

REPORT

Community Services Department

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: February 10, 2025

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

Item #: 2025-44

Subject: **Community Advisory Assembly Pilot Evaluation and Next Steps**

RECOMMENDATION

1. *THAT staff be directed to consider feedback from the Community Advisory Assembly on its Terms of Reference, included as Attachment 2 to the report titled “Community Advisory Assembly Pilot Evaluation and Next Steps,” in developing recommendations for the future of the Assembly model; and*
 2. *THAT the next steps of Assembly evaluation activities, development of staff recommendations, and Council decision-making on the future of the Assembly initiative be endorsed.*
-

PURPOSE

This report outlines the process to evaluate the Community Advisory Assembly pilot project and the next steps planned to complete the evaluation, compile the evaluation results, develop recommendations from staff, and return to Council for decision-making about the future of the Assembly initiative.

BACKGROUND

The City’s Community Advisory Assembly is a pilot project that was designed to test a new model for committee-style public engagement. The Assembly model differs from traditional City of New Westminster advisory committees in several ways:

- Larger group of residents – 36 members

- Diverse membership that mirrors the overall demographic profile of New Westminster
- More regular meetings – monthly
- Covers a variety of topics related to current City priorities and initiatives, with a focus on topics that impact residents and have a clear opportunity for influence
- Greater focus on dialogue, deliberation and reaching consensus
- Meetings are led by a professional facilitator (contractor)
- Members are offered a variety of supports to help address barriers to participation.

In the fall of 2023, the City issued an open call for applications to join the Assembly pilot term, with any current New Westminster resident eligible to apply. More than 200 applications were received, and a masked selection process was conducted based on applicants' demographic profiles. More information about the application and selection process can be found on the [Assembly startup](#) webpage on the City's website.

The Assembly started meeting in January 2024 and the pilot term concluded last month (January 2025) with a final meeting and wrap-up event. More details about the Assembly meeting schedule and meeting minutes are available [on this page](#). The [Assembly's Terms of Reference](#) (included as Attachment 1), adopted by the Assembly members at the start of the term and by Council, outline further detail about the structure and procedures of the group.

Through the pilot term, the Assembly discussed and provided recommendations to the City on a variety of topics, including: community belonging and connecting; road reallocation; climate action and intersectionality; cultural observances; and evaluation of the Assembly model. Assembly members presented the group's recommendations to Council in May and December 2024, and an update report was provided to Council in November.

DISCUSSION

Because the Community Advisory Assembly was launched as a pilot project, a formal evaluation process was developed as an important component of project planning. As part of pilot development, staff worked with a consultant with expertise in deliberative democracy to help develop the evaluation approach.

Evaluation activities, both completed and underway, include:

- Facilitated discussion and feedback from the Assembly as a group
- Individual evaluation surveys completed by Assembly members, City Council, staff who interacted with the Assembly, and Assembly Steering Committee
- Individual research interviews (optional) for all groups above, with PhD candidate researchers from SFU.

Feedback from the Assembly as a Group (complete)

At the Assembly's May 2024 meeting, members brainstormed, discussed and prioritized potential topics for the Assembly to cover in one or two future meetings. A topic put forward by a group of members and that received strong support from many in attendance was about the Assembly model itself, and how the City could sustain and expand on the model. This topic was added to the agenda for discussion at the November 2024 Assembly meeting, and members were invited to provide feedback on the Assembly experience.

At the December 2024 Assembly meeting, discussions on the Assembly model were continued and expanded to focus on providing feedback on the [Terms of Reference](#) for the pilot year. During this discussion, the Assembly members in attendance unanimously agreed to recommend to Council that the Assembly model should be adopted as a permanent initiative.

A draft summary of comments on the Terms of Reference was developed by the Assembly facilitators, and finalized at the last Assembly meeting and wrap-up event, which was held on January 16, 2025.

See Attachment 2 for the Assembly's comments on the Terms of Reference.

Evaluation Surveys (underway)

Both pre- and post-term evaluation surveys were developed for Assembly members, City Council, staff, and the Assembly Steering Committee. Conducting surveys at both the start and end of the pilot term allows for evaluation of expectations for the Assembly process at the outset, compared with experiences and outcomes at the conclusion.

Those in attendance at the January 16, 2025 Assembly wrap-up event were asked to complete the post-term evaluation surveys during the event. Those who were not in attendance received the survey electronically afterwards. Staff are currently working to compile the survey responses.

Research Interviews (underway)

In addition to the evaluation surveys, two PhD candidate researchers from Simon Fraser University have invited Assembly members, Council, staff, Steering Committee members, and the facilitation team to participate in one-on-one evaluation interviews. Researchers Elodie Jacquet and Megan Mattes are conducting research on the experiences of municipal governments with citizen assemblies in Canada. Ms. Jacquet has also supported the Assembly initiative as a consultant during the pilot development, and as a volunteer member of the Steering Committee.

Participation in the interviews is optional and voluntary, and interviews will continue through February 2025. The interview input will be anonymized and the researchers will prepare a summary of the findings for the City's use in assessing whether to continue with the Assembly model. The researchers also plan to publish the findings as part of their wider research on this topic.

In addition to the Assembly's comments on the Terms of Reference, the evaluation survey and interview results will be provided to Council to support decision-making on whether to continue with the Assembly model or not.

NEXT STEPS

Complete Input-Gathering for Evaluation – February 2025

- Research interviews conducted by SFU researchers
- Assembly members, Council, staff and Steering Committee have been invited to participate in optional interview

Compile and Summarize Evaluation Input – March-April 2025 (tentative)

- Staff compile and summarize evaluation surveys
- SFU researchers compile and summarize interview input and provide summary to City staff

Develop Recommendations for Council's Consideration – April 2025 (tentative)

- Incorporating evaluation results, staff will develop recommendations related to the future of the Assembly initiative and suggestions for adjustment if model is continued
- Budget implications of continuing the Assembly model will also be identified

Report to Council with Evaluation Results and Recommendations – May 2025 (tentative)

- Council deliberation and decision-making

No Assembly meetings or other activity will take place during the evaluation and decision-making period.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Community Advisory Assembly pilot term was delivered within the identified budget for the initiative. No financial implications are expected to deliver the next steps outlined above.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The Community Advisory Assembly process is led by the Public Engagement team, with support from Legislative Services. Staff from multiple departments have supported the Assembly’s work depending on the topic under discussion. Staff from Community Services and Engineering Operations also supported the Assembly as members of the Steering Committee.

OPTIONS

Three options are provided for Council’s consideration:

- 1. That staff be directed to consider feedback from the Community Advisory Assembly on its Terms of Reference, included as Attachment 2 to the report titled “Community Advisory Assembly Pilot Evaluation and Next Steps,” in developing recommendations for the future of the Assembly model; and
- 2. That the next steps of Assembly evaluation activities, development of staff recommendations, and Council decision-making on the future of the Assembly initiative be endorsed;
- 3. Provide staff with alternate direction.

Staff recommend options 1 and 2.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Community Advisory Assembly Terms of Reference, February 2024
Attachment 2 – Community Advisory Assembly’s Comments on Terms of Reference

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Jennifer Miller, Acting Deputy Director, Community Services

This report was reviewed by:
Zaria Alibhai, Public Engagement Coordinator
Sayano Izu, Public Engagement Coordinator

This report was approved by:
Blair Fryer, Acting Director, Community Services
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer