



Downtown Livability Strategy

ON TABLE
City Council Meeting
December 12, 2022
re: Item 3.1

Front Street Public Realm Activation

NEW WESTMINSTER

Two Downtown Livability Reports

REPORT PURPOSES

1. Progress report on immediate and short term actions in the Downtown Livability Strategy
2. Update on the Downtown public realm improvements and activation initiatives
3. Rationale for service enhancements for 2023 Operating Budget and 2023 Capital Budget

Interdepartmental Team

- ❖ Reports: Purpose and Context – **Lisa Spitale**, Chief Administrative Officer
- ❖ Homelessness Crisis Context - **John Stark**, Supervisor, Community Planning
- ❖ General Cleanliness / Access to Public Toilets – **Lisa Leblanc**, Director of Engineering
- ❖ Enhanced Homelessness Outreach – **John Stark**, Supervisor, Community Planning
- ❖ Business Support and Outreach – **Jen Arbo**, Economic Development Coordinator
- ❖ Toxic Drug Crisis Response – **Brad Davie**, Assistant Deputy Fire Chief
- ❖ Mental Health Response – **John Stark**, Supervisor, Community Planning
- ❖ Downtown Activations – **Renee Chadwick**, Manager, Special Projects and Community Partnerships
- ❖ Fourth St. Stairs / Flex Space – **Dean Gibson**, Director of Parks and Recreation
- ❖ Financial Implications – **Harji Varn**, Director of Finance
- ❖ Reports Recommendations – **Lisa Spitale**, Chief Administrative Officer

The City is trying to address the challenges in the Downtown in order to improve the livability for area businesses and residents, while serving the needs of the City's most vulnerable populations in a compassionate way.

Many of these challenges fall under the jurisdiction and the mandate of the Provincial Government. Notwithstanding, several of the actions in the Strategy have been operationalized under existing City Departmental budgets and City staff work programs.

In order to move forward, significant, guaranteed senior government funding is required on a long-term basis as the issues facing the Downtown are beyond the jurisdiction, mandate or fiscal capacity of the City.



Facing a Crisis

- The March 2020 Homeless Count found 52 unsheltered and 71 sheltered homeless people in New Westminster.
- As with all homeless counts, this is likely an undercount of the true extent of unsheltered homelessness.
- In September 2020, service providers with a mandate to address homelessness estimated the size of the unsheltered homeless population, including those who couch surf, at three to four times the pre-pandemic number.



Facing a Crisis



- The increase in homelessness is stressing faith-based and non-profit service providers; taxing City staff; and contributing to business and resident complaints.
- The City has found that enforcement action often shifts the issue from one area to another. Additionally, recent court cases and challenges limit the ability of Police and Bylaw Enforcement to act when it comes to social issues such as homelessness.

Business and Resident Concerns

Based on the consultation related to the **Homelessness Action Strategy (2022)**, the following issues were identified, with these issues being most acute in the Downtown:

- increasing litter
- lack of access to toilet facilities
- increasing public drug use and intoxication
- more people presenting with mental health issues
- more camping and squatting
- over-burdened faith-based and non-profits
- concerns about public safety
- frustration with calling the police non-emergency line
- lack of communication

DOWNTOWN LIVABILITY STRATEGY

DOWNTOWN LIVABILITY STRATEGY

General
cleanliness
and
enhanced
access to
24/7 toilets

Enhanced
homeless
outreach and
added
emergency
shelter
capacity

Opioid
epidemic and
illicit drug
response

Business
support and
outreach

Mental
health
response and
support

General Cleanliness and Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

General Cleanliness: Litter, human waste and drug related waste

The Problem:

- More activity on streets, generating variety of waste
- More take-away containers
- More people who are unhoused and therefore without toilet facilities, resulting in human waste in public realm
- More drug use in public, resulting in needles and other drug related waste in the public realm
- More open burning for warming



General Cleanliness and Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

General Cleanliness: Litter, human waste and drug related waste

Our response:

- More litter cans, in key locations
- Larger litter cans, in key locations
- More frequent collection
- Operations staff shifted from other functions to increase litter clean up
- Other Operational functions are negatively impacted by this shift in staff
- Removal of combustible debris
- 'It's on the Street' Program – applied for 2023 grant (unsecured funds)
- Specialist cleaning service contracted to patrol for and clean up human waste and drug waste – applied for 2023 grant (unsecured funds)
- An additional street cleaning staff is being requested in 2023 Budget, to be funded through Property Tax Increase



General Cleanliness and Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

The Problem:

- More people who are unhoused, and therefore without easy access to toilet facilities
- In addition to serving those who are unhoused, public toilets support families, seniors and other members of the public
- Public toilets are highly susceptible to vandalism and other misuse
- We do not have sufficient resources to service a new public toilet, and existing toilets require more service than we can currently provide



General Cleanliness and Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

Increased Access to 24/7 Public Toilets

Our response:

- Permanent free standing public toilet to be installed in Hyack Square in 2023
- Meantime, 2 portable toilet trailers will be installed at the shelter on Front Street, and in Hyack Square
- The toilets need an attendant during open hours to manage risk
- The toilets will be cleaned by the specialist waste contractor, to start; we hope to shift that to internal staff
- A Public Toilet Annual Operating Budget is being requested in 2023 Budget



Enhanced Homeless Outreach & Added Emergency Shelter Capacity



Initiatives include:

- Implemented Enhanced homeless outreach and referral services, which are working in conjunction with the City's Livability (Bylaw) Coordinators
- Implemented a nightly shelter and activating a warming centre during extreme weather
- Advocating for a 24/7 shelter with support services and served by two sanitation trailers
- Working with BC Housing to develop 52 units of supportive housing at 60 to 68 Sixth Street

Business Support and Outreach

Resource Development:

- Materials specific to businesses - homelessness, the opioid crisis and de-escalating crisis
- Dedicated page on the City's website
- Information webinars on overdose and homelessness available on the City's YouTube channel
- Monthly Invest New West newsletter - approx 950 subscribers

Business Information Session – December 5

- 12 attendees
- The primary concerns/questions staff heard:
 - need for increased and timely communication of available resources (3 attendees)
 - clarification of the roles of the City, Province, and social service providers (2 attendees)
 - proactive and consistent garbage and human waste collection (4 attendees)
- Presentation boards to be displayed temporarily Downtown at old Army & Navy
- Presentation boards also added to City website and Invest New West newsletter



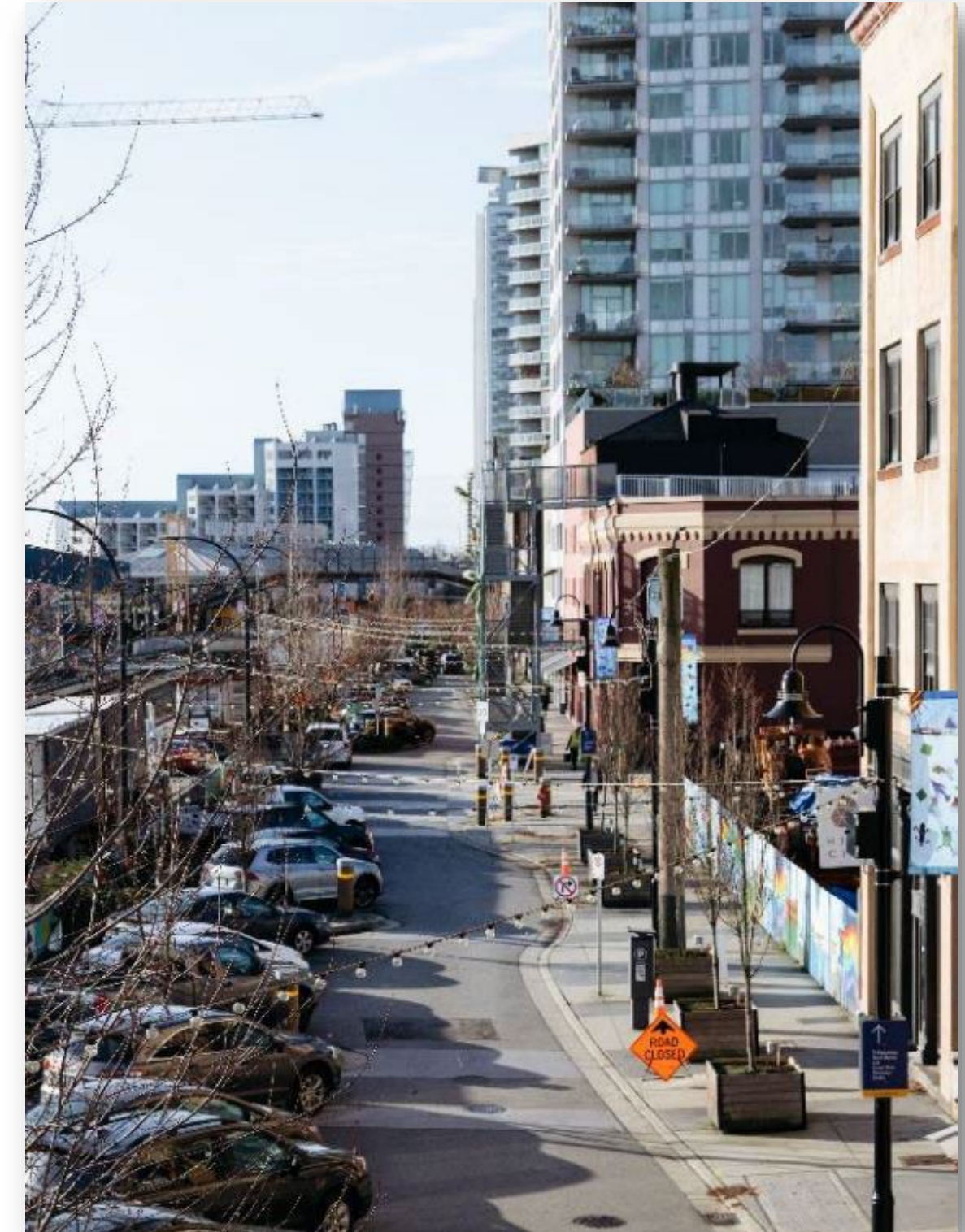
Business Support and Outreach

Outreach and Communications:

- Regular communication with the Downtown BIA
- Economic Development staff regularly connect one on one to businesses
- Livability Coordinators (Bylaw Enforcement Officers) regularly visit businesses in the Downtown
- Collaborative shop local campaigns promoting Downtown

Longer Term Actions:

- Completed Sidewalk and On-Street Patio Bylaw
- Retail Strategy
- Collaborative marketing campaigns
- Continued expansion of an expedited Tenant Improvement permitting process to help with revitalization



Toxic Drug Crisis Response

Health Care Centre:

- Overdose Prevention Site
- Supports and Referrals

Post Opioid Overdose Pilot:

- Overdose
- Stabilize Lifestyle

Take Home Naloxone/Naloxone Administration

Rapid Access Addictions Clinic

- same day appointments



Mental Health Response & Support



Initiatives include:

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team

- Provides flexible, community-based support for adults with serious and persistent mental illness.

Integrated Homeless Action Response Team

- Works to stabilize and treat chronic health conditions, including mental health and substance use issues, with particular attention to those who are unsheltered and living in encampments.

Peer Assisted Care Team

- Redirects mental health distress calls to PACT, in which a mental health practitioner and a trained peer crisis worker will respond based on the needs and the assessed risk.

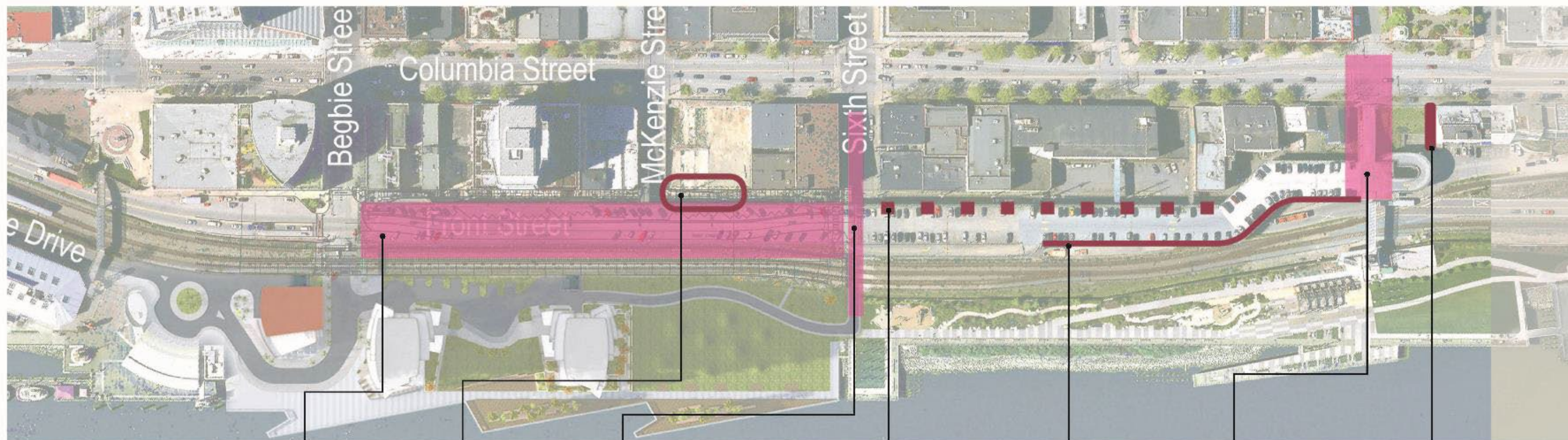
PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS AND ACTIVATION

DOWNTOWN ACTIVATIONS

- FRIDAYS ON FRONT
- REST OF NEW WEST
- CAR FREE DAY
- PRIDE DAY
- OUTSIDE / IN SERIES
- PLAY THE PARK
- END OF SUMMER FIREWORKS
- SHINE BRIGHT NEW WEST
- HOLIDAY MARKETS



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2017)



1

FRONT STREET MEWS*

2

PARKLET**

3

6TH ST. PEDESTRIAN OVERPASS**

4

MEGA BANNERS*

5

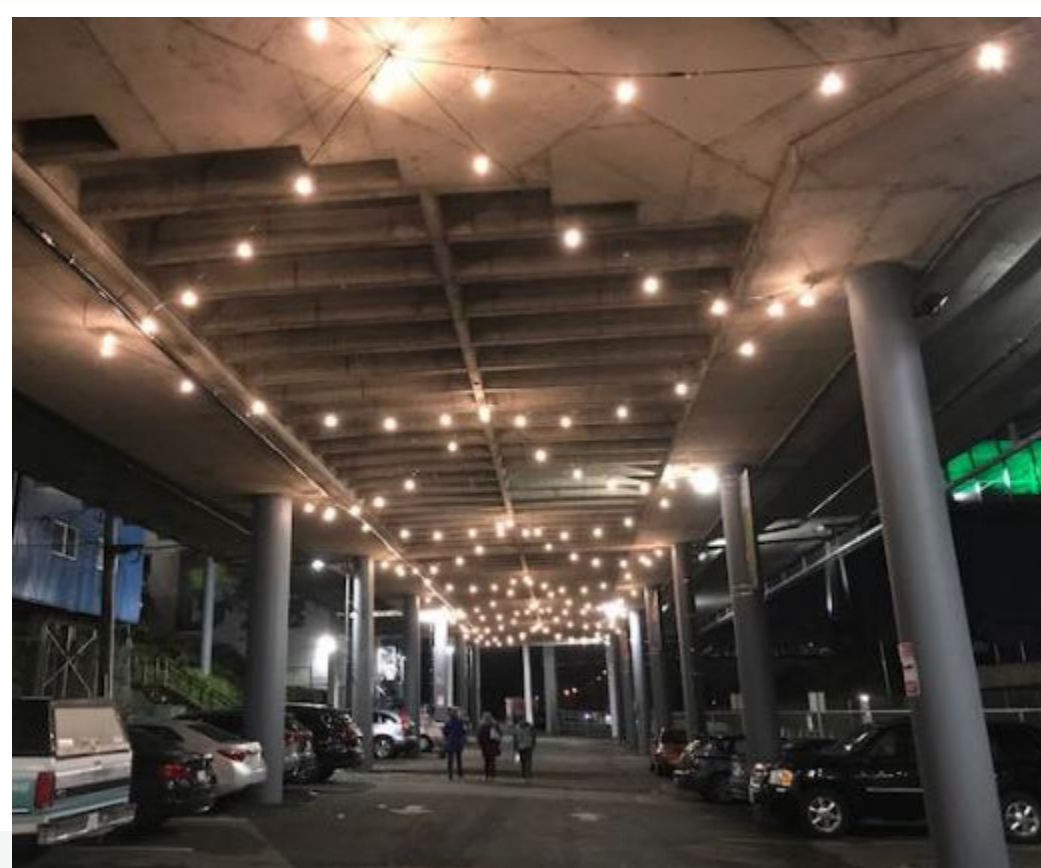
PARKADE PUBLIC ART*

6

FLEX SPACE AND STAIRS FROM COLUMBIA TO FRONT***

7

CAPTURE PUBLIC ART*



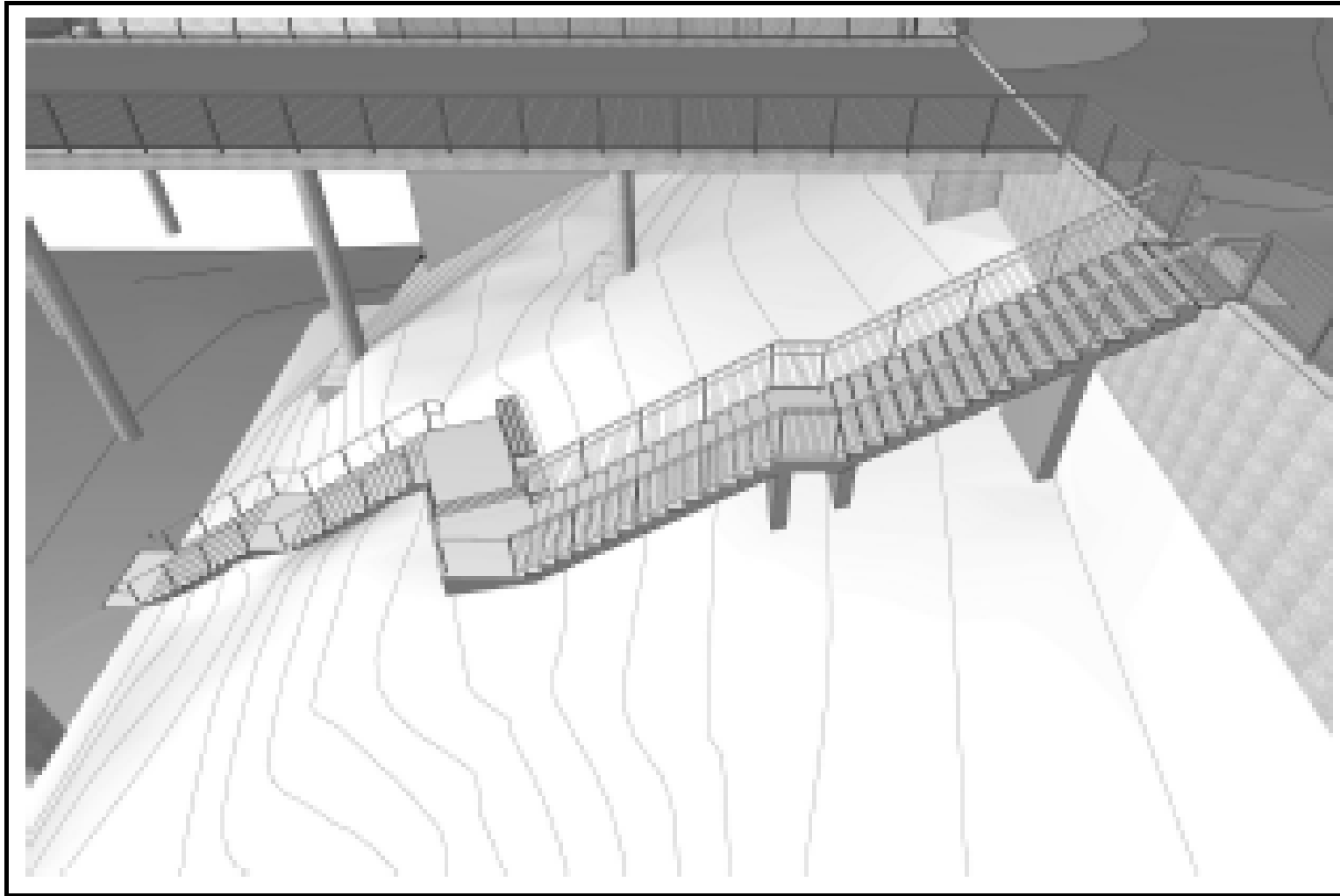
FOURTH STREET STAIRS AND FLEX SPACE- PROJECT SITE



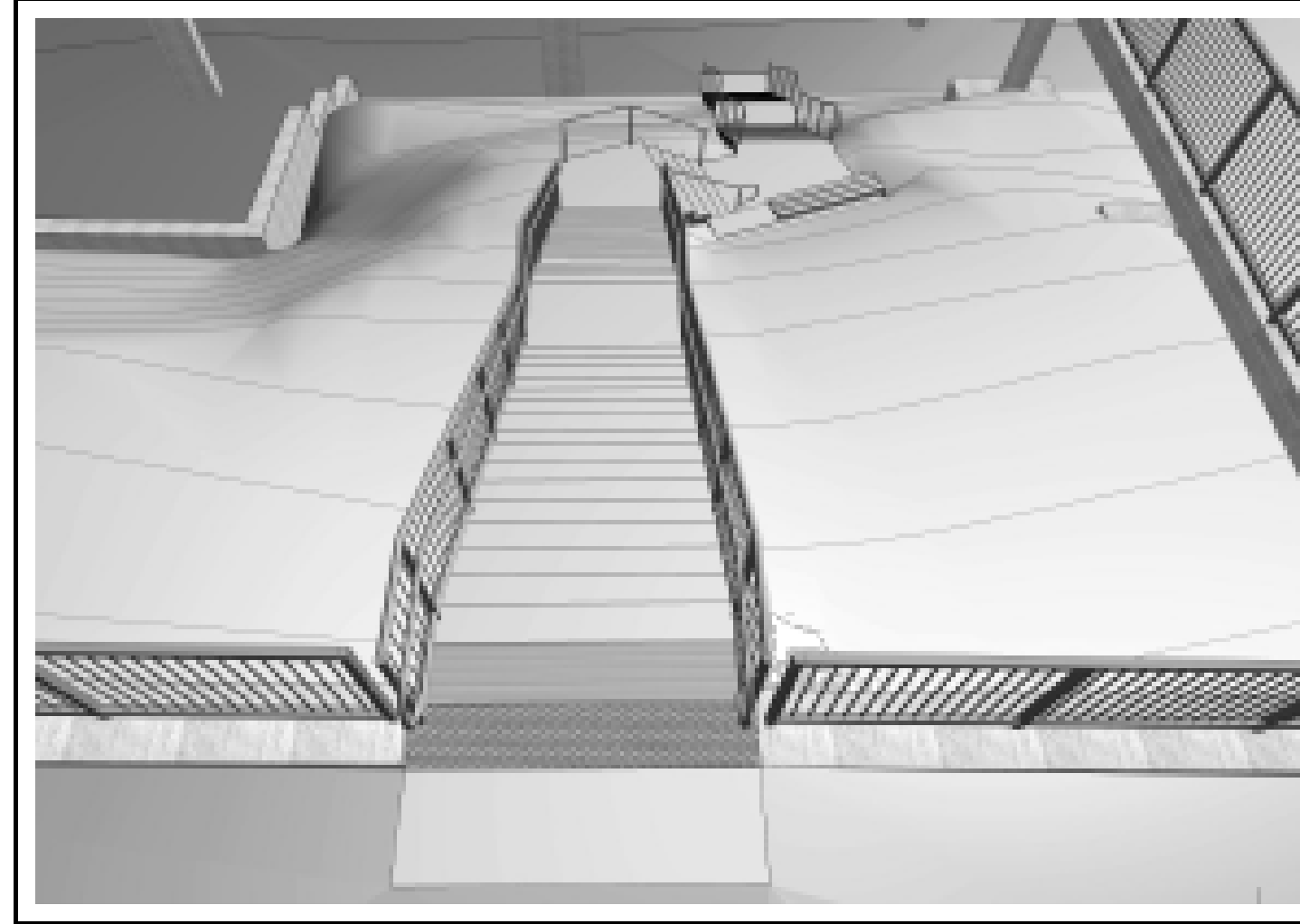
SITE PHOTOS (AT FOURTH STREET)



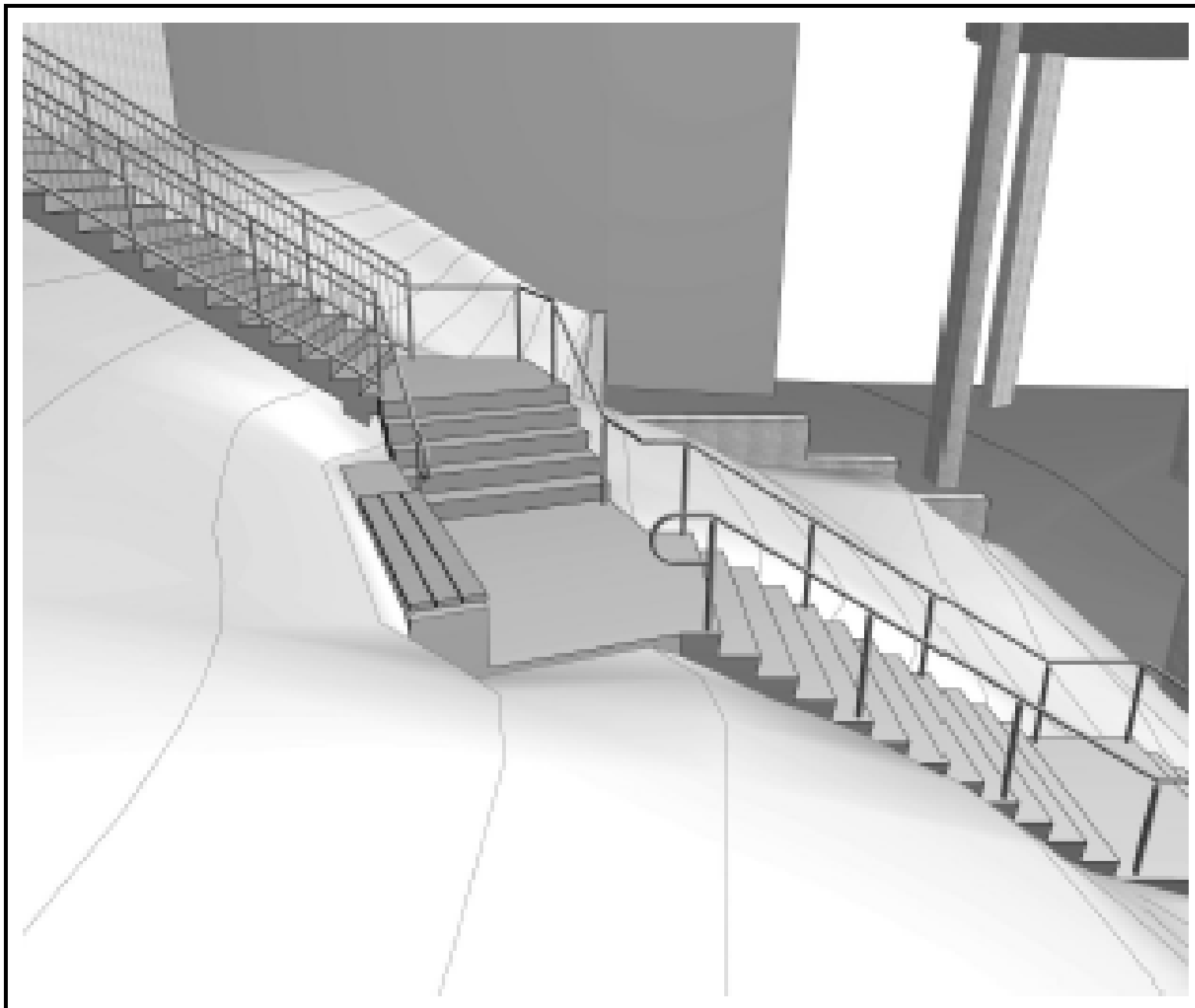
FOURTH STREET STAIRS (PERMANENT)



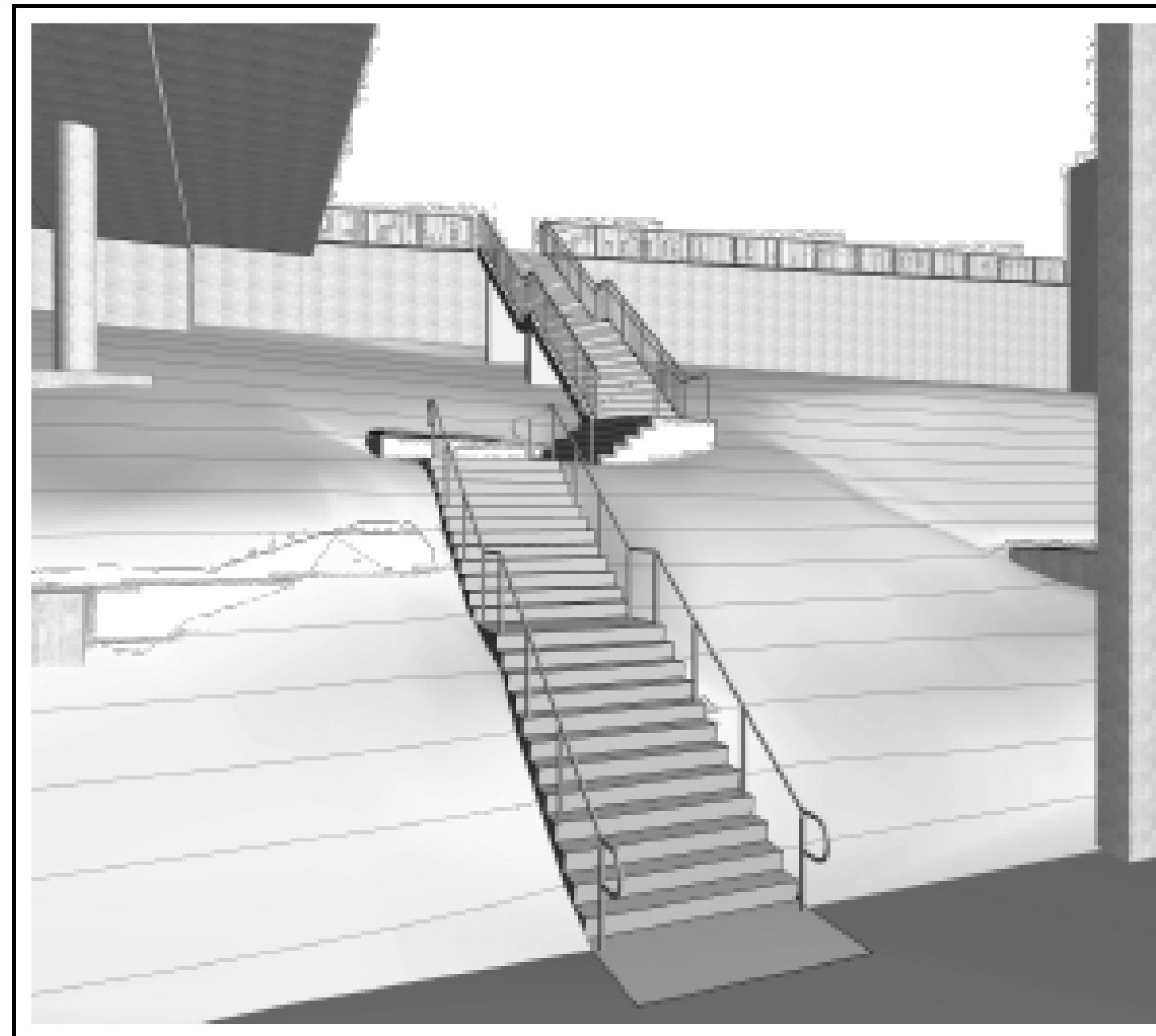
VIEW FROM EAST



VIEW FROM ABOVE



VIEW FROM WEST



VIEW FROM SOUTH

FLEX SPACE- PROGRAMMING IDEAS



basketball



street hockey



roller skating



skate features



boxing ring



concerts



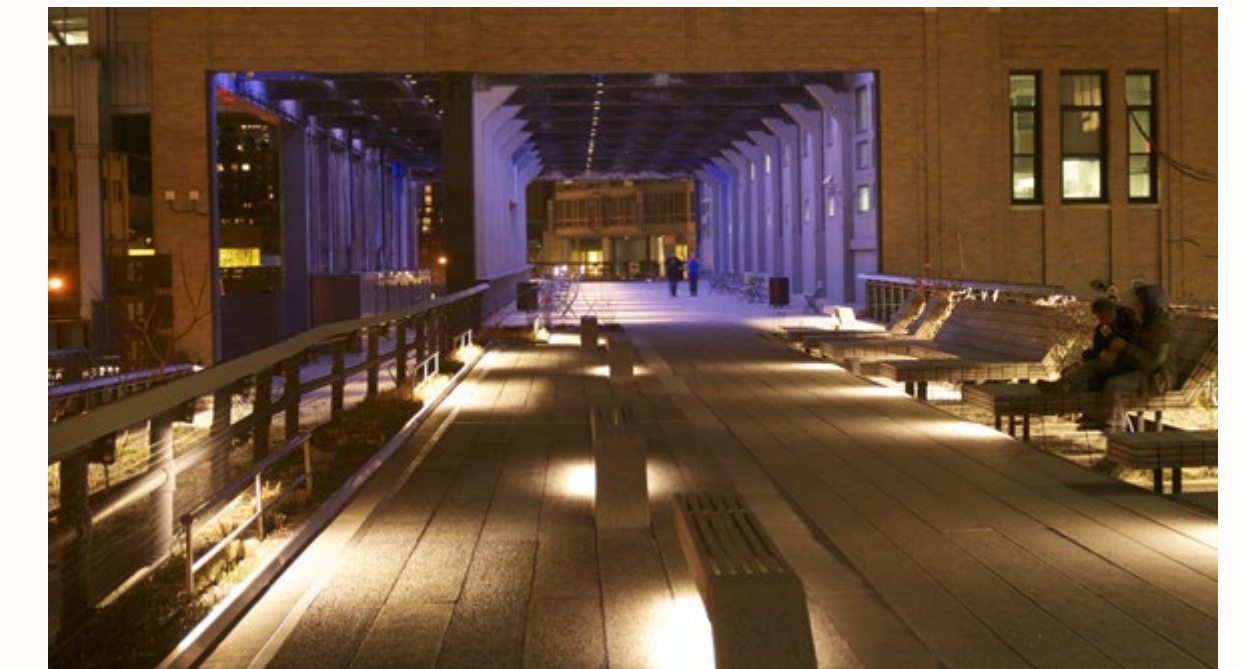
street social



parking



annual festivals



lighting

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

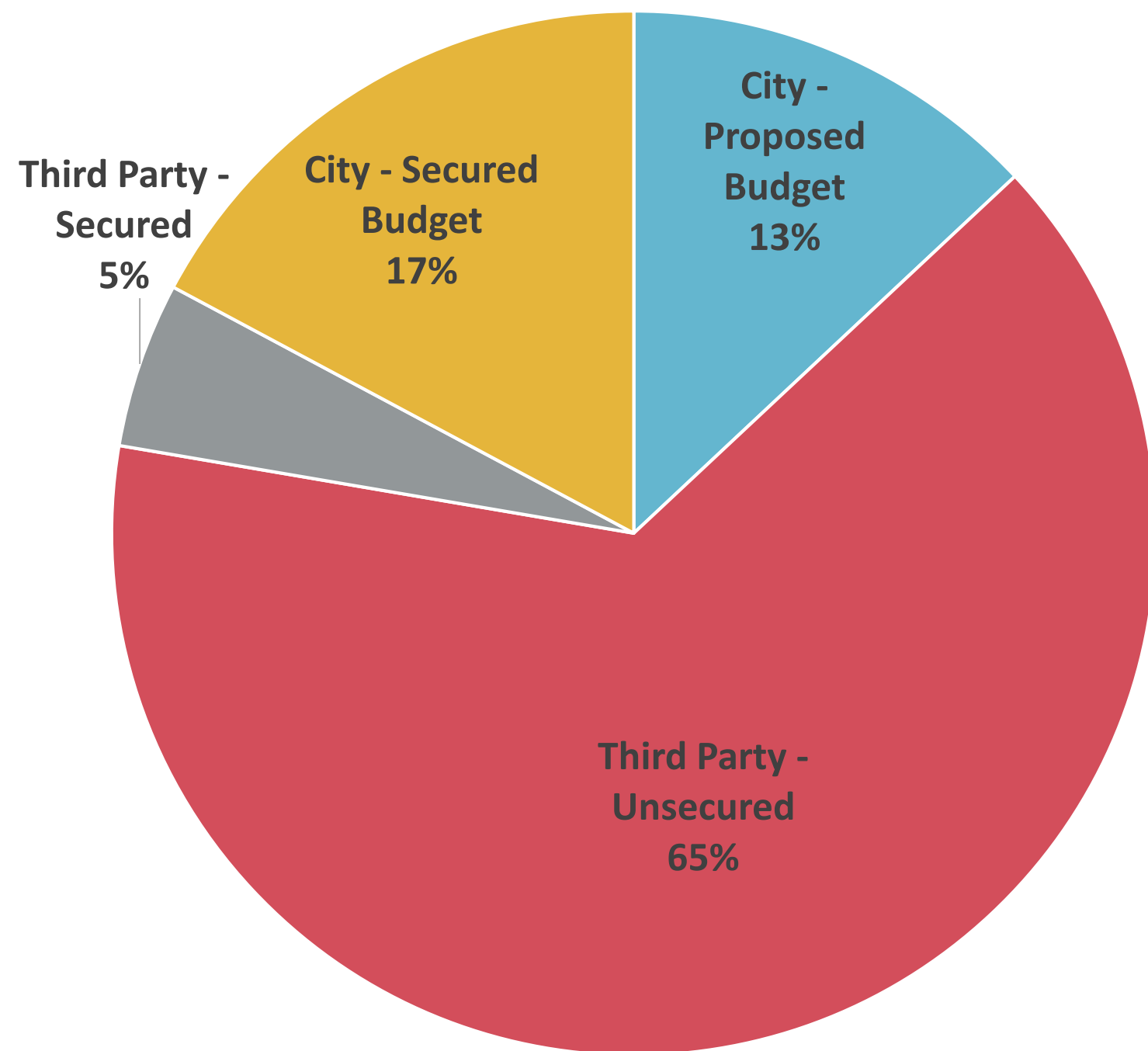
Given that the demands on public realm in the Downtown have increased since 2018 due to challenges associated with changing demographics, economic development, homelessness and housing affordability, staff recommend the following next steps:

- 1) Meet with identified stakeholders to review and receive additional feedback on the original 2018 plan for the Fourth Street stairs and Flex Space;
- 2) Review experience from elsewhere on efficient and innovative approaches to programming and maintaining this new public space;
- 3) Generate an update to the 2018 cost estimate for the Fourth Street Stairs and Flex Space from the existing 2022 Approved Capital Budget, and bring back to Council the updated project estimate in today's dollars with the 2023 Proposed Capital Budget.
- 4) Report back to Council with updated information including the plan, budget and timelines for all four initiatives, as part of the 2023 Budget process.

Financial Implications

Funding Requirements for Action – “DT Livability”

Total Financial Implications
\$4,392,000



\$1,060M Secured Funding Items – Procurement Underway:

- ✓ Portable Toilets - grant
- ✓ Temporary Cleaning and Attendants – grant
- ✓ Permanent Toilet - city
- ✓ Garbage Receptacles - city

\$572K Proposed Service Enhancements:

- Beat Crew Person – Street Cleaning
- Permanent Toilet – Operating Costs for new City Asset
- Senior Development Planner
- Downtown Livability Coordinator

\$225K Proposed Capital Growth:

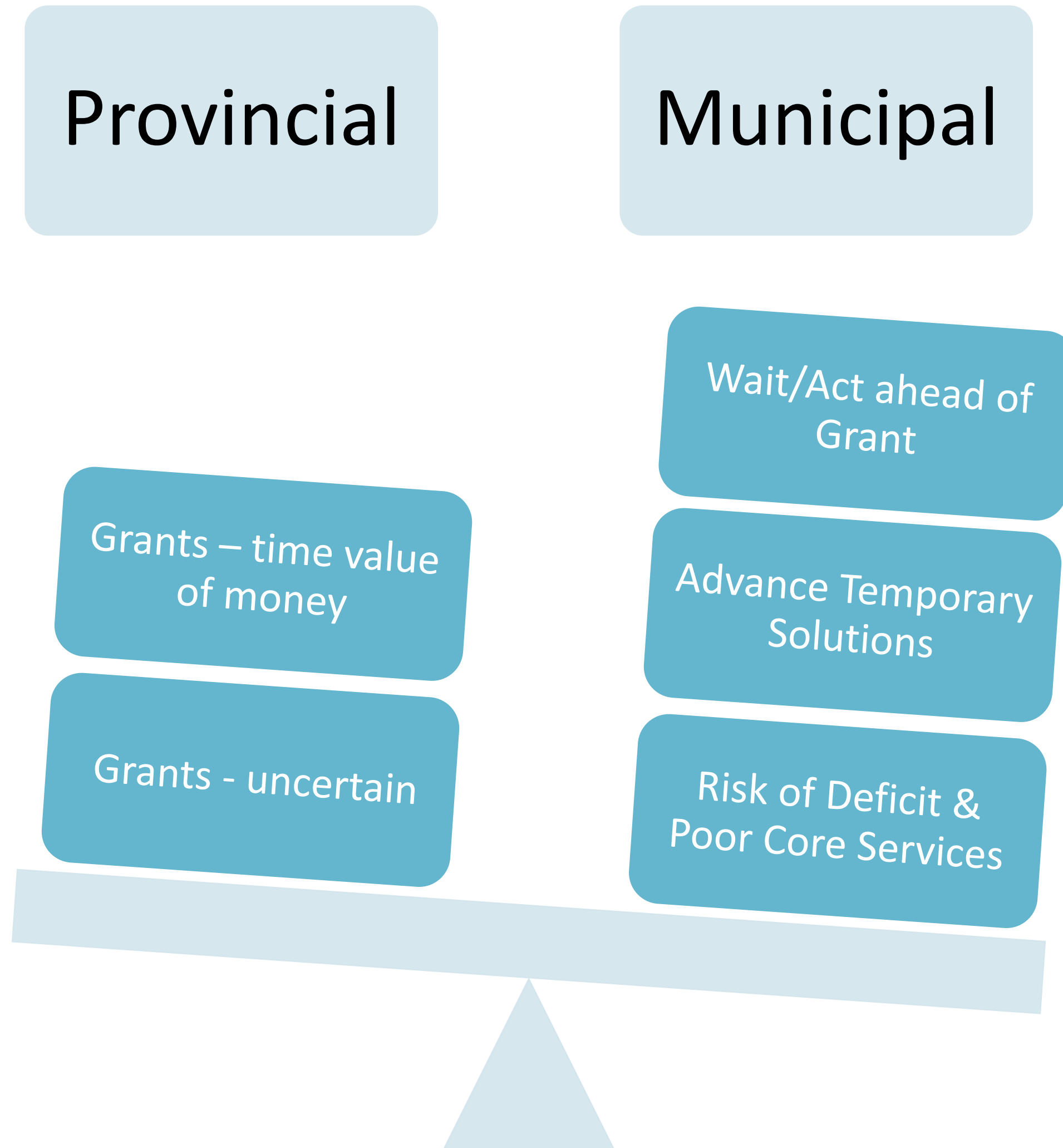
- Affordable Housing Planning Analyst (Temp)
- Strategic Initiatives Coordinator (Temp)

\$2,640M Unsecured/Pending Grants:

- I’s on the Street Program
- Human Waste Contractor
- Building Safer Communities
- 24/7 Shelter & Sanitation
- Outreach Program
- Downtown Livability Coordinator (Temp)
- Pilot - worker with lived experience
- Policy Analyst (Temp)

➤ *Public Realm Budget is work in progress*

Provincial vs Municipal Jurisdiction

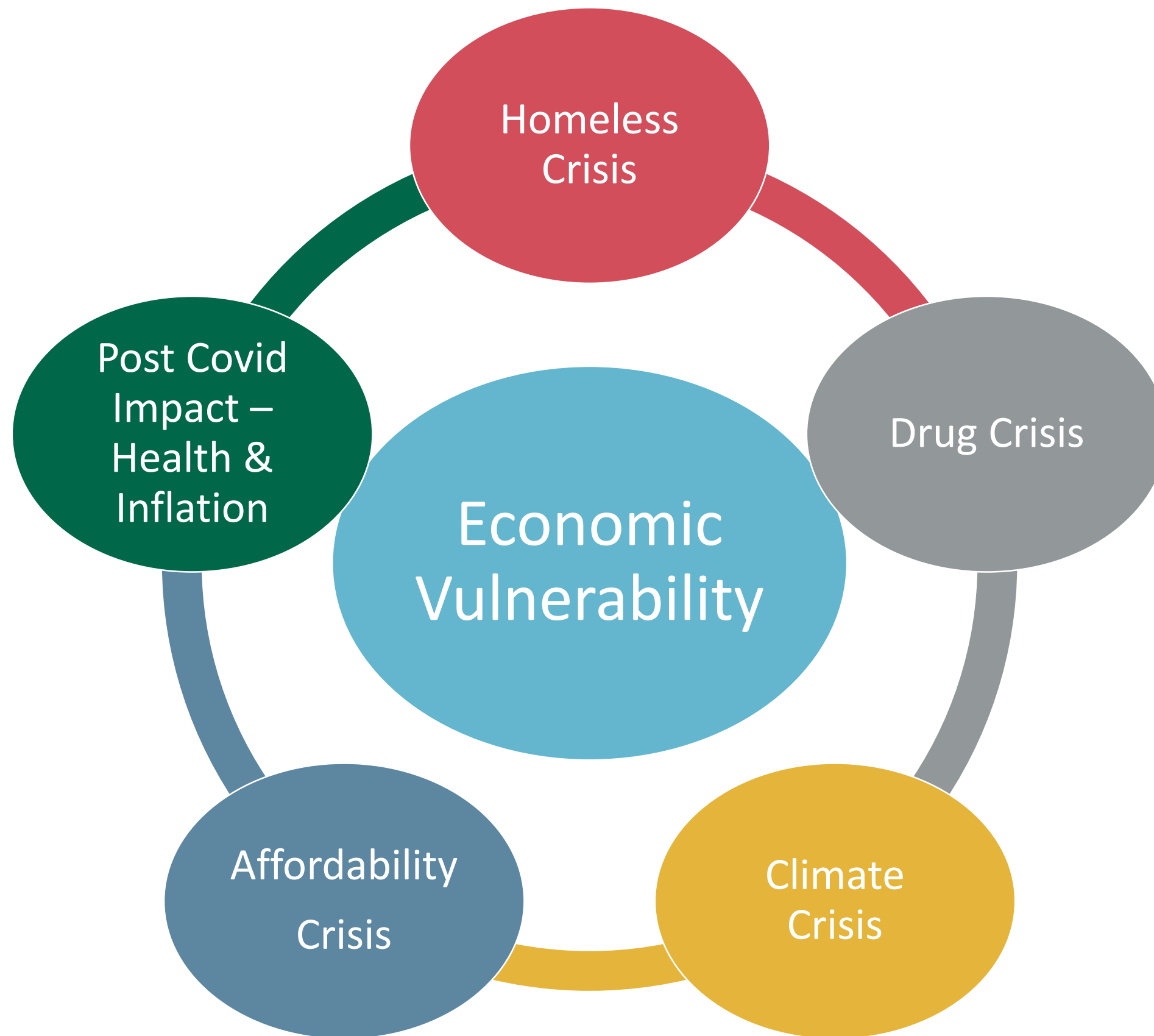


For City of New Westminster:

- Waiting for grants not an option – need to act now
- reactionary short-term measures costly as we wait
- Grants are uncertain – continued risk on City's financials

Need Long-term Sustainable Strategy

Financial & Economic Vulnerability



Municipal Financial Vulnerability

- General Fund Equipment, IT and Facilities reserves depleted – Asset Condition and Need for Growth Related Assets pending Asset Management Results, could be at risk of being underfunded.
- General Fund Provisional Reserve – drops below 5% over the current 5 Year Plan (we aim to hold it within 5-10%) to safeguard against subsidized or variable revenue sources
- Variable Revenues vs Committed City Assets and Resources: Anvil, TACC, Development Services, Q2Q Ferry, Parking Revenues, Social Support & Grant Funded Divisions (Over 10% of Stable Revenues/Property Tax Dollars)

Financial Risk Mitigation Strategy

FISCAL STABILITY AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1. Short-term** – continue to accelerate emergency action, pause and slow down/defer in other areas until Provincial Funding is secured (hold \$2M to \$3M of Capital Work) until we have security and economic confidence.
- 2. Capital Planning vs Implementation** – Phased Project Implementation – confirm the financial health of the City before advancing on multiple major construction projects – finish what we start to avoid risk of overspend due to inflation and unknowns or other project risks.
- 3. General Fund Provisional Reserve Policy** – hold 5% to 10% of Revenues.
- 4. Climate Action Reserve** – data driven decision making; best practice principles and business cases to drive maximum GHG reduction and continued increase in recognition for Carbon Credits.
- 5. Continue investing in the Longer-term Strategy** – strength through strategic planning, IT investments in the face of scarce resources, resilient and improved assets to avoid community risk on Municipal Core Services and Safety.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Downtown Livability Strategy – Update and Next Steps:

THAT staff be directed to submit service enhancement requests for the 2023 Operating Budget and the 2023 Capital Budget to address the actions as contained in the Downtown Livability Strategy;

THAT staff be directed to seek Provincial funding to address the actions as contained in the Downtown Livability Strategy; and

THAT staff be directed to seek Federal funding to address the actions as contained in the Downtown Livability Strategy.

The Downtown Livability – Public Realm Improvements and Activation:

THAT Council approve the next steps as outlined in the staff report.