

REPORT

Community Services

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: April 7, 2025

From: Blair Fryer, Director of Community Services
File: 2665802

Item #: 2025-96

Subject: 10-year Anvil Review Recommendations Update

RECOMMENDATION

1. *THAT the report titled “10-year Anvil Review Recommendations Update” from the Director, Community Services dated April 7, 2025, be received for information.*
 2. *THAT the next steps for the new media exhibition space at Anvil Centre, as outlined in the report titled “10-year Anvil Review Recommendations Update” from the Director, Community Services dated April 7, 2025 be endorsed.*
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PURPOSE

This report provides Council with an update on the 10-year Anvil Review Recommendations as well as details on next steps for the New Media Gallery.

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 has reached its first decade of operations.

On June 19, 2023 at a 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 directed 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 approached 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; 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.

On July 15, 2024 staff returned to Council to provide a draft set of recommendations for discussion, refinement and consideration of approval. Recommendations were presented across four categories of impact: Activation, Access, Awareness and Experience. Council endorsed all recommendations and this report is to provide an update on the progress of these recommendations.

With respect to the Art and Technology Division, since January 2025, the two management positions managing the New Media Gallery (NMG) have been vacant. Noted further below in this report is an update on the planning for the NMG exhibition program.

Other areas within the remaining Art and Technology Division continue through programming, both at Anvil Centre and through outreach at various civic facilities.

DISCUSSION

Anvil Review Recommendations Update

Attachment 1 details the recommendations endorsed by Council on July 15, 2024. This attachment also provides a status update on each recommendation as of March 2025. Some highlights of progress to date are as follows:

Recommendation 1.2 - Explore temporary public art opportunities through the atrium and lobby

Art Banners

Banner hardware will be installed in the Anvil Centre atrium to support ongoing temporary and rotational art banner displays inside the Anvil Centre. The first display will feature local children's artwork and will be installed in April/May 2025.

Capture Photography Festival

Anvil will continue to host a temporary photo-based art installation in conjunction with the regional Festival. A new work on the Columbia Street façade is scheduled to be installed in April 2025.

Recommendation 1.3 - Work to regularly activate the ground floor with public activities and vibrant offerings that will bring people into the facility.

Library Summer Reading Club Wrap Up

In September 2024, Anvil Centre hosted the Summer Reading Club Wrap Up party in the Ballroom. Library Services coordinated this event through support by Anvil Centre Conference and Cultural Services staff for a total attendance of 500. This wrap up event will be held again in September 2025.

Indigenous Art In Cultural Spaces Round Table

In October 2024, "Art in Cultural Spaces: A Round Table Discussion" was held in the Anvil Ballroom. This public panel talk was related to the New Westminster Museum exhibition *Downstream Where the Waters Mix*, and invited artists, curators, and supporters of the exhibition to discuss the historic and working relationships between Indigenous artists and museums, galleries, and cultural centres.

Family Day Pow Wow Workshop

On February 16, 2025, Anvil Centre hosted a drop-in Pow Wow workshop for Family Day. This participatory workshop, held in the ground-floor ballroom, taught the history of powwow, along with its regalia, drums and stories.

Tin Soldier Time Capsule Viewing

Following the opening event of the Tin Soldier Time Capsule on February 14, 2025, many community members showed interest in viewing the items. The

items were made available for viewing on the ground level of Anvil Centre and within the third floor spaces on February 22 and 23.

Recommendation 1.4 - Expand upon existing partnerships with Library services to activate the ground floor space and respond to needs in the Downtown neighbourhood

Capital funding was approved for a library book vending machine in the City's 2025 budget. Library staff are in preliminary research stages to identify the appropriate equipment for this service.

Recommendation 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.

Library Programs in Anvil Studios

Art Services staff worked with the library to provide space in the Anvil Studios during underutilized times to support a weekly parent and baby story and play time. This three-month program will launch in April.

Music Lessons

Beginning in 2024 Anvil Centre began hosting Community Recreation piano and guitar lessons in the music practice rooms on level 4. With the opening of *təmesełtxw* in 2024, the piano lessons were relocated to this facility but guitar lessons continue at Anvil Centre.

Recommendation 2.4 – Consider establishing a new funding stream in the City's grants program specific to Anvil Centre activation and use.

Staff will be recruiting a Grants Coordinator in Q2 of 2025. Once onboarded, they will analyze a micro-granting program to support access to Anvil Centre as a component of the phased grant refinements Council approved in 2024. Council should expect a report with recommendations later in 2025.

Recommendation 2.6 – Provide affordable and flexible catering alternatives for community users.

Newly Established Flexible Fraser Health Licensing

Flexible FHA Guidelines are in place, allowing for community users booking cultural spaces to have catering alternatives in Anvil Centre. This means community groups can bring their own food into the venue, provided it is prepared in a Fraser Health certified facility.

New Community Catering Menu

Guidelines are in place to provide affordable and flexible catering options for community users and community events. This provides community users new opportunities for catering with more options for service.

For a complete update on all Anvil Review Recommendations see Attachment 1.

New Media Gallery Programming and Planning Update

New Media Arts Residency – Spring 2025

Staff are developing an Artist Residency project for the gallery to be launched this spring. This project will connect a local (Metro Vancouver) professional artist working in new media with the community in order to envision and create an interactive residency. It is anticipated that the residency will result in the establishment of a temporary gallery installation that actively incorporates community identity and interests. This interim project will allow the City to animate the gallery space through its transition and maximize community participation.

Pop-up Creative Exhibition - Drone Day

During the resident artist recruitment, staff in the Art and Technology division are coordinating a pop-up, sound-based participatory exhibition in the gallery on May 24. Drone Day is an annual celebration of drone, community, and experimental sounds. A sound artist will be engaged for a live drone performance in the gallery. Community members will be invited to participate with their own drone-making methods and/or sit within the space to take in the sounds. This event aligns with the Art and Technology division's mandate to make contemporary arts accessible to the community while showcasing new frontiers of expression rooted in the media arts.

Exhibition Vision and Mandate Review

The New Media Gallery is a unique space within the Anvil Centre and City facilities. It is a specialized and purpose-built exhibition space designed to meet professional museum and gallery standards. A new vision for this dedicated new media exhibition space is being developed. This vision will build on the Anvil 10-year review engagement work completed in 2024, and will be informed by discussions with the local arts community and sectoral research. As part of this process, staff will hire a specialized consultant to complete a scan of the regional and national visual arts sector in order to identify current gaps and opportunities. Following this work, operational scenarios for the gallery will be developed for Council's consideration.

NEXT STEPS

Staff are continuing to implement the Anvil Review Recommendations detailed in Appendix 1, along with the next steps outlined above regarding activating and planning for the New Media Gallery space in Anvil Centre.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

All activities reported in this update are being undertaken within approved budgets.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Staff from Community Services, Parks and Recreation and the New Westminster Public Library are contributing to the implementation of the Anvil Review Recommendations.

OPTIONS

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

1. THAT the report, titled "10-year Anvil Review Recommendations Update," be received for information.
2. THAT the next steps for the new media exhibition space at Anvil Centre, as outlined in the report titled "10-year Anvil Review Recommendations Update" be endorsed.
3. THAT Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommend Options 1 and 2.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Anvil Review Recommendations with Updates as of March 2025.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:

Todd Ayotte, Manager of Community Arts and Theatre

Vali Marling, Anvil Centre General Manager

Rob McCullough, Manager of Museums and Heritage Services

This report was reviewed by:

Jennifer Miller, Acting Deputy Director of Community Services

This report was approved by:

Blair Fryer, Director of Community Services

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer