



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of October 21, 2021

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** October 1, 2021
From: Mandi Sandhu, Service Innovation and Improvement Head
Subject: Victoria Welcoming City Strategy and Action Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Endorse the Victoria Welcoming City Strategy and Action Plan; and
2. Direct staff to work with the community to develop community-driven implementation plans.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2020, City staff, Council members, along with a community-focused Welcoming City Task Force began development of a Welcoming City Strategy and Action plan. In February 2021, external consultants from Neuquinn Consulting were contracted to work with the Task Force to develop the proposed recommendations for Welcoming Strategy. The purpose of this initiative was to co-create a roadmap for a stronger, more inclusive community, and bridge the gaps between newcomers and long-time residents.

The Welcoming City Strategy is anchored around the *Welcoming Standard* and addresses seven key impact areas: Government Leadership, Civic Engagement, Equitable Access, Education, Connected Communities, Economic Development, and Safe Communities. The Action Plan defines community desired outcomes into targeted short (1-2 years), medium (2-3 years) and long-term (3-5 years) timelines. Implementation steps are based on ease of execution, resource requirements, the need for collaborative development with community partner organizations, and necessary measures for success and are subject to further refinement.

The implementation of this Strategy and Action Plan is a shared responsibility with the community. Staff will continue to work with the community and pending Council approval of a continuing Welcoming City Advisory Committee, contained in a separate report, continue regular engagement and partnership building.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council endorsement of the Welcoming City Strategy and Action Plan.

BACKGROUND

As directed through the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan adopted by Council in early 2019, one of the Actions under the Objective of *Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City* is to:

Create a Welcoming City Strategy:

- a. Staff to join Welcoming City initiatives*
- b. Community efforts that promote inclusivity, understanding and collaboration across cultures to learn about and appreciate everyone's unique perspective*
- c. City not to use funds, personnel or equipment to detain people due to immigration status*
- d. Business leaders, civic groups institutions, residents to join in a city-wide effort to expand prosperity and integration to include all residents*
- e. Ensure a welcoming, compassionate and neighbourly atmosphere in our community where all people, including immigrants and refugees are welcomed, accepted, respected and encouraged to participate*
- f. City plays role in collective response to fear mongering, racism and human suffering*
- g. Diversity and inclusion training for staff and Council*
- h. Support entrepreneurial ambitions of newcomers through the Business Hub at City Hall*

To support this direction, a Task Force was established to provide guidance and input on the project. Additionally external expertise was retained to lead the project from Neuquinn Consulting. The Task Force was co-chaired by Mayor Helps and Councillor Dubow. The Strategy draws from the Task Force members own expertise and lived experiences, as well as invited experts and public with the goal of assessing Victoria against the Welcoming Standard to co-create a Victoria specific Welcoming City Strategy. The Task Force members included representatives from the following organizations and community groups:

- Bayanihan Community Centre
- Société francophone de Victoria
- Greater Vitoria Chamber of Commerce
- Victoria Police Department
- Members at Large
- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society
- Intercultural Association
- Songhees Nation
- International Student
- Esquimalt Nation
- Here in Canada Magazine
- Greater Victoria Public Library
- Chinese Community Services Society
- George Jay School PAC
- Kulea Culture Society
- Victoria Silver Threads

The two-phased public engagement approach operated under the model of ***By Us, For Us*** to enlist expertise and lived experiences of both long-term residents and newcomers to inform the recommendations, using the Welcoming Standard as a guide. The first phase took place in May 2021 and invited the public to participate by providing stories, ideas, and completing an on-line poll.

In addition, the Task Force along with City staff completed an assessment of Victoria against the Welcoming Standard. The findings were then tested in a series of virtual workshops. The second phase concluded in mid-July and offered an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on draft recommendations for the Strategy through an online survey.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Welcoming Standards are community specific roadmaps that provide a guide with community determined benchmarks to develop stronger, more inclusive communities and bridge the gaps between newcomers and long-time residents. A 'newcomer' is defined as a recent immigrant (up to five years in Victoria), refugees, international students, temporary foreign workers, and recent immigrant Canadians relocating to the city. Welcoming cities recognize that communities are healthier, happier, and more productive when newcomers are welcomed and can participate fully in society and the local economy.

The Welcoming Standard is drawn from *Welcoming America*, a non-profit organization that was established in 2009. Since that time, several countries including Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and the United Kingdom joined as members of Welcoming International. More recently, the Government of Canada, through the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship joined the network in 2020. The City of Victoria is the first city in Canada to develop a Welcoming City Strategy. The Welcoming Standard is organized according to the following seven categories:

1. **Government Leadership** - In welcoming places, local governments implement systems, programs, and comprehensive equity, diversity, and anti-racism policies that strengthen community efforts and embed inclusion within government agencies.
2. **Civic Engagement** - Welcoming communities actively ensure that residents, including newcomers, fully participate in civic life by increasing access to leadership and democratic spaces.
3. **Equitable Access** - Welcoming places work to ensure community services and opportunities are available to all residents, including newcomers.
4. **Education** - Welcoming communities strive for an educational system that ensures all students have the support they need to succeed in school and the education they need to succeed in the workforce.
5. **Connected Communities** - Welcoming communities build connections between newcomers and long-term residents by strengthening relationships and communicating shared values.
6. **Economic Development** - Welcoming communities harness the full potential of all residents. Newcomers have the skills and assets to thrive, and economic development systems are prepared to leverage new and existing talent.
7. **Safe Communities** - Welcoming communities foster trust and build relationships between residents, including newcomers, and local law enforcement and safety agencies.

These standards are intended to help communities imagine the possibilities of what they could look like while also providing a framework of accountability to measure progress.

The Action Plan includes twenty-two (22) recommended actions and defines community desired outcomes into targeted short (1-2 years), medium (2-3 years) and long-term (3-5 years) timelines. Implementation steps are based on ease of execution, resource requirements, the need for collaborative development with community partner organizations, and necessary measures for

success and subject to further refinement.

The implementation of this Strategy and Action Plan is a shared responsibility with the community, and not solely the work of the City alone. Staff will continue to work with the community and pending Council approval of a continuing Welcoming City Advisory Committee, contained in a separate report, continue regular engagement and partnership building. It is expected that as community conversations evolve, the Action Plan will be further refined in the coming years.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

The Welcoming City Strategy is intended to be community owned and driven. Many of the action items are outside the jurisdiction of local government, however the City can play a key roll in bringing together other levels of government, not-for-profit organizations, and academic institutions to further build out specific strategies and programs. As such, staff are recommending Council endorse, rather than approve the Strategy and Action Plan. Additionally, pending Council approval of a new Terms of Reference for a continuing Welcoming City Advisory Committee contained in a separate report, work with new members will help inform the delivery of the action plan recommendations.

Accessibility Impact Statement

Core to the goal and intent of the Welcoming City Strategy is the ensure an inclusive community where everyone can participate equitably in programs and services.

2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan

This report directly responds to the Strategic Plan Objective of Health, Well-Being, and a Welcoming City to develop a Welcoming City Strategy. This report also supports Victoria 3.0 – Recovery Reinvention Resilience 2020 – 2041 which is meant to create a city for everyone, including a focus on “a clear goal of improving the quality of life and well-being of the community”.

Impacts to Financial Plan

No additional funding is being requested in the 2022 Financial Plan.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The Welcoming City Strategy supports the Official Community Plan value of Inclusivity and Accessibility - respect and respond to the perspectives, values and needs of Victoria’s many individuals, groups, and communities.

CONCLUSIONS

As the first municipality in Canada to adopt the Welcoming Standard in the development of Victoria’s Welcoming City Strategy, this represents an important step to bridging the gap between newcomers and long-term residents, drawing in the community as partners to make Victoria a more welcoming city.

Respectfully submitted,

Albert Galiev

Lead, Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Silvia Mangué

Coordinator, Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Mandi Sandhu

Head of Corporate Initiatives

Susanne Thompson

Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

1. Welcoming City Strategy
2. Welcoming City Action Plan