

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Advisory Planning Commission **Date:** January 16, 2024
From: Emily Huang, Planning Analyst
Meredith Seeton, Senior Policy Planner **File:** 2408432
Subject: **22nd Street Station Area Bold Vision: Ideas Gathering** **Item #:** 2024-21

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Advisory Planning Commission receive this report for information; and

THAT the Advisory Planning Commission nominate a juror to participate in the reGENERATE ideas challenge evaluation.

PURPOSE

To update the Advisory Planning Commission (APC) on 22nd Street SkyTrain Station Area visioning, including reporting back on the first round of community engagement, and to request participation of an APC member on the jury for the reGENERATE ideas challenge.

SUMMARY

The City has launched a visioning process to imagine the future of the neighbourhood around the 22nd Street SkyTrain station. The first phase of community consultation was ideas gathering and it is coming to a close. Through this phase, the project team heard from a diversity of residents, and interested and impacted parties who explored the current state of the neighbourhood and aspirations for its future. To gather further input, an ideas challenge was launched in mid-November, and will be open until the end of January. The ideas challenge is primarily focused on climate-friendly neighbourhood design. This report updates the Commission about the findings from community engagement to date, and requests participation in the evaluation of ideas challenge submissions.

BACKGROUND

Planning for the area around 22nd Street SkyTrain station was relaunched in the summer of 2023. The aim of this work is to create a bold vision for a climate-friendly neighbourhood that would advance the City's goals around increased housing, climate action, and collaboration with First Nations. Previously, staff reported to the Advisory Planning Commission (APC) at their meeting on September 19, 2023, providing a project outline and soliciting input on key considerations for achieving the project objectives.

Since then, the first round of community engagement has been completed, and the reGENERATE ideas challenge has been launched. Recently, the Province released new legislation which requires accommodation of certain minimum densities around transit stations and hubs (see the Provincial press release included in Attachment 1). The new legislation applies to the 22nd Street Station area and will be integrated into the planning process.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The first round of community engagement and ideas gathering took place from September to November 2023. This round of engagement solicited broad input on the state of the neighbourhood (assets and challenges), aspirations for the future, and ideas for how to create a climate-friendly neighbourhood where everyone can thrive.

General outreach was to neighbourhood and city-wide community members and businesses. Targeted outreach efforts were made to connect with youth, seniors, urban Indigenous community members, and other equity-denied groups and lesser-heard voices.

The sections below summarize engagement activities and findings; these are detailed further in the Ideas Gathering Engagement Summary included as Attachment 2.

Engagement Activities

A range of engagement activities were undertaken, including:

- *Community Survey and Ideas Board:* A closed-ended survey was hosted online, as was an ideas board, where community members could provide open-ended ideas and comments.
- *Idea Jams:* A launch event with speakers and facilitated table activities was held at Anvil Centre at the beginning of the engagement period, and a similar event was held virtually the following week.
- *Focus Groups, workshops and meetings:* Four focus groups and workshops were conducted with residents and organizations serving equity-denied groups, including newcomers, people with lived and living experience of homelessness, youth ageing out of foster care, and middle school youth. Two meetings with individuals

representing organizations serving urban Indigenous community members were held, to share about the project, encourage member participation, and listen to priorities and ideas from the organizations. In addition to engaging with equity-denied organizations, staff connected with post-secondary students and staff at Douglas College for a virtual ideas-gathering workshop.

Staff also attended a joint meeting of the Connaught Heights and West End Residents Associations early on in the engagement period. Staff provided an update on the relaunch of visioning, and listened to concerns and early input on the process.

- *Pop Up Booths:* Pop up booths were organized across different locations in the city for people to learn about the project, ways to engage, and share ideas. This strategy of “going to where community members are at” was used to connect with community members who may not have been able to attend a separate scheduled event. Locations included the 22nd Street SkyTrain station, Connaught Heights Elementary School, the farmers market, Grimston Park, Century House, and the library. A pop-up was also held at a Chamber of Commerce “Coffee Talks” event.
- *Open House:* Towards the end of the engagement period, an open house was held within the project area, at Connaught Heights Elementary School, where engagement highlights were shared and additional ideas were gathered.

Outreach Methods

Online engagement activities and project updates were (and continue to be) shared on the Be Heard New West project page. A postcard about engagement opportunities was mailed to residents of Connaught Heights and the West End, and delivered in-person to businesses along 20th Street. Engagement opportunities were also advertised in online newsletters, in local newspapers, through the City’s social media channels, on City billboards, bus shelters and digitally at City facilities. Focus group discussions were arranged by reaching out to organizations directly.

What We Heard

Staff heard from over 700 people encompassing both event attendees and online engagement responses. Key themes include:

- *Managing the transportation network:* Traffic congestion remains a key concern for residents, primarily along 20th Street and Stewardson Way. Many residents stressed the importance of giving careful consideration to the transportation network before accommodating significant growth in the area. Some community members encouraged consideration of a car-light area around the station, and supporting car-light lifestyles by enhancing car share options, making the most possible use of SkyTrain, and the region-serving bus loop and cycling connections through the neighbourhood.

- *Expanding housing:* There were many expressions of openness to exploring more density, including high-rise forms, especially near the SkyTrain station, and significant interest in affordable housing and diversity of housing typologies.
- *Enhancing amenities and services:* Many community members raised the lack of amenities and commercial services in the neighbourhood, and expressed a desire to for development to include a mix of uses, especially in the immediate vicinity of the SkyTrain station. There was also significant interest in expanding spaces to gather, especially outdoor space.

The input gathered echoed much of the feedback received through past planning processes in the area, with a recognition that the housing and climate crises have worsened in recent years and more bold action is needed on these fronts. Feedback from equity-denied community members highlighted the need to include non-market housing, public services such as washrooms and indoor and outdoor gathering spaces, and easily accessible commercial services.

REGENERATE IDEAS CHALLENGE

In addition to community engagement activities described above, the City is hosting an ideas challenge to tap into bold ideas on climate-friendly neighbourhood design. The reGENERATE ideas challenge was launched on November 20 and is open until January 31, 2024.

Thought leaders and experts on climate resilience and community planning, students, and community members are all invited to provide creative ideas about how to advance an inclusive climate-friendly neighbourhood, reflecting the underlying values of climate action, truth and reconciliation, and equity and inclusion.

Outreach Methods

Participation in the ideas challenge was encouraged during engagement activities, especially as there are prizes for submissions from New Westminster community members and youth, as well as 'community's choice' award. The project's external consultants are also promoting the challenge through their networks, and through direct outreach to relevant organizations, associations, and post-secondary programs with focuses on climate action, community planning and design. Staff is promoting the challenge through the City's social media channels, CityPage, and local news media.

Submission Evaluation

A technical committee of staff and project advisors will review the ideas challenge submissions and create a short-list for evaluation. Evaluation will then be completed by a jury in February. The jury is gathered by invitation. Jurors are being selected to bring expertise on planning, design, and community development, with a focus on climate and equity. Attention to diverse representation was also part of the selection process. To date, confirmed jurors include:

- a climate planner from Metro Vancouver,
- a community planner from Happy Cities with expertise in social connectivity, and
- a New Westminster youth with civic engagement experience.

Confirmation of participation is anticipated from two more professionals. Collaborating First Nations have also been invited to join the jury, and Kwantlen First Nation has expressed an interest in participating.

APC JURIST

To enhance local representation, APC is being requested to consider nominating a representative to the ideas challenge jury. To reduce potential for (or perception of) conflict of interest, the representative would preferably live outside the Connaught Heights or West End neighbourhoods. An honorarium for the time spent as a juror will be provided.

The anticipated evaluation process and timeline is as follows:

- *January*: jury members individually review the Ideas Challenge Brief (Attachment 3), which includes the evaluation criteria for the submissions.
- *February 7-14*: jury members individually review a shortlist of submissions (estimated twenty four-page documents) and score submissions based on the evaluation criteria and categories.
- *February 14 or 15 (TBC)*: Half-day jury deliberation.

NEXT STEPS

Staff continue to manage the ideas challenge and are concurrently continuing discussions with external agencies, such as the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, TransLink, BC Hydro, the School District, and the City of Burnaby. Staff is also reviewing the housing and transit oriented development legislation announced by the Province in November, and the recently released policy manuals, and giving consideration to how new requirements can be met through the vision, in conjunction with project goals.

Next steps include inviting First Nation staff members to join a workshop in early 2024, focused on integrating First Nations design into the vision, and better understanding reconciliation priorities.

Following the closing of the ideas challenge, idea submissions will be evaluated through February. These submissions, as well as the community engagement findings, collaboration with First Nations, and discussions with external agencies, will be considered further at a multi-day design workshop anticipated to be held in March. A vision will then be drafted and refined, and made available for public review later in 2024.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Provincial Press Release Regarding Transit Oriented Development

Attachment 2: 22nd Street SkyTrain Station Engagement Summary Report

Attachment 3: reGENERATE Ideas Challenge Brief

APPROVALS

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