
  - iv. Subjectivity limiting advocacy. Making ill-informed comments about a societal issue that plagues all western societies demonstrates an inability to remove one's position of privilege and advocate for the needs of the city in an objective way.
- b. Providing this training to city employees and elected officials is one part to establishing cultural change. Those in a position to represent our city and advocate for our needs should be setting an example for others, and without having a trauma-informed approach, alongside one that is

inclusive and intersectional, we risk future commentary having long-lasting negative effects on our population as discussed.

4. Justification:

- a. Foundational Principles Of Responsible Conduct. There are 4 guiding principles for responsible conduct as brought forward by the Working Group on Responsible Conduct. Though we could find justification under all, we will focus on two that were not upheld in the recent comments and subsequent actions from an elected official.
  - i. Accountability. One point to fulfilling this principle is “listen to and consider the opinions and needs of the community in all decision making, and allow for discourse and feedback”.
    - 1. An apology on a social media site is not full accountability. Acknowledging misjudgement and harmful actions, whether intended or not, is one aspect of accountability. There has been no transparent update provided from this member in terms of the education they are seeking.
    - 2. The proposed solution in this particular case was swiftly brought forward yet lacked robust consultation with the communities named to participate. The motion did not account for how it would support the strategic plan nor did it provide a critical analysis of how this motion would further support or advocate for the ongoing staff work with regards to the 2019 motion to mandate sexualized violence prevention training across Victoria venues. Education needs to happen first and foremost before proposing the use of resources to solve issues that some officials neglected to address.
    - 3. In order for elected officials to foster an environment where discourse and feedback is welcomed, they must remain open and judgement-free, instead of being met with criticism which communicates a lack of value for community input.
  - ii. Respect. One point to displaying respect to others and as a representative is that an official is to “create an environment of trust, including displaying awareness and sensitivity around comments and language that may be perceived as offensive or derogatory”.
    - 1. Being trauma-informed allows for increased capacity to think before acting and to ensure commentary and actions are

executed in a way that is inclusive and minimizes the possibility of doing harm.

- b. Code of Conduct. Not only should trauma-informed training be a part of city staff training but there should be a code of conduct for elected officials that is made available to the public. The closest publication would be the excerpt from the City of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2019-2022, *Declaration of Principles and Values*, page 7 (see appendix 1).
  - i. These principles are made "to create a culture of deep respect". They reference inclusivity and intersectionality through mentions of "welcoming diversity and fostering a spirit of inclusion".
  - ii. Council is open to ongoing education as stipulated in "nurturing a culture of continuous learning with each other".
  - iii. Trauma-informed training would therefore be in line with council's declaration and would echo the importance for all persons to engage in continuing education at any point of their career to ensure those representing our city are doing so with an empathetic lens.

## Appendix 1

Excerpt from City of Victoria's Strategic Plan 2019-2022, *Declaration of Principles and Values*, page 7.

VICTORIA CITY COUNCIL 2019–2022

# Declaration of Principles and Values

**I**N ORDER to create a culture of deep respect, to build the relationships we need to do the work, and to aspire to be our highest selves even when it feels hard and when difficult decisions could stand to divide us, we are committed to:

1. Governing with integrity, transparency and an unwavering dedication to public service.
2. Welcoming diversity and fostering a spirit of inclusion and equity in everything we do.
3. Leading with creativity and courage.
4. Deep listening and critical thinking.
5. Assuming that everyone is here with good intention to make the community better.
6. Nurturing a culture of continuous learning with each other, staff and the public.
7. Working collaboratively and cooperatively with each other, staff and the public while welcoming a diversity of opinion and thought.
8. Practising generosity, curiosity and compassion.
9. Being patient, kind and caring.
10. Bringing a spirit of open-mindedness and open-heartedness to all of our work.
11. Keeping a sense of humour and light-heartedness with each other.
12. Reviewing these principles once a quarter with the same humility, honesty, and candour with which we govern.

CITY OF VICTORIA | Strategic Plan 2019–2022

## References

Government of Canada. 2021. Trauma and violence-informed approaches to policy and practice. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/trauma-violence-informed-approaches-policy-practice.html>

Government of British Columbia. 2021 Responsible Conduct of Locally Elected Officials. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/governance-powers/conduct-of-locally-elected-officials/responsible-conduct>

Working Group on Responsible Conduct. 2018. Foundational Principles Of Responsible Conduct. [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/local-governments/governance-powers/foundational\\_principles\\_responsible\\_conduct.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/local-governments/governance-powers/foundational_principles_responsible_conduct.pdf)

Working Group on Responsible Conduct. 2021. Forging the Path to Responsible Conduct in Your Local Government. <https://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Resolutions~and~Policy/Policy/Governance/Working~Group~on~Responsible~Conduct/Forging%20the%20Path%20to%20Responsible%20Conduct.pdf>

## Reading List

Bowen, E.A., & Murshid, N.S. 2016. Trauma-Informed social policy: A conceptual framework for policy analysis and advocacy. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(2), 223-229. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4815621/>

Kramer Tebes, J., Champine, R.B., Marlin, S.L., & Strambler, M.J. 2019. Population health and trauma-informed practice: Implications for programs, systems, and policies. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 64, 494-508. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12382>

Municipality of Saanich. 2020. Council Policy: Code of conduct. <https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Local~Government/Documents/Bylaws~and~Policies/Council~Policies/code-of-conduct.pdf>

Purtle, J., & Lewis, M. 2017. Mapping “Trauma-Informed” legislative proposals in U.S. Congress. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 44, 867-876. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-017-0799-9>