

REPORT

Engineering Services and Parks & Recreation

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: October 30, 2023

From: Lisa Leblanc
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Director, Parks & Recreation
Item #: 2023-684

Subject: **Report Back on Council Motion Regarding New Westminster Becoming a 15-Minute City**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report and confirm that staff should continue to incorporate 15-minute city principles into existing and upcoming planning and infrastructure work rather than create a standalone plan for becoming a 15-minute city.

PURPOSE

To report back on Council's motion to prepare a plan for New Westminster to become a "15-minute city".

SUMMARY

This report documents how the principles of a "15-minute city" are already incorporated into much of the City's planning and infrastructure work, and how they can be further developed through upcoming collaborative work by several City departments.

BACKGROUND

In support of a delegation of students from the Monkey Rebel Activism Club at École Glenbrook Middle School at the June 12, 2023 Council Meeting, the following motion was passed by Council:

WHEREAS the City of New Westminster declared a climate emergency with an accompanying plan of 7 Bold Steps, and is committed to a just energy transition to greener infrastructure; and

WHEREAS walking and biking stimulate and improve health, both mental and physical, and the City of New Westminster has seen a recent uprise of mental health issues; and

WHEREAS the City of New Westminster is already committed to creating a safe and comprehensive network of bike paths in order to give people more options in addition to personal vehicles and transit and is committed to a more connected way of life, as demonstrated by their environmentally friendly plans and recently introduced Strategic Plan 2023-2026;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of New Westminster endorse the concept of becoming a 15-minute city and create a plan to implement the plan by 2030.

The list of examples for improvements provided by the Monkey Rebel Activism Club at École Glenbrook Middle School include:

- Increased and wider sidewalks
- More benches and seating areas
- More trash cans, bike racks, water fountains, public washrooms and street lights
- Improved bike lanes and wayfinding
- More community gardens and green spaces
- Upgraded playgrounds
- Increase incentives, education and advocacy related to the 15-minute city
- Prioritization of lower-income neighbourhoods for items listed above

DISCUSSION

The 15-minute city concept is based on the principle that all basic needs should be available within a maximum 15-minute walk or “roll”. These include living, working, commerce, healthcare, education and entertainment. Development in New Westminster is guided at a high level by the Official Community Plan, which integrates six themes into the Plan’s policy areas, the following of which are particularly reflective of the 15-minute city concept:

- **Neighbourhood Hearts** – Ensuring each neighbourhood in New Westminster has a heart – a central place where people gather to shop, play, access services and meet their neighbours. Neighbourhood hearts can be community facilities, Great Streets or places like the River Market.
- **Strengthened Connections** – Creating more social and physical connections for a healthy community by fostering growth that supports all modes of transportation,

creating new connections to the riverfront, addressing physical barriers that keep people from meeting and connecting, and working with neighbouring municipalities to improve regional connections.

- **Supporting Innovation** – Pursuing new concepts or ideas to effect positive change and create value for residents, businesses and institutions. Our goal is to ensure innovative activity that benefits the local economy while creating an environment that engages our entire community in positive change.
- **Community Health** – Directing land use and urban design for improved health and well-being. A well-planned community can influence health by promoting physical activity, improving access to healthier foods, addressing housing needs, reducing pollution, promoting healthier natural environments and fostering good mental health.

Many of the goals and policies of the OCP also align with the 15-minute city concept, such as:

- Facilitate a more equitable and livable city in which all residents can meet their basic needs.
- Foster knowledge-based and creative industries that cultivate innovation, promote entrepreneurship and generate employment.
- Ensure natural features are integrated throughout the urban environment.
- Create neighbourhoods with housing options for people of all ages, abilities and household types to meet their changing needs.
- Design housing to be livable and to foster social cohesion and connectivity.
- Provide well-designed parks and open spaces that accommodate and respond to the needs and demands of the diverse and growing community.
- Design complete streets that promote livability, animate the public realm and encourage people of all ages to mingle and socialize.

The City's current transportation and parks and recreation planning and infrastructure work is also well aligned with the 15-minute city concept in the following ways:

- Overall prioritization of walking, cycling, and transit as the preferred transportation modes, as outlined in the Master Transportation Plan.
- Council adoption (2022) and pending implementation of the Active Transportation Network Plan to expand the core network of routes to enable cycling and wheeling by people of all ages and abilities.
- Progress toward Bold Step #7, whereby road space currently used solely for motor vehicle movement and storage is reallocated for sustainable transportation, public gathering and green infrastructure.
- Public open spaces not traditionally perceived as "park", such as roads, streets, and the river's edge, continue to be planned and designed collaboratively with outdoor recreation, walking, cycling, and social objectives in mind. Recent or upcoming projects with public amenities (e.g., seating, drinking stations, urban

misters, street trees, native planting, bike racks, improved street lighting, etc.) include the Agnes Street Greenway, Sixth Street Improvements, and the Uptown Plaza.

- New and replaced sidewalks are at least 1.8 m wide to provide an improved walking and wheeling experience.
- Ongoing implementation of outdoor fitness stations, misting stations, public seating, and playground replacement on an annual basis.
- Identifying opportunities for POPS (privately-owned public spaces), parklets, off-leash areas and/or green infrastructure as part of development proposals or partnerships with third parties with vacant/underutilized lands.
- Progress towards Bold Step #6 with the ongoing implementation of:
 - Urban Reforestation and Biodiversity Enhancement Initiative (URBEI) in 2022-2024, which includes 2,200 new trees and 1.0 hectare of rewilding in parks/open spaces (neighbourhoods prioritized by highest need).
 - Enhanced or restored natural areas including Stanley Street Greenway, Ryall Park (south), Queen's Park, and Lower Hume Park.

Future work to update the City's Official Community Plan could more explicitly reflect the principle of the 15-minute city concept. The next such opportunity to do would be through the Downtown Community Plan update, which is anticipated to follow completion of the 22nd SkyTrain Station Area Plan.

In addition, the pending Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan Update will provide opportunity to further reflect on the principles of the 15-minute city as it pertains to park and open space planning, community recreation facilities, and related services. Through this comprehensive planning process, staff will have the opportunity to learn from the community their priority around 15-minute city principles as related to parks and recreation and overall connectivity to facilities by walking, cycling, and transit.

Staff are also anticipating an update to the Master Transportation Plan (MTP) within the next three years. As with the above planning exercises, renewal of the MTP will provide an opportunity to further incorporate 15-minute city principles and actions into the City's plans.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to incorporate 15-minute city principles into existing work and upcoming planning processes, as described above. If Council wishes staff to develop a standalone 15-minute city plan, further discussion and direction about resourcing and workplan priorities would be required.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Generally speaking, the 15-minute city concept supports people to live “locally” resulting in reduction of carbon emissions by decreasing the use of motor vehicles and by decentralizing services and amenities such that the basic needs for living are located within each local neighbourhood (i.e., accessed within 15 minutes by walking, wheeling, cycling, or on public transport). Over time, this type of planning aims to reduce the need for travel, strengthen a sense of community, and improve sustainability and livability.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff from various departments, including CAPD, Engineering Services, and Parks & Recreation are already working collaboratively to integrate design principles of the 15-minute city concept into development projects and capital projects. To continue this way of working, staff do not anticipate any financial implications at this time. As revised Master Plans are developed (e.g., Neighbourhood Plans, the Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan Update, the Master Transportation Plan), staff anticipate future impacts to the Financial Capital Plan towards implementation.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

This report has been developed jointly by the Engineering and Parks & Recreation Departments, in collaboration with the Climate Action, Planning & Development Department.

OPTIONS

The following two options are presented for Council’s consideration:

1. That Council receive this report and confirm that staff should continue to incorporate 15-minute city principles into existing and upcoming planning and infrastructure work rather than create a standalone plan for becoming a 15-minute city.
2. That Council provide staff with alternate direction.

Staff recommend Option 1.

CONCLUSION

The 15-minute city concept is based on the principle that all basic needs should be available within a maximum 15-minute walk or “roll”. Given its scale and historic development pattern, much of New Westminster already possesses many characteristics of a 15-minute city. Many of the City’s existing plans and policies are also well aligned with the concept, and upcoming planning processes offer the opportunity to further incorporate these principles into the City’s long-term plans.

APPROVALS

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