Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

Attachment *#1*

Community Advisory Assembly's Comments

on Terms of Reference, January 2025

Community Advisory Assembly's Comments on Terms of Reference

During the December 2024 meeting of the Community Advisory Assembly pilot, Assembly members debriefed the year-long process and collaboratively discussed avenues for improving the model. Should the City choose to continue with this form of resident engagement beyond this pilot – an action unanimously endorsed by the members – the following comments on specific sections of the Terms of Reference should be considered. *Note:* Excerpts from the Terms of Reference are included below, noted as "original statement on," but additional detail is available in the full [Terms of Reference document](#).

Original statement on Vision / Goal:

To provide advice and guidance to the City on Council's Strategic Priorities, as well as important City projects, plans, and policies. There will be a focus on projects that are expected to directly affect the day-to-day lives of New Westminster residents.

Assembly Comments: Keep this vision, with the caveat that Assembly members should have some say in which City projects, plans and policies are "important" to provide guidance on. Include a note on accountability: the City reporting back to Assembly on what of its recommendations is and isn't implemented.

Original statement on Mandate:

The Assembly's role is to advise City Council and City staff across all departments on plans and actions related to Council's Strategic Priorities, and other current City projects, plans, and policies. Topics that come to the Assembly for input should:

- Be expected to include changes that are likely to have a direct impact on residents.
- Include elements, details, or options that have not yet been decided / there is opportunity to shape or change;
- Be early enough in the process where there is a genuine and meaningful opportunity for the Assembly to help shape the outcomes.
- Provide sufficient background information and context for the Assembly to be able to provide informed, meaningful input; and
- Include a plan for project staff to report back to the Assembly and the community how the Assembly's input was incorporated / influenced the outcomes.

Assembly Comments: More attention should be given to the selection of discussion topics. Topics should not be entirely predetermined before members join the Assembly. City staff, Council, and the Steering Committee should advise Assembly members on topics that they would like to get input on early in the Assembly's term. At the same time, Assembly members should be asked independently what topics they care about. A collaborative process during one of the early meetings should lead to a set of topics that including priorities for the City and priorities of the

Assembly members, at about a 50:50 ratio (noting that there may well be overlap between the two). Under this model, if there isn't a perfect window of influence on a topic, but it is of high importance to members, it would not be excluded. The Assembly also recommends that while majority of topics are determined early in the term, there is some room for emergent topics and responsiveness to what is going on in the community.

Original statement on Membership:

The Committee will have a maximum of 36 members who are all current residents of New Westminster. Membership of the Community Advisory Assembly will mirror the overall demographic profile of the city, based on the following characteristics:

- Geographic area of the city (i.e., neighbourhood)
- Gender identity
- Age group
- Housing tenure (i.e., renter or owner)
- Visible minority
- Indigenous identity

In addition to these characteristics, a diversity of lived experiences will be sought across Assembly members, such as including newcomers to Canada, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, etc.

Assembly Comments: Specifically name additional demographic profiles used in the selection process as part of the bulleted list as opposed to the use of "in addition" and "etc.". Include "non-English speaking" in membership criteria to reflect the city's demographic profile.

Original statement on Equity and Inclusion:

The City recognizes that residents face different barriers to participation in civic processes such as the Community Advisory Assembly. To support the inclusion of a diversity of voices and experiences, a variety of supports will be offered to Assembly members.

Assembly Comments: Make it clear that no experience is required for applicants. Allow for a choice between one- and two-year terms for Assembly members, so that there is possibility for staggered/overlapping terms and greater continuity. Adjust the honorarium according to living wage changes. During the meetings and activities, rotate seating frequently to foster mixing of members. Involve relevant community organizations (e.g. NGOs, businesses etc.) as presenters at Assembly meetings.

Original statement on Governance:

A Steering Committee will be established to help advise City staff and Council on what topics/projects are presented to the Assembly, as well as the group's process, evaluation, and other parameters of the pilot project.

Assembly Comments: Explore the addition of past Assembly members to the Steering Committee.

Original statement on the Role of City Council:

While members of City Council will not have an official chair or membership role in the Assembly, Council needs to be accountable for the efforts made by the Assembly to provide advice and guidance. Efforts will be made to provide opportunities for relationship and trust building between Council and Assembly members through informal gatherings, such as a dinner event at the start of the Assembly term. The Assembly will provide regular updates to City Council on their work, through reports and delegations. The Assembly members will select Assembly representatives to present their recommendations to Council.

Assembly Comments: Establish a mechanism for Council to be accountable through regular reporting on which Assembly recommendations are implemented or not. Council should have a reporting timeline of three to six months. The Assembly should have more opportunities to interact with Council, potentially through Workshop meetings of Council and/or other options.

Original statement on Staff Supports:

Depending on the projects, plans and policies brought forward to the Assembly, a wide range of City staff will be available to the group to provide information and technical expertise.

Assembly Comments: Establish a tracking mechanism or more frequent follow ups from Staff to close the loop on outcomes of the Assembly's recommendations. Increase financial transparency so that Assembly's recommendations on every topic are informed by the reality of how much different options cost. Be transparent about the cost of the Assembly's process versus other processes.

Original statement on Term of Service:

All members of the Community Advisory Assembly will be appointed for a one-year term. Assembly members will be limited to one term.

Assembly Comments: Consider extending the term from one year to two years to allow more time for members to get comfortable and achieve meaningful outcomes (see above). Provide supports for past Assembly members to stay involved in City events. Create hand-off documents

to support transitions between Assembly cohorts, implement a mentorship system, and host a meet-and-greet with alumni at a welcome dinner.

Original statement on Facilitation:

Rather than appointing a Chair, a professional facilitator who is not an Assembly member and who will not participate in the content of Assembly discussions (i.e. not provide their opinions/perspective on the topic under discussion) will lead the group in its discussions. The Facilitator's role is to support the Assembly in fulfilling its mandate.

Assembly Comments: Continue using professional, external, dedicated facilitators to run meetings.

Original statement on Deliberation:

Assembly members are tasked with providing advice and direction to the City, and in many cases, this will involve finding common ground among the membership. The Facilitator will work to ensure every participant has an opportunity to speak, and that a variety of formats and methods of collecting input are applied in meetings. Assembly members will be asked to commit to careful and active listening, and to weighing and considering multiple perspectives.

Whenever possible, the group will be asked to aim for consensus: recommendations or advice that all members can accept. The root of consensus is "consent" – this is different from full agreement or majority rule. When consensus is not possible, minority opinions will still be recorded and acknowledged in meeting notes, reports to Council, and other methods of reporting on the Assembly's work.

Assembly Comments: Continue with the consensus process.

Original statement on Quorum:

Regular attendance and active participation of Assembly members is a high priority, given the aim of the group to provide advice as a representative cross-section of the community. A quorum shall consist of two-thirds of the Assembly members (24 out of the 36 members). If a quorum is not present within 30 minutes following the meeting start time, the Committee Clerk will record the names of the members who are present, and the meeting will be adjourned.

Assembly Comments: Allow a discussion among Assembly members to proceed if quorum is not reached within the first 30 minutes of the meeting start time, but do not make any decisions without quorum.

Original statement on Attendance:

Members will be asked to tell the Committee Clerk in advance whether they will be able to attend a meeting.

Additional terms as decided by the Assembly in May 2024:

- After the first four months of the Assembly term, members who leave or are removed from the Assembly should not be replaced by new members, and instead the size of the group should be adjusted down to reflect active membership. This is in recognition that key learning takes place and relationships are formed in the initial meetings of the term. Quorum requirements would also be adjusted to reflect the new total membership.

- If a member does not stay in communication over two missed meetings, they should be notified that they have the option of resuming communications, withdrawing from the Assembly, or being subject to removal from the Assembly. Efforts should be made by Staff to understand the member's circumstances and to gather any feedback they might have about how the Assembly process is going for them. If a member remains uncommunicative, they will be removed from the Assembly. Any members who withdraw from the Assembly should be offered an exit interview.

Assembly Comments: Students should receive credits/volunteer hours for attending the Assembly.

Note: The Assembly confirmed their support to continue with the updated attendance policy, decided in May 2024.

Original statement on Meeting Frequency:

The Assembly will meet approximately once per month. Meetings will alternate between weekday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Assembly Comments: Meetings should not exceed three hours to prevent fatigue. Beyond monthly meetings, consider inviting members to workshops and City events to engage directly with the community.

Original statement on Evaluation:

Assembly members, City staff, and City Council will all be included in the evaluation of the Assembly pilot project. The evaluation process will include questions about the Assembly process, experience, and outcomes. Evaluation results will be shared with participants, Council, and the broader community.

Assembly Comments: Ensure continued evaluation and adjustment processes to improve the Assembly over time.

Original statement on Rules of Procedure:

Committee procedures are governed by the current version of the City's Council procedure bylaw.

Assembly Comments: Continue to co-develop meeting guidelines to ensure respectful and productive discussions.

Additional Comments: The Assembly should be supported through a marketing budget, Assembly champions, and social media channels to raise community awareness about the Assembly's work and communicate it success stories.