

New Westminster Community Advisory Assembly

Assembly Meeting 9

November 21, 2024 5:30 PM – 9:00 PM

New Westminster City Hall, Council Chambers

511 Royal Avenue

Objectives

- To finalize recommendations for how the City can best determine which level of recognition the City can offer to different cultural observances
- To begin discussion on how the City can sustain and expand on the intergenerational community assembly model shaped by the pilot Assembly

Agenda

The following is a draft agenda for the meeting. Exact times may vary in response to the needs of the group. Additional breaks may also be added as needed.

5:15 PM	Doors open for Assembly members
5:30-6:00	Dinner for Assembly members <i>(optional, but please let Carilyn know ASAP if you are not eating so we can adjust the food order)</i>
6:00-6:10	Opening and overview of the evening’s agenda
6:10-6:25	Review the draft framework for cultural observances (including time for individual reflection to identify questions and points of discussion)
6:25-8:00	<p>Finalize recommended framework for cultural observances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss remaining questions, trade-offs and considerations • Vote to approve framework <p><i>(The group will take a minimum of one break during this period)</i></p>
8:00-9:00	<p>Opening Dialogue on the intergenerational community Assembly model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key points of discussion for the December session



**COMMUNITY ADVISORY ASSEMBLY
MINUTES**

**Thursday, September 26, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Century House, 620 8th Street, New Westminster, BC**

PRESENT:

Aftab Erfan

Facilitator, Executive Director

Nicole Armos

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Facilitator, Manager, Knowledge and Practice

SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Juno Avila-Clark

Assembly Member

Mandy Chan

Assembly Member

Diana Cruz

Assembly Member

Rajdeep Dhaliwal

Assembly Member

Ella Durning

Assembly Member

Jadyn Gibson

Assembly Member

Heidi Hizsa

Assembly Member

Melody Kruppa

Assembly Member

Rahul Kumaar

Assembly Member

Anne Ladouceur

Assembly Member

Leo Li

Assembly Member

Marlene Mydske

Assembly Member

Bob Petrusa

Assembly Member

Nyomi Ross

Assembly Member

Stuart Rushworth

Assembly Member

Erika Sanabria Medina

Assembly Member

Dave Seaweed

Assembly Member

Romy Senghera

Assembly Member

Rosemary Sojka

Assembly Member

Paul Toth

Assembly Member

Jordan Van Brakel

Assembly Member

Taz Visram

Assembly Member

Margaret Wanyoike

Assembly Member

Declan Williams

Assembly Member

Erica Wong

Assembly Member

Titus Yip

Assembly Member

REGRETS:

Iyad Al Khatib

Assembly Member

Sergio Barbon	Assembly Member
Michele Kelly	Assembly Member
Eri MacArthur	Assembly Member
Maria Nguyen	Assembly Member
Richard Schabler	Assembly Member
Kumar Varma	Assembly Member
Keysa Yanez Leon	Assembly Member

STAFF PRESENT:

Jennifer Miller	Acting Deputy Director, Community Services
Ashleigh Young	Manager, Communications
Jen Arbo	Supervisor, Community Partnerships
Lisa Kemp	Recreation Supervisor, Community Recreation
Rebeca Salas	Cultural Heritage Supervisor
Kait DeWolff	Communications Coordinator
Justine Wiklo	Minute Taker, Raincoast Ventures

1. CALL TO ORDER AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At 6:03 p.m., Facilitator Aftab Erfan called the meeting to order and provided a land acknowledgement. She reviewed the eight principles for working together that the group agreed upon at the start of the Assembly's term.

2. OPENING AND OVERVIEW OF AGENDA

Aftab recapped the discussion that took place at the June meeting regarding climate change in relation to different identities. After the last meeting, some Assembly members offered feedback to City staff regarding the structure of the meetings and some requests were made with respect to getting the agenda package out earlier, rescheduling the October meeting, providing at least one more presentation to Council, and that the meeting in December be a regular working meeting.

It was noted that staff were considering the possibility of adding one more meeting in January 2025, as the Assembly pilot term ends in January. An evaluation process will take place at the end of the term.

Aftab acknowledged that the next Assembly meeting is scheduled for October 19, 2024, the same day as the Provincial election. Not all members took the survey that was circulated with alternative dates and there were not enough people available on any of the dates, including the original date, to have a quorum.

Discussion ensued and Assembly members and staff provided the following comments:

- Staff had ample time to explore meeting dates other than October 19, the day of the election, and it is concerning to be asked to choose between civic activism and activism related to a campaign or working for BC Elections;
- Maybe we could do an extra meeting before December;
- Continuity in meeting is important in order to keep the ball rolling;
- Some City staff are not available on October 26, but we may be able to hold the meeting without them.

Aftab asked members who would be available on October 26, 2024, instead of October 19, 2024, and 21 people raised their hands.

Discussion continued, and the following comments were offered:

- While not everyone is present today, there is still a higher probability for quorum on October 26;
- The October 19 meeting date is more convenient for members that live in Queensborough as that is where it is planned to be held;
- Staff will attempt to find a location for a meeting on October 26 in Queensborough.

Aftab thanked members for their flexibility.

3. **FINALIZE CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERSECTIONALITY DISCUSSION**

Facilitator Nicole Armos reviewed the Climate Change and Intersectionality discussion from the June meeting, noting that four fishbowl dialogues took place, where people of particular identities had opportunities to share lived experiences and how they experience climate change. From the dialogues, a draft summary report was created to identify the key highlights to be delivered to staff in the City's Climate Action team. Nicole reviewed the highlights from the summary report and thanked Assembly members for sharing their experiences. She asked for any additions to the summary report.

In response to comments and questions from the Assembly, staff provided the following comments:

- A scan of the minutes will be done to ensure that no climate solution suggestions are missing from the summary report;

- It was determined that the report would go to the Climate Action team and they would come back to the Assembly before the end of the year to share how they will use the information provided in the report;
- The summary report provides a collective voice highlighting specific areas that can be prioritized. What is being said in this report is different than what is in the equity indicators that were expected; until we speak to people we do not get a sense of what is being said on the ground.

Discussion ensued, and Assembly members provided the following comments:

- Food security, something that the City could address, is just two lines in the summary report but is an issue that exists in every age group. The way that crops are grown and the use of certain fertilizers is also an issue that the public should be made aware of, as the government can regulate these types of by-laws;
- A food insecurity category could be added at the end of the report;
- It is concerning that agenda topics are pre-set as it was anticipated that we would be sharing our opinions and brainstorming with our peers on things that the City is actively working on and topics we bring to the Assembly;
- Assembly members can be better prepared for meetings if agenda topics are shared more than one week before each meeting.

Nicole acknowledged that the topics the community cares about may not necessarily be what Council is ready or able to take action on and noted the Assembly's discussion earlier in the year about agenda topics. She reminded members that there would be an opportunity for them to provide feedback on the Assembly pilot at the end of the term.

All members raised their hands when asked if they felt comfortable sending the summary report to City staff with the addition of other climate solutions identified in the June meeting minutes and a section on food insecurity.

4. OPENING DIALOGUE ON CULTURAL OBSERVANCES

Aftab introduced a new topic for Assembly discussion: cultural observances. It was noted that historically, holiday celebrations were mainly focused on common holidays such as Christmas and Easter, and these were considered to be cultural practices that were shared by everyone. However, there are many people who are not reflected in what has traditionally been celebrated and it needs to be determined what should be observed and celebrated in the New Westminster community in the present. She advised that the objective of the discussions around

cultural observances is to start to come up with an approach to marking holidays and developing a philosophy for how they are marked by the City, such as criteria and categories.

Assembly members engaged in a discussion at their respective tables about which marked occasion is meaningful to them or to consider which unmarked occasions should be marked.

Members advised that the following occasions are meaningful to them and their communities:

- Chinese New Year/Lunar New Year;
- Christmas;
- Diwali;
- Remembrance Day;
- Pride;
- Orange Shirt Day;
- Red Dress Day;
- Hanukkah;
- Thanksgiving;
- Autism Acceptance Month;
- Black History Month;
- Mental Health Day;
- International Women's Day;
- Hungarian Festival;
- Peace Day.

5. OVERVIEW: CULTURAL OBSERVANCES IN NEW WESTMINSTER

Ashleigh Young, Manager of Communications, advised that cultural observances are a challenge for staff when it comes to allocation of resources. She advised that questions to consider for discussion include:

- What should the City do to observe things that are important to the community?
- How do we know what cultural observances to mark?
- Where should we seek and gather information on which observances are important?

Staff advised that sometimes the City marks an observance through a proclamation read aloud at a City Council meeting. It was noted that there are some City guidelines around flags and lighting up City Hall, and that every municipality approaches observances differently.

In response to comments and questions from the Assembly, staff provided the following comments:

- There are 365 days in a year that could all have different meanings to different groups, and there is not always the time nor capacity to conduct research on what is appropriate for the communications team to post. There are a lot of non City-led events conducted by the community but supported by the City. Requests are received all the time and we do not always know what the best approach is;
- Grants for observances are adjudicated by a panel of community members, who make the decisions on what to fund. There is grant funding of \$975,000 per year;
- The City spends a lot of money on audiovisual and microphone technology and marketing for Remembrance Day and, as it is a statutory holiday, a big expense goes to staff time;
- Shine Bright and other observances, such as lighting up City Hall for Black History Month or Indigenous celebrations also require the City to spend a lesser amount of money;
- Lighting up City Hall is a way to show the community that the City is acknowledging or observing a specific event or week;
- The City does not have a cultural ambassador at this time;
- Proclamations are done on a request basis through the Mayor's office. None are done in perpetuity; it must be requested every year;
- The City does not have an equity, diversity and inclusion department but the Human Resources team will be posting a position in the next few months. The City adopted the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism (DEIAR) Framework last year;
- A staff member at the Museum will be soon be doing research on underrepresented stories and communities;
- Heritage includes museums, places of significance, archives, records, and the intangible. It is also who we are, what we do, what we remember, what brings us together, and the traditions that persist across generations. These things change over time;
- Consideration needs to be given to how resources are allocated in order to maintain equity;
- The main challenges in Parks and Recreation are around budget and resources. It is often said that programs should be subsidized and there are questions regarding whether cultural programs should be free; however, the department is operated on a cost-recovery basis;

- A lot of Parks and Recreation programs are staff-led and questions are asked, such as when the City offers numerous Christmas programs, why there are no Diwali (except for the preschool) or Hanukkah programs.

Discussion ensued, and Assembly members provided the following comments:

- A lot of retired professionals would welcome the opportunity to volunteer as a cultural ambassador for the City and / or to bring in information from underrepresented groups;
- We need to determine how to hear the voices of the community, ways to canvas the community, and the definition of what constitutes a cultural observance;
- People get excited to see storybooks on Chinese New Year in the library and this is a simple thing that helps to recognize culture. Getting people to come in and talk about different cultures will also help the different groups feel recognized;
- Many volunteers and groups would come forward to help with this, if they are invited.

6. **GROUP EXERCISE: DEFINING LEVELS OF RECOGNITION**

The Facilitator asked members to consider how they felt decisions should be made regarding which cultural observances are marked by the City.

Discussion ensued, and Assembly members provided the following comments:

- A procedure that includes a points system that could be honed over time;
- Whether cultural or nationalistic, this could be done on an as-needed basis;
- Volunteers could talk about various cultural observances such as Black History Month;
- Resources should be divided equally for inclusivity;
- Base observances off of the Census data of the City;
- Community surveys in places such as schools where there are mixed populations;
- Look at who is renting venues and gathering for occasions;
- A fund-matching model; if a community comes with funds, the City can match that out of a limited budget, although some groups may not have funds at all;
- Cultural and issue-based recognitions and observances should not be competing against one another;

- Instead of dividing resources, a large festival where you could taste the food and meet people from different cultural groups, could be held. This would be similar to what is done in Toronto and Victoria;
- Issue-based observances such as Cancer Day, Seniors Week, and Autism Recognition are not based on language, race, ethnicity or other dimensions of identity;
- Simple things such as proclamations and lights could be planned in the year prior to when they are going to happen so that the public can share their observance priorities;
- There should be no social media posts for observances as it is impossible to expect the City to be responsible for acknowledging every culture in every manner and sooner or later someone will take offense and sue for discrimination;
- Consideration must be given to the business community and if they are interested in partnerships as businesses could be affected when there are festivals;
- The business community may participate in things that make them money, but they are strapped and may not want to have to spend money to do that;
- A multicultural fair that includes one week of activities to showcase various cultures and has a volunteer cultural ambassador to help connect groups could be considered;
- It comes down to money and securing grant money may be challenging so the next step is partnerships;
- It can be hard to know the difference between an event and a cultural celebration and this may be challenging for staff as they cannot make everyone happy.

Staff advised that in the past businesses have generally not been interested in organizing observances but may be if they benefit by being involved.

The Facilitator asked the Assembly if they would prefer to see different events every year or have a more static calendar and to share their reflections on flexibility as a principle.

Discussion ensued, and Assembly members provided the following comments:

- There needs to be flexibility to consider and include new ideas such as a yearly application process;
- Some need to be static and some need to be flexible;

- Proclamations could be stored in a calendar or database and then reviewed at City Hall in advance;
- Stories from locals around how they experience their culture and heritage can be shared and featured as a way for people to learn and grow. These stories will bring us together and help us gain perspective;
- Owed observances such as Remembrance Day and Truth and Reconciliation Day must be discussed as these are groups that are owed a level of honour and respect;
- New Westminster is unique and has some great history and some not so great history. We can share experiences and build on them for future reference;
- The City's geography is very unique and being by the river has defined our boundaries and is a part of the City's heritage;
- The City functions as a small town, blending the modern and the past and we should use that when talking about the City's heritage and belonging;
- The cultural centers can take care of events for race and religion and the City can focus on who or what the City is as a group. We should move away from competition between groups;
- It is important to consider what is going on at a geopolitical level when deciding on observances in order to prevent offences. We must be sensitive to underlying global narratives;
- Generic events similar to Shine Bright could be done throughout the year and those that have cultural significance and social aspects could be community-led, with support;
- Rules set today for events may not be appropriate for the City's population in the future. Static, more generic events would work better;
- Setting a framework and preparing and having a budget and flexibility on observance days that are not statutory holidays could help.

7. **WHOLE GROUP DEBRIEF**

The Facilitator invited final comments from Assembly members and a member noted that they were happy to see that the Assembly has come full circle and is back on track after the summer break.

8. **END OF MEETING**

The Facilitator thanked the Assembly for their time, and the meeting concluded at 9:00 p.m.

9. UPCOMING MEETINGS

October 26, 2024

November 21, 2024

December 11, 2024

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