



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-reimagining of community safety and wellbeing, to support and enhance the quality of life for 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 providing 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.

Respectfully submitted,



Mayor Marianne Alto.