

REPORT

Community Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: July 15, 2024

From: Blair Fryer,
Acting Director of Community Services
File: 05.1035.10

Item #: 2024-459

Subject: Anvil Centre 10-year Review Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council provide feedback on the proposed recommendations outlined in this report, which respond to Council and community input received through the Anvil Centre 10-year Review Engagement;

THAT Council approve the recommendations, and direct staff to begin implementation based on the timelines outlined in Attachment 1; and

THAT Council direct staff to bring enhancement requests related to the approved recommendations identified for implementation in 2025 forward as part of the City's 2025 Budget process.

PURPOSE

To share recommendations developed collaboratively by City staff that respond to Council and community input provided through the Anvil Centre 10-year Review process, and seek Council's feedback and consideration of approval to implement the recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Anvil Centre is a vibrant cultural venue and conference centre located in downtown New Westminster. The multi-use, City-owned facility is designed to accommodate a wide variety of events, conferences, community programs, workshops, exhibitions,

performances and cultural experiences. Anvil Centre opened in 2014 and is reaching its first decade of operations.

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 the 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 sought 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.

On November 6, 2023, Council endorsed the proposed engagement approach, including engagement objectives, an overview of groups that should be included in the engagement, and framing for the community conversation.

The Anvil Centre 10-year Review engagement took place from February 1 through early April, 2024, and included workshops, drop-in engagement sessions, interviews, intercept surveys in Downtown New Westminster, and a variety of online engagement tools hosted on the [Be Heard New West project page](#). More than 300 people participated across all opportunities to share input.

The engagement results were provided to Council in a workshop meeting on May 6, 2024, and a summary report and the verbatim input were posted publicly on the Be Heard project page. At the May 6 workshop, Council endorsed staff's proposed next steps, which outlined a collaborative staff process to develop a set of recommendations that respond to Council's direction and the engagement input. Staff are now returning to Council to provide the draft recommendations for discussion, refinement and consideration of approval.

DISCUSSION

Following the May 6, 2024 Council workshop, staff worked to develop and facilitate a three-part workshop series to collaboratively develop and refine a set of draft recommendations that respond to input from Council and the community. These workshops were held through June 2024 and included staff from all divisions at Anvil Centre, New Westminster Public Library, Parks and Recreation, Corporate Communications and Public Engagement.

Once an initial set of draft recommendations was drafted, the Anvil Centre leadership team worked to refine the language and identify the resources required, high-level cost estimates, and proposed timelines for implementation. The draft recommendations for Council’s feedback are included below.

See Attachment 1 for the list of recommendations including the estimated resources, cost level and proposed timeframe for implementation.

1 ACTIVATION

- 1.1 Add mobile display cases in order to expand the community art and heritage exhibition programs to the ground floor, facilitate the exhibition of three-dimensional art works and artefacts, and, support visual displays to celebrate various cultural holidays and commemorative occasions throughout the year. Explore opportunities to potentially rotate displays to other civic facilities.
- 1.2 Explore temporary public art opportunities through the atrium and lobby. This could include art wraps on structural pillars.
- 1.3 Work to regularly activate the ground floor with public activities and vibrant offerings that will bring people into the facility. This could include introducing unstructured, drop-in activities, interactive educational displays and creative events.
- 1.4 Expand on existing partnerships with Library Services to activate the ground floor space and respond to needs in the Downtown neighbourhood.
- 1.5 Establish a new interdepartmental staff working group to work with all Anvil departments to collaborate on new programming, including representation from Recreation and Library Services (also see item 2.2).
- 1.6 Continue to proactively work with community partners in activating the ground floor of Anvil Centre during street festivals and other outdoor events on Columbia Street; seek out new partners to plan and develop new and innovative ways to increase presence at all street festivals on Columbia (also see item 2.4).
- 1.7 Develop selected flexible/ephemeral programming such as screen-based, sound and light to activate the ground floor.

2 ACCESS

- 2.1 Develop a strategic plan for Anvil Centre to provide clarity of purpose and establish priorities and a clear framework for facilitating community usage.
- 2.2 Identify underutilized times and spaces within the facility. Develop internal programs and work with Recreation and Library staff to develop a plan and support the delivery of new recreation and leisure opportunities at Anvil.
- 2.3 Establish strategies to create more flexibility in accessing Anvil programs and services. Potential strategies could include:
 - Expand and diversify drop-in program opportunities;
 - Explore ways to align with other civic facility access programs (Active Pass);
 - Offer more satellite programming at other civic facilities to generate interest and awareness of existing programming at Anvil Centre;
 - Work with other departments to develop a Pay-What-You-Can system.
- 2.4 Consider establishing a new funding stream in the City’s grants program specific to Anvil Centre activation and use. This could include prioritizing grant funding for applicants who propose activation and utilization of the ground floor.
- 2.5 Develop strategies to simplify booking processes for community access:
 - Streamline and centralize intake processes;
 - Reaffirm and clarify criteria for community use;
 - Establish priority use parameters for cultural and community activation;
 - Establish clear criteria for offering free community use (for example, specific spaces, specific days/times);
 - Where possible, align booking policies with other civic facilities.
- 2.6 Provide affordable and flexible catering alternatives for community users.

3 AWARENESS

- 3.1 Engage a consultant to develop a comprehensive communications plan for Anvil Centre that will:

- Maximize use of existing City communications channels;
- Secure a prominent presence on the City’s website for Anvil Centre and its programs;
- Deliver cohesive, ongoing marketing of Anvil Centre and its offerings;
- Explore ways that the building and downtown area can be used to facilitate communication.

- 3.2 Hire a communications and outreach specialist for the operation in order to action the communications strategy and ground level activations.
- 3.3 Strengthen internal communications processes to maximize opportunities for collaboration between all Anvil divisions.
- 3.4 Develop and install new external signage that is eye-catching, supports the needs and aesthetics of each cultural division, and creates greater awareness of the programs and services offered by all Anvil departments.
- 3.5 Develop and install new internal signage to direct visitors and increase awareness of offerings throughout the facility.

4 EXPERIENCE

- 4.1 Engage a space planning consultant familiar with cultural and public assembly spaces to develop a space plan to establish a more welcoming presence at Anvil. Potential initiatives could include:
 - Relocate the kiosk to a more central and visible location;
 - Consider separating security and customer service functions in the redesign;
 - Increase cultural services staff presence on the ground floor;
 - Explore the introduction of new seating, work and passive gathering spaces in the lobby (the ground floor and all levels);
 - Add a rigging system to support temporary décor install and strike;
 - Add ambient sound through the space;
 - Add colour to provide warmth and visual interest;

*Note that the need for additional storage space to support movable furniture will need to be addressed as part of the space plan.

- 4.2 Develop and implement an operational plan to identify what is working well, ways to improve guest experience and decrease any perceived/real barriers. Potential initiatives could include:
 - Improve front line customer service presence and decrease security presence while maintaining the needed security function;
 - Develop a Facility Ambassador Volunteer Program with defined roles to augment the kiosk function;
 - Open the Columbia Street glass walls when possible to draw visitors into the facility.

NEXT STEPS

Pending Council’s approval of the recommendations outlined above, staff will proceed with implementation of the recommendations based on the timelines included in Attachment 1. For recommendations where additional budget has been identified, staff will complete the work required to develop more detailed budget estimates and bring these back to Council as part of the City Budget 2025 process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Attachment 1 includes high-level cost estimates for the recommendations that staff suggest cannot be implemented within existing Anvil Centre budgets. The cost estimates are organized by \$ indicating up to \$15,000, \$\$ indicating \$15,000-\$75,000 and \$\$\$ indicating \$75,000 +. Pending Council’s approval of the recommendations, staff will work to provide more detailed budget estimates and bring these forward as part of the City Budget 2025 process.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The collaborative staff process to develop the recommendations outlined in this report included staff from Parks and Recreation, the New Westminster Public Library, Corporate Communications, Public Engagement, and all divisions of Anvil Centre.

OPTIONS

The following options are provided for Council’s consideration:

1. That Council provide feedback on the proposed recommendations outlined in this report, which respond to Council and community input received through the Anvil Centre 10-year Review Engagement;
2. That Council approve the recommendations, and direct staff to begin implementation based on the timelines outlined in Attachment 1;

3. That Council direct staff to bring enhancement requests related to the approved recommendations identified for implementation in 2025 forward as part of the City's 2025 Budget process;
4. That Council provide alternative direction for staff.

Staff recommend Options 1, 2 and 3.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Recommendations with Resources, Cost Level and Estimated Timeframe

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

Jennifer Miller, Manager of Public Engagement
Todd Ayotte, Manager of Community Arts and Theatre
Rob McCullough, Manager of Museums and Heritage Services

This report was reviewed by:

Carolyn Casenas, Chief Librarian, New Westminster Public Library
Corrinne Garrett, Senior Manager, Recreation Facilities and Programs
Vali Marling, General Manager of Anvil Centre
Diane Heal, Manager of Conference Services
Gordon Duggan, Executive Director, New Media Gallery
Sarah Joyce, Director Curator, New Media Gallery

This report was approved by:

Blair Fryer, Acting Director, Community Services
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer