

REPORT

Community Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: December 16, 2024

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

Item #: 2024-721

Subject: **Response to Council motion re: Selecting an inclusive and accessible site for the 2025 Canada Day celebration and festivities**

RECOMMENDATION

THAT staff be directed to proceed with a fulsome public engagement process on Canada Day events in New Westminster for the planning of events for 2026 and beyond, including engagement to cultural observances recommendations presented by the Community Advisory Assembly.

PURPOSE

To provide options in response to Council's September 9, 2024 motion regarding resources required to plan and implement a fulsome public engagement process for Canada Day 2025.

BACKGROUND

At the September 9, 2024, Regular Council meeting, Council made the following resolution:

1. *THAT staff report back on the resources required for a fulsome public engagement process for the 2025 Canada Day festivities and celebrations; and*
2. *THAT several locations across the City be offered to the public as a potential site for the 2025 Canada Day festivities including at least one site in Queensborough.*

In 2024, Canada Day was held at Westminster Pier Park. While it saw moderate success in terms of attendance, construction and road closures in the area meant that access was challenging for both vendors and attendees. Challenges included restrictions in accessing the location, constraints on the possible size and scope of activations due to weight restrictions, additional budget required for auxiliaries and traffic management contractors, and expanded timeline for set up and tear down because vendors needed to be brought in individually through a single entrance.

Canada Day celebrations in New Westminster have changed over the years, and in recent years efforts have been made to incorporate Indigenous elements and performers as New Westminster continues its journey of truth seeking and reconciliation. Staff have heard feedback, both positive and negative, on all of these elements. The majority of negative feedback following the 2024 Canada Day events, from those who sent in comments, indicated a desire for a new approach and/or location. Comments included complaints about the condition and number of washrooms, the lack of food truck choices (limited due to weight and access), lack of activities for younger children, and lack of both free and paid parking. Prior to Council's motion in September, staff had begun the early planning work of developing ideas to respond to this feedback.

DISCUSSION

Resources required to deliver a fulsome public engagement process

A fulsome public engagement process at the City of New Westminster usually includes the following activities:

- Developing an engagement approach and detailed plan, including engagement objectives, timeline, activities, etc. The engagement approach is usually brought to Council for review and endorsement before engagement begins
- Both online and in-person opportunities to participate
- Promotion activities to invite community members to participate, including City e-newsletters, social media, paid advertising, notices in City facilities, direct outreach to interest groups, etc.
- Targeted / specialized engagement activities designed to include under-represented groups
- Minimum of three weeks of active engagement (collecting community input); more fulsome engagement can run over 4-6 weeks to reach targeted groups
- A fulsome report-back on what we heard, which includes compiling all input received, analyzing the input to identify themes, and writing a summary report

Resources that are required to deliver the activities described above include:

- Staff capacity on the City's Public Engagement team to develop the engagement plan, co-develop all engagement and promotions materials with the project team

– in this case, Community Partnerships – launch and promote the engagement, schedule, promote and facilitate in-person engagement activities, analyze input, and write the What We Heard report

- Alternatively, consultants can be hired to deliver some of these tasks. Staff capacity is still required to source the consultants (typically, through an RFP process), review all materials, and support engagement implementation
- Budget for advertising and promotions, targeted engagement activities (for example, honorariums for participants), and in-person engagement activities (for example, event costs, refreshments, giveaways, etc.)

Engagement costs for a fulsome public engagement process, including the hard costs outlined above, typically range from \$5,000 to \$10,000. This does not include consultant costs.

Planning, implementation and reporting back on a fulsome public engagement process typically takes 4-5 months to complete. This timing can be extended by other engagement processes that are already planned or underway.

A fulsome public engagement process on Canada Day festivities as outlined above would be challenging to complete in time for the engagement results to come back to Council for direction on Canada Day 2025 planning. Should Council endorse proceeding with fulsome engagement, staff anticipate that the engagement work would take place in 2025 and the results would be applied to the planning of Canada Day 2026 and onwards.

Timing of Canada Day event planning

Canada Day generally takes three to four months of planning, with all event details finalized about one month in advance to allow for time for marketing. Staff in Community Partnerships typically begin the initial planning for Canada Day in December, with contractor reservations made in January or February, and the bulk of the planning work taking place in March. Reservations for some contractors are best made early in the year to secure preferred vendors, given that Canada Day is a widely-celebrated holiday in the region.

Other related engagement activities

Over the last few months, the Community Advisory Assembly has been discussing and developing recommendations for the City on cultural observances, with a focus on how the City could formalize its practices in this area to be more inclusive, equitable, and support community belonging. The Assembly was highly supportive of the City prioritizing its efforts on observances that appeal to and bridge diverse communities, and strengthen the collective New West identity.

Many of the Assembly's recommendations on cultural observances have implications for the City's approach to Canada Day events. Please see related report, titled "Recommendations on Cultural Observances from the Community Advisory Assembly" on the December 16, 2024 Council agenda.

The Assembly recommended that the City annually lead a few large-scale observances that promote a sense of shared community identity and bring people together across differences. Seasonal, intercultural celebrations involving large-scale, public, festival-like events, such as Canada Day, were identified as a priority event type.

Within the Assembly's full guidance, staff have identified a few specific recommendations that would apply to Canada Day, such as:

- **City-wide Inclusivity:** Ensure events are distributed across the neighborhoods, for example with a rotation schedule or multiple locations.
- **Symbolic Neutrality:** For seasonal celebrations, transition away from using religious or culture-specific symbols, visuals or language in City-led activities, while welcoming communities participating in the events to bring their own flair.
- **Collaborative Engagement:** Actively invite multiple communities to co-create and participate in observances and celebrations through the support of community connectors who would act as liaisons between the City and community.

As outlined in the related report, staff will be working in the coming months to review the Assembly's recommendations in detail, connect the recommendations with existing processes, and identify next steps for implementation, alignment across staff teams, and possible broader public engagement.

ANALYSIS

Given the above, staff have developed two options for Council's consideration.

Option 1 – a fulsome public engagement process that includes the activities outlined above, and that also seeks to incorporate and engage more broadly on the recommendations provided by the Community Advisory Assembly. With the very recent timing of the Assembly's discussions on observances, this option would require some additional interdepartmental staff work to explore how best to engage the community on priorities for Canada Day as well as some of the Assembly's recommendations. With this option, staff would develop an engagement approach and return to Council for further feedback and endorsement before proceeding. Given the time required for detailed engagement planning, a Council check-in to confirm the approach, active engagement time, and analysis and reporting of the input, staff acknowledge it would be challenging to receive engagement results with enough time to significantly influence planning for Canada Day 2025. Should Council wish to move forward with fulsome

engagement, staff anticipate that the engagement would take place in 2025 with engagement results applied to planning for Canada Day 2026 and onwards.

Option 2 – an online survey that could more quickly identify some preferences of survey participants for logistics of Canada Day 2025. The survey would primarily include multiple choice questions to simplify the planning and reporting processes. Staff anticipate such a survey could be launched in January 2025, with the intent to bring the survey results back to Council in February 2025 for further direction on plans for Canada Day 2025.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will proceed with early planning for Canada Day 2025 events as per our usual process and timelines. Pending Council's direction and preferred option, staff would proceed accordingly.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As outlined above, expenses for a fulsome public engagement planned and implemented by City staff range from approximately \$5,000-\$10,000. This includes costs for advertising, event expenses such as refreshments, potential prize draws, honorariums for participants, etc. Expenses for Option 2 – an online survey – would be minimal and consist of advertising and prize draws.

Staff anticipate that engagement costs for either option could be accommodated within existing budgets.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from the Community Partnerships and Public Engagement divisions within the Community Services Department are collaborating on responding to Council's motion. Staff from multiple divisions supported the Assembly's discussions on cultural observances, including Community Partnerships, Communications, Parks and Recreation, Museums and Heritage, and Public Engagement.

OPTIONS

Options for Council's consideration include:

1. THAT staff be directed to proceed with a fulsome public engagement process on Canada Day events in New Westminster for the planning of events for 2026 and

beyond, including engagement to cultural observances recommendations presented by the Community Advisory Assembly.

2. That staff be directed to proceed with an online survey in early 2025 to identify some preferences for logistics of Canada Day 2025 events in New Westminster.

Staff recommend Option 1.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

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