

Public Engagement Strategy: Action Plan Status Update, January 2023

The City of New Westminster's [Public Engagement Strategy](#) was adopted in late 2016. The strategy was based on the work of the Public Engagement Task Force, which included seven members of the New Westminster community, the Mayor, two Councillors, and five members of City staff. The strategy includes an Action Plan: a series of measurable steps for the City of New Westminster to implement its Public Engagement Strategy, in support of the recommendations and detailed priorities developed by the Public Engagement Task Force. Dollar signs (\$\$) were used in the Action Plan to identify the relative cost of each action, considering both staff time and financial resources. Detailed cost estimates for each action were to be developed as work implementing the strategy progressed.

The following table shows all of the actions outlined in the Public Engagement Strategy, organized by the seven recommendations developed by the Task Force, and the current status of each action as of January 2023. Implementation of the Public Engagement Strategy, and application of the City's Public Engagement Policy, is ongoing. The City recognizes that meaningful, equitable public engagement requires sustained effort and continuous improvement. There will always be a need to include the voices of those who are impacted in the decisions we make as a local government – the work of public engagement is never finished.

Recommendation 1: Provide clear and easy-to-access information about engagement initiatives and civic operations, and improve the City's consistency in "closing the loop" with community members who provide input.

Action #	Action	Status
1.1	Revise City of New Westminster website. \$\$	Complete
1.2	Work with Finance Department to mail an infographic to every resident at tax time communicating the value residents receive from their tax dollars. Include an invitation inviting residents to register in order to receive email notifications of future online and in-person engagement opportunities. \$\$	Infographic is complete & ongoing: Property tax bill includes a flyer with info about where property tax dollars go. <ul style="list-style-type: none">Additional budget education tools have been developed in recent years, such as the Budget 101 webinar series.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation to register for Be Heard New West is under consideration; staff recognize there is a greater need for this information to go to renters, as property owners are currently over-represented in all City engagement processes. • Public Engagement staff have pursued possibility of bill insert in NW Electrical bill instead of property tax bill; however, Privacy Officer has advised that this is not possible under anti-spam legislation. • Separate mail-out specific to Be Heard is more costly / not included in current budget, and also paper mail is not recommended from a climate lens.
1.3	Develop corporate branding standards for public engagement activities, including templates for frequently required collateral. \$\$	Complete & ongoing
1.4	Work with Literacy New Westminster to develop plain language guidelines and conduct targeted training with key staff in each Department, including reviewing plain language guidelines for development application notice boards. \$	Underway / ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training completed in January 2022.
1.5	Provide community members with a central and accessible web presence to find information about upcoming engagement opportunities, as well as report out on past engagement results and how they impacted final decisions. \$	Complete: (Be Heard New West)
1.6	Conduct a communications review in collaboration with all public-facing units to identify opportunities to integrate visuals and plain language descriptions in their communications materials. Provide graphic design support to make improvements. \$\$\$	Plain language review of new public engagement materials is ongoing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic design is undertaken when project budget allows (Corporate Communications team does not have a graphic designer on staff). • Full-scale audit of previous materials has not been initiated; lack of staff capacity / resources to undertake this work.

Recommendation 2: Pilot new methods to engage residents and stakeholders in ways that maximize collaboration, relationship building and the quality of engagement outcomes.

Action #	Action	Status
2.1	Pilot Deliberative Dialogue as a model for collaborative decision-making, where participants who reflect the diversity of their community receive background information and work in small groups to develop recommendations for Council. The timeline for this action will depend upon the identification of a suitable engagement topic. \$\$\$	<p>Pending / still to come: No suitable topic/project identified to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement staff working with project teams / departments to identify potential project for this, and more generally to offer more dialogue-based engagement opportunities and consider working group-style processes with demographic representation where possible.
2.2	Study the feasibility of Participatory Budgeting—a process where the City allocates discretionary funds to support community-initiated projects, with community members developing project ideas with staff assistance and voting to select winning projects—and report back to Council with potential benefits and costs. \$\$ / \$\$\$\$ (funds may be re-allocated or net new)	<p>Pending / still to come:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement staff have explored this and attended webinars on the topic. Report to Council on potential benefits and costs is on the 2023 Public Engagement Division work plan.

Recommendation 3: Develop new methods that bring engagement “to the people” to increase accessibility, convenience and diversity of input.

Action #	Action	Status
3.1	Pilot a “Pop-up City Hall” kiosk, tent or truck that brings frequently required city services and information to major community events. Create a fully costed implementation plan. \$\$\$ / \$\$\$\$	<p>Complete & ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current practice is pop-up engagement to support active engagement projects, as well as to develop connections with the community and raise awareness about

		the Be Heard platform.
3.2	Identify constituencies that are most under-represented in public engagement and create a centralized list of known relationships, communications vehicles and methods to better reach these constituencies. Examples include, but are not limited to: youth, recent immigrants, renters, low-income residents and residents with dis/abilities. \$	Underway / ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underrepresented groups have been identified as a whole, and project-specific underrepresentation is reported in each engagement summary. Work is underway to build relationships and reduce barriers to participation with these groups.
3.3	Explore training “Pop-up City Hall” auxiliary staff to act as engagement ambassadors for street-level interaction during major public consultations (funded by budgets of individual engagement initiatives). \$	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former pool of auxiliary “Community Connectors” was discontinued through COVID-19. Current practice is pop-up engagement delivered by departmental/project staff, Public Engagement staff, and/or project consultants. Staff training and development in public engagement has resulted in more capacity in this area.
3.4	Identify or develop community-based engagement champions who can encourage and/or facilitate participation within under-represented communities. \$\$	Underway / ongoing
3.5	Create an accessibility policy to identify and support City responsibilities in mitigating barriers to participation. Provide training for staff to operationalize policy. \$\$	Complete & underway: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff training on equitable engagement / addressing barriers completed in January 2021 and again in April 2021. Established Staff Resource Guide on language, translation and accessibility in public engagement. Draft Engagement Honoraria Policy developed and moving to pilot phase. Formal engagement accessibility policy still to be developed.

Recommendation 4: Select and implement engagement technologies consistent with New Westminster's Intelligent City Strategy to increase the breadth and depth of public involvement.		
Action #	Action	Status
4.1	Initiate a pilot for a standardized online engagement platform, to be centrally supported by the Communications Public Engagement Division and available for use by all departments. \$\$\$	Complete: Be Heard New West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjustment to the platform being centrally supported by the Public Engagement Division (instead of Communications). Platform confirmed for ongoing use.
4.2	Work with the Finance Department to pilot an online budget tool or calculator early in the budgeting process, for the purpose of increasing community member knowledge of City budget processes and trade-offs and to allow for higher quality feedback. This tool could also be applied to large capital projects.	Not initiated to date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance Department and Public Engagement Division staff have focused on other education tools in recent years related to City Budget engagement – i.e. Budget 101 webinars and open Council budget workshops. Recommendation from Public Engagement and Finance teams is for more in-person, workshop-style sessions, instead of online tools where discussion is limited. Online budget tools/calculators can be useful for community education on complexity of City budget and competing priorities for limited dollars; however, these tools should not be considered engagement as defined in the City's Public Engagement Policy (i.e. input to inform decision-making). Such tools should be

		used with caution as they are often confused with engagement (i.e. participants believe their calculations in the simulator will be used in budget decision-making).
4.3	Evaluate the benefits and costs of using social media tools such as Twitter or Google Hangouts to enable increased accessibility and interaction, such as remote viewing and/or participation in appropriate workshops, and providing questions/feedback to Council. \$\$	Complete & ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual participation opportunities greatly expanded through COVID (i.e. community workshops through Zoom, Council meetings through Zoom, etc.).
4.4	Work with the Intelligent City Digital Literacy Working Group to ensure that all community members have access to computers and the Internet as the City embraces digital communications and engagement. \$\$\$	Underway / ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various digital inclusion initiatives are underway, supported by Century House, Community Planning Division, non-profit community partners, etc. Intelligent City Digital Literacy Working Group is no longer active. Public Engagement Policy outlines that a combination of in-person (offline) and online engagement activities should be offered for most projects.
4.5	Complete a feasibility study for establishing a single point of contact for resident communications—such as collaborating with other municipalities on a Civic 311 phone and social media information service, reverse 311 services allowing the City to contact local residents (e.g. alerts for water main break), or implementing a web-based question and answer system—and report back to Council with potential benefits and costs. \$ (study); \$\$\$\$\$ (311 service)	Preliminary research completed; formal study not initiated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources required to establish and operate 311 call centre determined to be significant and cost prohibitive. Existing contact channels are well used: i.e. social media, See-Click-Fix, City Hall front desk, general contact form on website, etc. Such information-sharing is not included in definition of public engagement as per City's Public Engagement Policy.

Recommendation 5: Integrate New Westminster's Public Engagement Strategy into the City's strategic planning and decision-making processes, and adopt the Strategy's Strategic Framework and Public Engagement Principles as a basis for planning and evaluating all major public engagement activities.		
Action #	Action	Status
5.1	Provide a Public Engagement Toolkit for New Westminster engagement staff to help create consistency in engagement practices. \$	Complete: Additional staff tools developed to date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement Needs Assessment worksheet Be Heard New West staff overview Be Heard project page guide Standardized demographics questions for all City engagement activities Staff Resource Guide: Language, Translation and Accessibility in Public Engagement
5.2	Implement a policy to improve consistency for planning and reporting on all engagement initiatives designated as medium or high impact/risk. This policy should require staff to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Submit an engagement plan for sign-off by the final decision-makers or project sponsors, answering the questions posed in New Westminster's Public Engagement Strategic Framework (see Appendix B). Present a summary of engagement outputs and evaluation results to the final decision-makers or project sponsors, using the public engagement principles and evaluation considerations in Section 2 as a basis for evaluation (e.g. number of participants, demographic profile, etc.). Create a summary of how public input impacted final decisions 	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Engagement Policy adopted in 2021.

	(including any reasons for why public input was not acted upon, if applicable). This summary should use accessible language and visuals, and should be circulated to participants and posted to the City's public engagement web presence. \$	
5.3	Work with relevant departments to develop a checklist of minimum corporate standards for engagement activities (e.g. notification periods, formats offered, accessibility requirements, information provided, etc.).	Underway: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum standards are outlined in the City's Public Engagement Policy.
5.4	Publish a concise annual summary on the City's public engagement activities, using standard indicators to evaluate performance against New Westminster's engagement principles (see Public Engagement Strategy, Section 2). \$\$	Underway: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual summary of engagement activities shared with Be Heard subscribers and included in City's Annual Report as of 2022. Evaluation of performance relative to engagement principles is underway.
5.5	With reference to New Westminster's engagement principles and evaluation standards, clarify expectations for third parties (e.g. property developers, other government agencies) in conducting independently managed public engagement activities that will inform Council decision-making.	Complete & ongoing
Recommendation 6: Expand the mandate of the Communications Division (Office of the Chief Administrative Officer) to oversee and implement New Westminster's Public Engagement Strategy. <i>(Note: Separate Public Engagement Division established as of 2020)</i>		
Action #	Action	Status
6.1	Allocate \$150,000 in new annual funding to implement the Public Engagement Strategy starting in fiscal year 2017/2018. This funding would be invested in 1 FTE of temporary, dedicated staff support to build New Westminster's public engagement capacity, as well as a Strategic Engagement Initiatives Fund to support Strategy operationalization. \$\$\$\$	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing annual budget is committed for Public Engagement Division, through the Office of the CAO. Operating budget in 2022 for division was \$280,000 (including 2 FTEs, Be Heard

		platform annual subscription, etc.).
6.2	Confirm detailed responsibilities of the Communications Public Engagement Division in supporting and overseeing New Westminster's Public Engagement Strategy, while also reaffirming the ongoing responsibilities of individual departments in planning and implementing public engagement initiatives. \$	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approach adjusted to establishing new Public Engagement Division as of 2020.
6.3	Hire a dedicated public engagement staff person beginning on a temporary basis, with a target start date of April 1, 2017. \$	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Engagement Division now includes two permanent positions.
6.4	Top-up budget for the Strategic Engagement Initiatives Fund to support the addition of medium and long-term engagement priorities. Examples of potential increments include the costs of Participatory Budgeting and Civic 311, if pursued. \$ TBD	Complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAO's budget allows for corporate priorities when requested by Council. Project-based engagement costs are funded through departmental budgets (i.e. overall project budget). Engagement work not related to a specific project or department is funded through the Public Engagement Division's operating budget.

Recommendation 7: Offer ongoing engagement training, coordination and recognition for City staff to support organizational learning and improvement.

Action #	Action	Status
7.1	Identify engagement leads within each department who can provide internal coaching and support, liaise with the Communications Public Engagement Division, and participate in the City's community of practice for engagement staff. \$	Complete & ongoing
7.2	Create an engagement calendar to allow staff across departments to coordinate initiatives. \$	Complete
7.3	Provide Public Engagement Strategy training for affected staff on a range	Complete & ongoing

	of relevant topics (e.g. how to plan engagement initiatives, facilitation training, addressing sensitive topics, etc.). \$	
7.4	Initiate a community of practice for engagement staff across all units to build staff capacity, reinforce organizational learning and provide professional development opportunities. \$\$	Complete & ongoing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff Community of Practice has been meeting regularly (approx. every 2 months) as of 2021.
7.5	Work with Human Resources to offer a leadership training series focused on public engagement. \$\$	Complete
7.6	Create reference materials and build expertise to provide guidance on structure of formal engagement structures such as advisory committees, public hearings, residents' association liaisons, etc. \$\$	Underway / ongoing
7.7	Work with Human Resources to update staff job descriptions and performance reviews to highlight duties related to public engagement. \$	Underway / ongoing
7.8	Work with Human Resources to create a system for recognition and positive reinforcement of staff/departmental engagement success stories.	Underway / ongoing