

REPORT

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: November 6, 2023

From: Lisa Spitale,
Chief Administrative Officer
File:

Item #: 2023-733

Subject: **Anvil Centre Engagement Objectives**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council endorse the Engagement Objectives outlined in this report; and

THAT Council endorse the Next Steps for engagement as outlined in this report.

PURPOSE

This report outlines the goals and objectives for community engagement on the Anvil Centre's role and perception in the community, along with context and framing to support delivery of the engagement.

BACKGROUND

On June 19, 2023 at a pre-workshop planning session with Council, staff presented a series of questions for Council to consider in order to frame a future, broader conversation on the strategic priority alignment of Anvil Centre.

Informed by feedback Council provided during that planning session, a Special Council Workshop on Anvil Centre was held on August 28, 2023. At the workshop Council endorsed Anvil Centre staff to prepare a detailed project and program plan, including developing a Community Engagement Plan with Public Engagement staff.

During these discussions, staff heard Council's desire for the engagement process to place a strong emphasis on the role of the facility within Downtown New Westminster, the experiences of its users and the broader community, and explore ways to make Anvil Centre a more welcoming and community-focused facility. This approach also seeks to identify potential additions to current activities in the facility, making the engagement particularly relevant as we approach the 10-year anniversary of Anvil Centre.

DISCUSSION

Working with Council's input, Anvil Centre leadership and Public Engagement staff have developed an engagement approach and a series of objectives to guide the community engagement process.

Dialogue with the community will be rooted in the understanding that Anvil Centre's origins lie in how its construction was funded, initially designated for a "multi-use civic facility" combining a conference and events center and cultural hub. Today, it is a dynamic space hosting diverse activities from theatre performances, cultural exhibitions and programming, to special events, meetings, conferences and more. Anvil Centre aims to enhance its community focus by potentially adding new activities while maintaining its existing offerings. However, no budget is currently allocated for major physical changes or renovations. The intent is to work with existing resources and building configuration to respond to what we hear through community engagement about priorities for this public facility.

The engagement will seek to include the following groups: current Anvil patrons and program participants, Museum and gallery visitors, community collaborators, current conference and events clients (both corporate and community-based), Anvil Theatre audiences and clients, performers and artists, facility renters, Downtown residents and businesses, and the broader community, including those who use Anvil, those who are aware of it, and those who aren't aware / don't use it.

To guide the engagement planning process, staff work to establish a set of clear objectives that define the purpose and scope of engagement. These objectives outline what we are planning to achieve through the engagement process, and guide the questions we want to ask the public and other interest holders. These objectives are then the foundation for planning all engagement activities.

The following objectives have been developed for the Anvil Centre Community Engagement:

1. Understand the experience of Anvil Centre users, including program participants, Museum and gallery visitors, event attendees, facility renters, conference clients, and others.
 - a. What's do they think is working well?

- b. What do they think could be improved?
2. Understand what Downtown and broader New Westminster groups/residents are not currently using the facility, and why not.
3. Invite Anvil users and non-users to reflect on the facility's nearly 10 years of operations, and gather input on whether the mandate of "Where Culture, Community and Commerce Meet" still resonates.
 - a. What is the role of this public facility in community life, and, more specifically, in Downtown life for residents and businesses?
4. Understand how users and non-users would describe the "identity" of Anvil Centre.
5. Gather suggestions from current users AND non-users about how to make Anvil feel more welcoming and community-focused.
6. Gather suggestions from current users AND non-users about what additional programming / services they would add to Anvil's existing offerings, with the understanding that the City intends to continue current services/programming, and that major renovations to the space are not planned nor budgeted for.
7. Gather suggestions from users and non-users on how best to share information about Anvil's offerings to the community and beyond.

NEXT STEPS

Should Council endorse the engagement objectives outlined above, Public Engagement and Anvil Centre staff would work to develop a more detailed Engagement Plan, outlining the engagement activities, timeline, budget and other details for this process.

Staff anticipate the work of detailed engagement planning, material development and logistic coordination would take place in November and December, 2023. Following this, active engagement with the community would commence and include a range of in-person and online opportunities to participate. It is expected that active engagement would launch in the first weeks of 2024.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff are anticipating potential engagement costs of up to \$20,000. This includes the potential for consultant support with facilitation and/or delivery of focus groups, materials costs, event costs, potential incentives for participants, and other expenses

related to engagement. A more detailed project budget would be developed as part of the detailed engagement planning work to come. An enhancement request has been included in the 2024 budget to accommodate this work.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from multiple divisions within the office of the CAO are supporting this engagement process, including Anvil Centre, Public Engagement, Economic Development and Communications.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. That Council endorse the Engagement Objectives outlined in this report;
2. That Council endorse the Next Steps for engagement as outlined in this report;
3. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Options #1 and #2 are recommended.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

Zaria Alibhai, Public Engagement and Communications Coordinator

This report was reviewed by:

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Sarah Joyce, Director/Curator, New Media Gallery

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This report was approved by:

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer