



Governance and Priorities Committee Report

For the Meeting of September 17, 2015

To: Governance and Priorities Committee **Date:** September 8, 2015
From: Katie Hamilton, Director, Citizen Engagement
and Strategic Planning
Subject: Options for Developing a Youth Engagement Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to:

Engage up to 10 youth, (aged 12-24) including Youth Council representatives, Victoria High School youth leadership students, representatives from youth serving agencies, and youth-at-large to engage the community and assist staff in the development of a “designed by youth, for youth” strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to bring forward options for Council’s consideration for the development of a youth engagement strategy. The goal of the youth engagement strategy is to increase participation of young members of Victoria in the design, planning and decision-making in their community.

One of the City’s goals as outlined in the Strategic Plan is to engage and empower the community. Youth are an important segment of Victoria’s population, accounting for 15 percent of the City of Victoria’s total population, yet their voices are often underrepresented in City planning.

A youth engagement strategy can identify gaps and strengths in services and civic opportunities for this age demographic and create more opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities. The outcome of this strategy is to create opportunities for youth to engage with their municipality at an early age to foster meaningful and sustain participation in civic issues, and build community connections.

The City currently engages young people through funding youth specific programming at community centres, offering youth programs and services at the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre, partnerships with other youth serving agencies and through consultation on City planning.

The City’s strongest youth partnership has been with the City of Victoria Youth Council. Developed in 2005, the group hosts projects and events to make Victoria more youth-friendly and to meet the needs of youth in creative ways.

Initial research on national and regional best practices has identified that common methods to engaging youth include establishing youth councils and youth advisory committees; using online tools to engage youth; creating dedicated spaces for youth to meet and creating opportunities for youth leadership and empowerment.

Should Council decide to develop a youth engagement strategy, staff recommend a strategy for youth, by youth. Engaging a youth team from across the Victoria will ensure youth participation and recommendations that are representative of youth from all neighbourhoods.

An assortment of perspectives and recommendations will help foster supportive, inclusive communities where youth have the resources they need to lead and flourish.

This report includes information on the City's current youth services, an overview of current best practices in other municipalities, a potential work plan, a list of groups that would be consulted and a proposed timeline for completion.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to bring forward options for Council's consideration for the development of a youth engagement strategy for the City of Victoria.

Council Motion

On April 30, 2015 Council directed staff *to prepare a report for Council on the development of a youth engagement strategy for the City of Victoria. The report is to include information on best practices in other jurisdictions, a potential workplan, and a list of groups that would be consulted.*

BACKGROUND

Youth aged 12-24 years are an important segment of Victoria's population. Victoria has one high school, one middle school and attracts youth from surrounding municipalities to participate in events, program and services. The University of Victoria and Camosun College draw young people from all over of which many become temporary and permanent residents. Over 15 percent of the total population of Victoria is comprised of people aged 12 – 24, yet input and involvement are often scarcely heard in the City's planning processes.

The City's main form of engaging youth has historically been through youth programming offered at the seven City-owned community centres and Crystal Pool. Over the last few years, more energy has been placed into reaching out to youth to engage them in their community and city.

Through the City of Victoria Youth Council and direct outreach to youth in the city, young people have the opportunity to advise the City on how best to reach their peers as well as co-design events with staff to ensure greater participation.

University of Victoria students assisted in engaging youth in shaping the future of their city with their creativity and innovation in business, the arts, urban planning and the environment in the development of the Official Community Plan. For the engagement of the Burnside Local Area Plan, youth hosted their own event in City Hall, gathering their peers to address the questions for which the City was seeking input. Non-traditional venues are being used to move away from asking people to come to City Hall and explore new areas in the community, such as Rifflandia headquarters and community parks. Idea boards are being placed in parks to collect feedback from youth while visiting the baseball diamond, skate park or sports field. Videos and social media tools make it easier for the City to reach youth, in a way that is more attractive and convenient to them.

Through these new tools and techniques, the City is engaging a greater number of young people but recognizes more can be done through a targeted effort and development of a long term strategy.

This report identifies four options for developing a youth engagement strategy, areas that the strategy could address an initial list of groups that would be consulted and a potential timeline for completion.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

The City currently engages youth through funding youth specific programming at community centres, offering youth programs and services at the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre, partnerships with other youth serving agencies such as BC Healthy Communities and through ongoing efforts to engage youth in City planning and civic issues through new tools and techniques.

City supported youth programming and initiatives currently include:

- The City of Victoria Youth Council which provides guidance to the City on how best to engage youth on City initiatives. The Council also hosts projects and events to make Victoria more youth-friendly and to meet the needs of youth in creative ways.
- The Step Up Youth Leadership Crew, based at the Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre, engages high school aged youth interested in volunteering in the community, developing leadership skills and fundraising initiatives.
- The Youth Leaders in Training Internship Program is an employment readiness program based at the Crystal Pool that requires youth to apply via resume and interview to be selected for two weeks of training and four weeks of internship placement in one of the many summer camps taking place in the city.
- The annual Vee Dub skate competition takes place at the Vic West Skate Park for skateboarders of all levels. The competition and the skate park are supported by the City's Skate Park Host who ensures a welcoming and safe environment.
- Create Community Colour is a partnership program with the United Way that will pair professional artists as mentors with youth aged 15-24 to produce community murals on various graffiti hotspots in downtown Victoria and the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- The Mayor for a Day program enabled young people to spend time at City Hall learning about the role of Mayor and Council and what it takes to run a city. The youth spent time with Mayor Helps, staff and individual councilors getting a first-hand experience.
- Quadra Village Community Centre's "The Crew" is a work experience training program that includes mentoring, coaching and event coordination.
- Burnside Gorge Community Centre's "Youth Self Sufficiency Program" teaches young people how to budget, manage money and set education goals.
- Fairfield Community Centre's "Youth Zone" is a character building, entry level leadership skills program for younger teens.
- Oaklands Community Centre "Flip Out Fridays" program is a drop- in program for youth where the participants help plan the activities they participate in.
- Vic West Community Centre's "The New Youth Project" is a 32 week project that brings together local and international youth to participate in a leadership program.
- James Bay Community Centre's "Youth Getaways" program is a Friday night out trip program that has a different activity every week.

The benefits of the City's current blend of both City and community centre led youth engagement and programming include:

- A total of nearly 200 programs listed in the Active Living Guide for youth over the age of 12 years
- Over 7,500 visits from youth aged 12 and up at Crystal Pool and Fitness Centre for all programs, events, drop ins, leadership, camps this year so far
- Maximizing the use of existing City and community resources by ensuring all facilities host range of programs that engage youth
- Encouragement of partnerships and linkages to other youth serving agencies
- Accessible neighbourhood venues to encourage more local youth participation
- Ability to provide both recreational and leadership programming
- Engaging youth throughout Victoria by offering programs and serves in multiple neighbourhoods

These benefits will help to form a baseline for measuring the current level of services offered and where the gaps and strengths in youth engagement exists. Success could be measured by potential outcomes such as:

- New and innovative opportunities created for young people to get involved in City programs and initiatives
- An increase in youth led events organized to solicit feedback for the City on various plans and projects
- More inclusive programs offered for youth from diverse backgrounds
- Well defined youth spaces within the community and neighbourhoods
- More youth engaged online and connected through social media with the City of Victoria
- Increased youth participation in City decision-making and consultation processes
- Greater voter engagement of younger demographics, and first time voters

How to engage more youth in City planning and civic issues is a topic many municipalities are seeking to answer. After reviewing what others are doing including Brisbane Australia, Nanaimo, Richmond, it is evident that the more youth involvement in developing the strategy and designing the process to engage their peers fosters greater community ownership and success. In order to gain a better understanding of the barriers the City is facing regarding youth participation in its events and services, a for youth, by youth approach is recommended.

The most common areas of focus in the youth strategies studied include creating more opportunities for personal growth and skill development, fostering stronger relationships with youth service providers and educators, establishing youth councils and youth advisory committees, creating designated spaces for youth to congregate, using social media and online platforms to engage youth and to solicit feedback and creating opportunities for youth leadership and empowerment.

Six municipalities have been studied to date. Of the six municipalities researched, two have developed strategies that are most applicable to what the City of Victoria is seeking in terms of engaging more youth in their local government and city – Brisbane, Australia and Toronto.

1. Brisbane Australia's 2014-2019 youth strategy was created by engaging youth, teachers, service providers and guardians to understand their experiences of Brisbane and identifying the role of local government in responding to the trends and issues being raised. Based on community input staff drafted a strategy that was shared with the Youth Strategy Reference Group, comprised of 20 youth representatives. The benefits of this approach are cost effectiveness and having a representative group review the strategy to ensure it is reflective of youth input.

2. Toronto recently completed their youth engagement strategy. The focus of their strategy was to engage more youth in the building of their city. The process involved developing a team of ten youth researchers to investigate how best to involve Toronto's youth in discussions around city building. Each researcher was responsible for engaging 30-50 of their peers, whose ideas were used to develop the final strategy. Staff will learn more about Toronto's process at the International Association for Public Participation Conference this month.
3. The District of Saanich, which is currently completing the engagement phase for their five year youth development strategy has hired a consultant to work with a youth engagement team made up of their Youth Council members to research and engage their peers. The consultant will then write the report with input from key staff and a steering committee made up of staff and community stakeholders. The benefits of this approach are youth led engagement and empowerment.
4. The Town of Halton Hills Ontario has recently completed a 10 year Youth Needs Study for 2012-2022. The report was tasked to two consultant groups to work in conjunction. The benefits of this approach are gaining an objective perspective via hiring an external consultant.

Several other municipalities developed youth engagement strategies that were more targeted towards recreation and leisure but contain insight in terms of various ways to engage youth in the development of their strategy.

5. The Town of Whitby, Ontario has completed an award winning Recreation and Leisure Services Youth Strategy for 2013-2018 that was written by staff with research and engagement performed by their youth council members with guidance from key staff. The benefits of this approach is creating valuable youth led engagement throughout the entire process and remaining cost-effective.
6. The Regional District of Nanaimo's Youth Recreation Strategic Plan for 2011-2016 involved hiring a consultant who teamed up with a youth research team to perform the engagement, and subsequently the consultant wrote the strategy with input from key staff and a steering committee made up of staff and community stakeholders. The benefits of this approach are youth led engagement and empowerment.
7. The City of Richmond's Community Services Youth Services Plan for 2015-2020 involved an implementation team of four key staff who partnered with not for profit groups the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, Peernet BC and an independent consultant to research and engage youth. The Staff team then wrote the report based on their findings. The benefits of this approach are use of community based not-for-profit agencies to research best practices and cost effectiveness.

Among the cities introducing some of the more progressive techniques for engaging youth is the Town of Whitby, Ontario which created a social media platform that implemented youth specific Facebook and Twitter accounts, and an e-newsletters targeting youth. The Regional District of Nanaimo created a grant system for middle, high school and rural initiatives for youth. Brisbane now provides free wi-fi access in 22 parks and public spaces across the city to access tailored communication platforms for mobile devices that use GPS technology to connect people to their city's spaces and venues. Brisbane is also creating a City Colours program where young people

transform rundown and uninviting public spaces, laneways, bridge underpasses and community spaces into vibrant displays of public art and murals that celebrate the city, people and history. The City of Richmond created a Roving Leader Program to expand their capacity to reach vulnerable, dis-enfranchised and English as a second language youth.

There are several actions the City can take to increase youth engagement and support through the implementation of a youth engagement strategy including:

- Creating designated spaces where youth can meet.
- Strengthening relationships in the community with youth service providers and schools.
- Moving away from predominantly engaging youth on land use and planning issues to creating innovative ways, such as placemaking initiatives with more immediate and visible impacts, to foster youth involvement in their communities.
- Developing ways to connect youth with others in their community.
- Creating opportunities for youth to engage with their municipality at an early age to foster meaningful and sustain participation in civic issues.
- Making City services, staff and information more accessible to youth.
- Utilizing technology and tools to further engage

The duration of the youth engagement strategies is most commonly between five to ten years. It is recommended that the City to develop a plan that will be evaluated and updated every three to five years. This duration will enable the City to monitor trends and best practices, and continually involve youth.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The proposed youth engagement strategy would be targeted towards young people aged 12 - 24 years of age. Many of the youth strategies explored aim to engage youth from the ages of 15-24; however, the expanded age category will enable the City to also engage middle school students to develop a relationship with their city and elected officials at an earlier age. The local grade six curriculum includes a section on government which is a great starting point from which to engage youth in civic issues and subsequently build upon in the youth engagement strategy.

The proposed strategy would consist of four phases.

Phase One - Stakeholder mapping and service review: In order to have a full understanding of the various ways the City and other agencies engage youth, what is working in terms of youth engagement in Victoria and what could be improved, a review of current youth services in Victoria is proposed. A comprehensive list of stakeholders will be developed to identify all organizations that should be consulted during the service review and throughout the development of the strategy.

Phase Two - Best practices: A comprehensive look at youth engagement strategies in other municipal districts will be explored and considered in a local context.

Phase Three - Youth engagement: To generate a better understanding of trends, barriers to participation and how we can better engage young people, a main focus will be on engaging youth throughout Victoria.

Engagement could include consultation with:

- Internal stakeholders including staff
- Council
- Teachers

- Youth in Victoria area in traditional and non-traditional arenas (schools, parks, street, coffee shops, malls, sports venues, online, etc.)
- Youth serving agencies, such as:
 - City of Victoria Youth Council
 - YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria
 - Boys and Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria
 - Neighbourhood Community Centres
 - Community Sports Organizations and Clubs
 - Alternative schools, Middle schools, High schools
 - Greater Victoria Public Library
 - 89 Pacific Squadron RCAC (Cadets)
 - Faith based organizations
 - Girl Guides and Scouts Canada
 - Victoria Native Friendship Centre
 - Youth Empowerment Society

Not for Profit entities such as:

- BC Healthy Communities
- Victoria Foundation
- Volunteer Victoria
- Power to Be
- Power of Hope
- Inter Cultural Association
- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society
- Antidote – multi-racial girls and women support group
- TRU2U - queer, lesbian, gay, trans support group
- Sierra Club
- Recreation Integration
- Step Up Youth Leadership Crew members

Phase Four: Develop the strategy: The strategy will be based on all previous three phases and will be shared with the community to ensure it reflects the feedback received before being brought before Council.

Timeline

The proposed youth engagement strategy would be completed within a timeframe of approximately six months with work beginning in January 2016 and presenting final recommendations to Council in June 2016.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

An interdisciplinary staff team is recommended to lead the project. The team would provide guidance in the development of the strategy.

The youth team mentioned in option one and three below is recommended to consist of up to 10 young people that would consist of Youth Council members, Victoria High School youth leadership students, representatives from youth serving agencies, and members and youth-at-large. The youth team would review best practices, design and lead the engagement, collect feedback and create recommendations for Council's consideration with support from staff where needed.

There are four options to consider for how the strategy could be developed:

Option 1 – Hire youth to engage the community and develop recommendations with staff support where needed. (recommended)

Impact – A youth led and developed strategy would help generate greater ownership and involvement in engagement. Staff would support youth where needed from technical advice to capacity building. The financial obligation for this would be up to \$10,000 to hire a youth team and pay them via one-time honorarium. Additional costs would amount to approximately \$5,000 to include promotion meeting venues and additional administrative costs.

Option 2 – Hire an outside agency to complete the youth engagement strategy.

Impact – Based on other municipal experience, hiring a consultant to engage youth in the community and develop the strategy would be approximately \$20,000 - \$40,000. A consultant would be retained through a Request for Proposal.

One consulting agency that is leading the way in terms of youth led strategies is Apathy is Boring. The organization is a youth-driven, non-partisan charitable organization that uses art and technology to engage youth in democracy. Apathy is Boring encourages young people to vote and be involved in their communities and develops opportunities for young people to meaningfully engage in their communities. Staff recently contacted Apathy is Boring to learn more about their services.

Option 3– Hire youth to engage the community and retain a consultant to write the youth engagement strategy based on their findings.

Impact – Having youth reach out to and engage their peers would ensure greater participation in the development of the strategy. The financial obligation would be approximately \$10,000 to hire a youth research team and approximately \$20,000 to hire a consultant to provide added capacity where needed such as technical advice and writing. The estimate is based on what other municipalities have paid to retain a consultant.

Option 4 – Partner with a local not-for-profit youth service provider to develop the strategy.

Impact – There are many local youth service providers that routinely examine how best to engage youth. Exploring partnership opportunities would strengthen community relationships and share resources. The cost factor would be subject to contractual negotiations with a partnering agency based on the usage of their staff resources and administrative and facilitative costs on their behalf. The estimated cost is \$15,000 which would include \$10,000 to be paid to the partnering agency as an honorarium and approximately \$5,000 to cover additional costs including, promotion, meeting venues and food. The drawback of this option is that youth are not leading the development of the strategy and it provides less opportunity for capacity building upon young people.

All these options share the intention to utilize young people as essential to developing any strategy. This contribution towards civic engagement is directly reflected in the City of Victoria Strategic Plan to “engage and empower” the community.

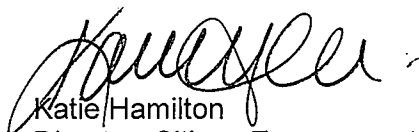
CONCLUSIONS

This report outlines a variety of options to be considered in the development of a youth engagement strategy. It is recommended that a youth team of up to 10 people be hired to lead the engagement of their peers and assist staff in the development of a three- five year youth engagement strategy.

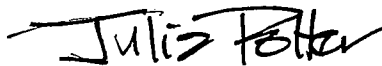
The recommended approach reflects the City's desire for an engaged and empowered community, supportive of a citizen led, consultative process that is developed by youth for youth. It provides empowerment and capacity building amongst the youth team and builds on the perspective of how to better support young people by making them active, contributing partners in their community.

Appendix A: Youth strategies undertaken in other municipalities.

Respectfully submitted,

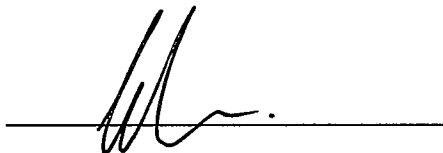


Katie Hamilton
Director, Citizen Engagement and Strategic Planning



Julie Potter
Manager, Citizen Engagement

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:



Date:

Sept. 9, 2015

Appendix A: Youth strategies undertaken in other municipalities.

City	Timeframe of the strategy	How it was undertaken	Recommendations put forward	Notable actions undertaken
Brisbane, Australia 2.2 million	2014-2019	Staff engaged with youth, service providers, teachers and guardians. Based on feedback they developed the draft strategy and shared it with the Youth Strategy Reference Group, comprised of 20 youth representatives to collect feedback on the draft.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Council programs, services and facilities are inclusive of and accessible to all young people • Support and resource youth-led initiatives, ideas and projects • Identify opportunities to involve young people in Council's decision making processes • Provide employment opportunities for young people • Engage with young people internationally through our sisters cities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Provide free wi-fi access in 22 parks and public spaces across Brisbane 2) Creating a City Colours program where young people transform rundown and uninviting public spaces, laneways, bridge underpasses and community spaces into vibrant displays of public art and murals that celebrate the city, people and history. 3) Establishing a commuter route marker program to ensure commuter cycling and walking routes are clearly signed with key destinations, as well as safety and directional information.
Whitby, Ontario Population 122,000	2013-2018 Recreation and Leisure Services Youth Strategy	Consultant and staff wrote the report and youth council, staff performed the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced communication via social media • Youth Council Structure - review and refine • Youth Program and Event enhancements • Youth Development and training – become a champion for a Youth Friendly Community • More Community Development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Social media platform implemented 2) Junior Whitby Youth Council developed 3) Positive Youth development staff training workshops 4) Youth Friendly Business Recognition Program

Appendix A: Youth strategies undertaken in other municipalities.

			<p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Facilities Plan for indoor /outdoor rec and leisure service 	
Halton Hills, Ontario Population 59,000	2012-2022 Youth Needs Study	Multi – consultation teams wrote the report and performed the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth engagement best practices – how to ensure youth voices are heard • More inclusive access to programs for all different types of youth • Foster youth friendly training and educational opportunities • Define indoor and outdoor dedicated youth space requirements 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) New Youth Taxi Script Program enabling registered youth to access taxis for half price 2) Development of Mayors’ Youth Action Committee for promotion of youth services and advocacy 3) Active recruitment of youth for advisory committee input 4) Staff orientation and training that includes asset building and positive youth development
Regional District of Nanaimo Population 83,810	2011-2016 Youth Recreation Strategic Plan	Consultant wrote the report with youth team research and findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform from direct programs to community development • Enhance communication • Foster youth leadership • Improve access to facilities • Review access to transportation • Build recreation team • Improve organizational culture and competencies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Creation of youth web page Facebook, Twitter 2) Creation of Youth Rec Advisors program where they learn valuable work and leadership skills, establish a job reference, earn volunteer hours for school and meet new people. 3) Created grants for middle, and high schools, and rural initiatives and a process around it for application, approval and accountability
City of Richmond Population 190,470	2015-2020 Community Services Youth Services Plan	Consultant performed the research and staff wrote the report with youth research team	<p>Goal 1 - Building youth assets through engagement and partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth asset development • Youth engagement, leadership 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Created new and innovative programs for youth such as the Richmond Youth Media Program 2) Youth are creatively, actively engaged in youth marketing and communication delivery

Appendix A: Youth strategies undertaken in other municipalities.

		findings	<p>and empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with community partners <p>Goal 2 - Expanding opportunities for youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth program development and delivery • Bridging services for vulnerable youth • Safe and social spaces for youth <p>Goal 3 - Improving quality of youth services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving towards standards • Marketing and communication • Tracking the progress and reporting to community 	<p>3) Implementing a city-wide youth service criteria and programs standard</p> <p>4) Expanding program capacities to reach out to vulnerable youth, English as a second language youth and youth with disabilities via the Roving Leader Program</p>
<p>Municipality of Saanich Population 108,000</p>	<p>2016-2021 Youth Development Strategy (in progress)</p>	<p>Consultant writing the report with Youth research team findings</p>	<p>Focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to strengthen inclusion • Changing the role and usage of their teen centres • More collaboration with schools and other youth serving agencies • How to address anxiety and stress in their youth programming • Enhancing personal growth and skill development for teens • How to integrate more risk and adventure based programs for youth • How to make young people active creators of their recreational experiences 	<p>To be completed</p>

Appendix A: Youth strategies undertaken in other municipalities.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More recreational facilities built with youth in mind	
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