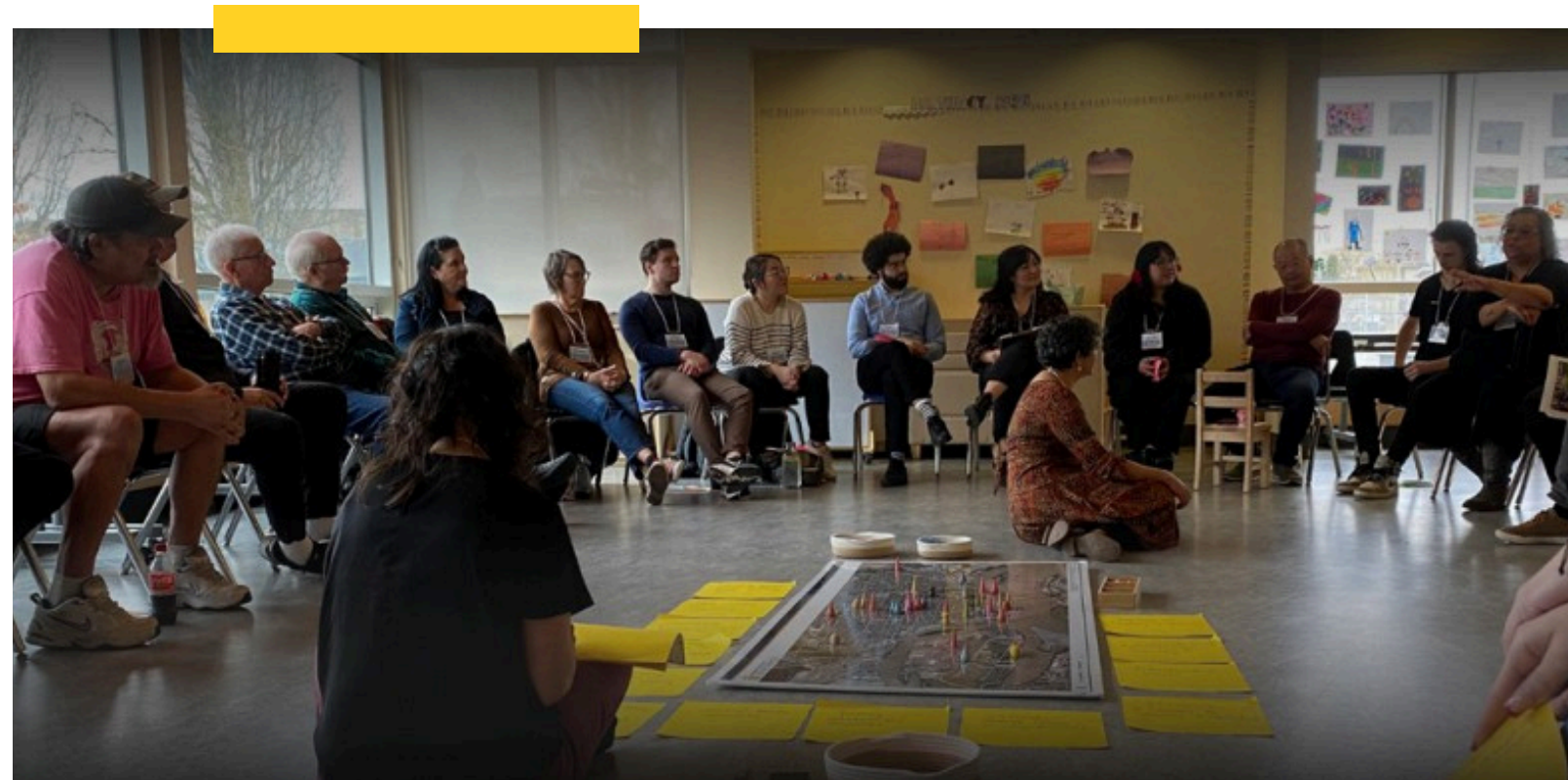


**Attachment #4**

*SFU Researcher Assembly Evaluation  
Report, April 2025*

# NEW WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ADVISORY ASSEMBLY EVALUATION



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SIMON FRASER  
UNIVERSITY

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We recognise and respect that New Westminster is on the unceded and unsurrendered land of the Halkomelem speaking peoples. We acknowledge that colonialism has made invisible their histories and connections to the land. As a City, we are learning and building relationships with the people whose lands we are on.

This report was prepared at Simon Fraser University, we respectfully acknowledge the xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), ǵíɕə́y (Katzie), kʷikwə́łəm (Kwikwetlem), Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo and Tsawwassen peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our three campuses reside.

WELCOME POLE IN THE ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE AT DOUGLAS  
COLLEGE, NEW WESTMINSTER, CANADA  
PHOTO CREDIT: JENNIFER KIRKEY



All photos in this report are from the City of New Westminster

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# INTRODUCTION

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In January 2024, the City of New Westminster launched a pilot Community Advisory Assembly (hereafter the Assembly), a deliberative mini-public designed to gather a representative sample of residents to discuss city policies and projects that affect them. The Assembly aimed to provide advice and recommendations to city staff and Council. This pilot project ran from January 2024 to January 2025 and was part of the City's efforts to transform its advisory committee structure as outlined in Council's strategic planning process. The Assembly was intended to meet more frequently than advisory committees and explore a broader range of topics, ensuring a more inclusive representation of New Westminster residents.

Globally, there has been a “deliberative wave” of citizens’ assemblies, aimed at complementing and strengthening representative democracy by providing citizens with opportunities to actively participate in decision-making. Several municipalities in Canada have experimented with deliberative assemblies for key decisions, such as Official Community Plans (Burnaby) or amalgamation (Victoria and Saanich). Some large cities outside Canada, like Paris and Madrid, have institutionalized this practice. Paris, in particular, adopted an extended version of the “Ostbelgien Model” of citizen participation. In this model, a permanent assembly of citizens drawn by lot plays a central role in other ad-hoc civic participation processes, such as citizen assemblies. The model also ensures follow-up on citizen recommendations by representative political institutions. New Westminster was the first Canadian city to pilot a similar institutionalized assembly.

Recognizing the importance of evaluation in Citizen Assemblies, as emphasized by international standards, I was invited by City staff to observe and evaluate this pilot. As a PhD student in political science with extensive experience in public engagement and deliberative processes, I undertook this task with great interest.

This report presents my observations from the sessions and findings from interviews with assembly members, City staff, and Councilors. It aims to provide insights into the lessons learned from this process and evaluate it against standards set by organizations such as the OECD. Each section will address an important principle or element of an assembly, provide an overview of how New Westminster’s model compared to OECD principles<sup>[1]</sup>, and summarize the views expressed by interviewees in relation to these principles. This evaluation complements the evaluation conducted by City staff through surveys.

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[1] [Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making](#).

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# METHODOLOGY

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I prepared this report by drawing from FIDE North America's multi-method evaluation framework[1], as well as from the OECD's best practices for deliberative processes for public decision making[2] Citizens' Assemblies. This includes a comprehensive set of questions designed to assess the effectiveness of citizen assemblies, and aims to systematically assess the impact of citizen assemblies. To account for the specificity of this process, additional questions comparing this process with other public engagement initiatives in New Westminster complemented FIDE North America's set of questions.

Sources of data consulted and used to prepare this report include:

- 1. Steering committee meetings:** I attended steering committee meetings to better understand the genesis of the assembly process, as well as the selection of the topics retained for this pilot model.
- 2. Researcher Observations:** I attended and observed two full assembly sessions, including one specifically on reflecting on the Community Advisory Assembly model and the final wrap-up. These notes provided an independent observer with impressions of the assembly.
- 3. In-depth Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 self-selected members of the assembly, 7 city-staff members, 2 Councillors, and 2 of the lead facilitators of the process. Interviews were conducted in February, March and April 2025. These interviews were conducted in compliance with SFU Research Ethics requirements. All participants provided their informed consent. The data shared in this report has been anonymized.
- 4. Meeting notes from *Reflecting on the Community Advisory Assembly Model* topic**
- 5. Pre and post surveys from members, staff, and steering committee members**

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[1] [Fide North-America Learning Series methodology](#).

[2] [Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making](#).

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# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

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## 1. ASSEMBLY PURPOSE, TERM, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Assembly was consistent with other models of assemblies, featuring a representative group of members, a predetermined term, and a set of remits. One innovative aspect of this model was the ability for members to propose topics for consideration. We will explore the remit further in the section on topics and policy impacts.

Interviewees were asked to compare the gains and losses of the Community Advisory Assembly with traditional city advisory committees. Assembly members highlighted the diversity of voices represented, noting the remarkable range of ethnic, cultural, and gender identities. Members emphasized the importance of neighborhood and inter-generational representation. However, one member pointed out the lack of representation from the business sector.

City staff appreciated the diversity of voices and lived experiences accessible through the assembly. One staff member remarked, “I liked the breadth of diversity in the room (...) the Assembly provided us with voices we are hoping to hear from.” Another noted, “Traditional committees center voices of the often-heard, the same fifty people who have strong opinions about the City and know how to utilize the tools. One of the gains of the Assembly is representation from seldom-heard voices. We need to hear more from people with living and lived expertise who would normally not speak up.”

Committees were described by one member as having the “same old people, doing the same old thing.” A Councilor added, “The Assembly was a rich, deep, and meaningful forum for community-building, whereas committees are more for information-sharing, not community-building.”



*“[The Assembly] spoke to understanding the city as a whole, better”, City Staff*



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However, members, staff, and Councilors also noted that committees could delve deeper into specific topics. There was a tension between the breadth achieved by the Assembly model and the depth provided by the committee model. Several interviewees expressed concern that the Assembly model could entirely replace committees. Staff and Councilors emphasized the need for complementarity between the two models. Two Councilors, staff, and one member remarked that people felt a strong sense of ownership in committees.

One assembly member, experienced with various city committees, mentioned the “stiffness” of traditional committees, which are chaired by a council member and follow Robert’s Rules of Order. While recognizing the usefulness of these rules, they noted that traditional committees often lacked consensus and involved a lot of back-and-forth. One participant highlighted that people were more comfortable sharing their opinions in the Assembly, which was not chaired by a council member. A staff member also mentioned that there was less self-censoring in the Assembly compared to a committee chaired by a council member.

A key difference between the two models is that committees share information in a top-down fashion, limiting community input. In contrast, the Assembly allowed for community ideas and peer learning in a more equalized forum. This concept will be further explored in the section on learning.

An unexpected outcome of the assembly's diversity was that half of the interviewed participants expressed a newfound understanding of the Queensborough neighborhood. One participant mentioned that before the assembly, they thought Queensborough was in a different city. Following the experience, participants shared a stronger understanding of Queensborough’s specific challenges.

The term of the assembly was a topic of much discussion. Three members advocated for at least a two-year term, while others suggested that a few self-selected members might continue from one term to the next to provide continuity. Several members and staff recommended sticking to one term to allow a new group of community members to participate, perhaps based on their interest in the topics. One facilitator noted that human dynamics often come into play with a second term, where cliques of previous members may form, potentially excluding newer members. There is also a natural decline in interest over time.

One staff member, along with assembly members, recommended eliminating the summer break. The frequency of meetings remains an open question. One member and one staff also discussed the possibility of holding some meetings virtually.



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## 2. LEARNING


The assembly model provided participants with adequate time to understand the process, relevant context, and subject matter expertise needed to make informed recommendations. Information shared with participants was checked for accessibility, avoiding jargon and ensuring a balanced perspective on the topics. However, the model did not allow members to seek expertise or information outside of what the city provided, nor to invite external experts. While critical thinking skills were enhanced through facilitation, additional skill-building opportunities could be considered.

Interviewees unanimously agreed that they had gained a deeper understanding of how the City functions. One member remarked, “The fact that I had an opportunity to talk to City staff was huge and fun for me.” They noted that some questions couldn’t be answered through a simple online search, and being able to address them with staff offered a valuable learning experience. Staff also found it beneficial to participate in the process, appreciating the positive feedback from the community.

Staff and members who had previous experience with community advisory committees noted significant structural differences. Members highlighted that information shared in committees can vary in complexity and accessibility, with exchanges often being unilateral and offering limited time for questions. A staff member expressed, “With the assembly, it was great to see conversation, a more reciprocal approach to information.” A facilitator with committee experience elaborated, “There are often long presentations and a small amount of time for questions, with no real time for deliberation. The information is not customized to the audience. Here, it was about choosing topics that work and collaborating with staff to ensure the information was appropriate. We needed to do some technical translation. A member emphasized that they felt staff was “really open about information” in the Assembly.

Staff noted an added benefit of the Assembly: the ability to identify undocumented issues. Recommendations by the Assembly should be documented to create responsiveness from the City. The collaboration between facilitators and staff to create briefs for members worked well, allowing complex information to be distilled into essential points. These briefs could be used more broadly in the city’s other public engagements.

The amount and quality of information required for effective deliberation is high, necessitating staff to prepare in advance. One staff member suggested covering some topics over several sessions to allow members to process the information adequately and ask questions. They also proposed sharing some information asynchronously.



*“[The Assembly] made a huge difference, it made the conversations real”, City Staff*

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### 3. DELIBERATION AND FACILITATION

The assembly utilized skilled facilitators who incorporated a mix of activities, balancing large and small group discussions, with a slight emphasis on large group interactions. The assembly followed the recommended arc of learning, deliberation, and drafting recommendations. Facilitators dedicated time to crafting group agreements with members to ensure everyone had adequate opportunities to listen and speak. Adequate time was allotted to deliberation.

Members discussed the challenges of deliberating and reaching consensus. They appreciated the facilitators' efforts to address disagreements by asking what was needed for everyone to come along. However, one participant felt that the facilitation style was occasionally "patronizing or condescending."

Several members expressed a desire for more time in small groups to delve deeper into topics. Small group work could have also benefited members who were shy or neurodivergent and felt overwhelmed in larger group discussions.

The importance of external facilitation was a common theme among interviewees. While one member felt disappointed by the facilitation, a majority of members emphasized the necessity of external facilitation, and recommended that the City continue hiring external facilitators if the process is renewed.

The value of external facilitators was highlighted in two main areas:

- **Specific skills in managing difficult conversations and maintaining a comfortable sharing environment:** Members and staff recalled the first meeting where conflict resolution was required. Facilitators noted that this process demanded skills beyond agenda management, including a nuanced understanding of language, equity, inclusion, and conflict mediation.
- **A step-removed from the City:** Members appreciated having facilitators without pre-formed opinions on the topics, which bolstered their trust in the process. This "neutrality" was deeply valued. One member mentioned that it allowed City staff to focus on being content experts, sharing information and responding to questions without the burden of facilitation. Another member pointed out that the quality of facilitation by city staff during small group activities was not as high as that provided by external facilitators.

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## 4. INCLUSION AND EQUITY

The assembly achieved high standards of representation, inclusion, and equity for this type of process. Thoughtfully designed accessibility measures enabled participation from often under-heard or marginalized individuals. The open call process allowed any resident of New Westminster to apply, and the detailed selection process ensured a high degree of demographic representativeness.

Members appreciated the accessibility and equity measures, which included meals, opt-in financial support for participation, childcare or elder care support, direct reimbursement of expenses incurred to participate, tools for emotional and sensory support during sessions, and a quiet space during meetings. One councilor noted that a key lesson from the Assembly was the integration of practices to lower nervous system responses, enabling better conversations. These practices could be extended to other forms of public engagement, although they required significant staff time.

Members shared that one aspect of the Assembly that supported their inclusion and equity was the opportunity to present their recommendations to the Council on two occasions. Some members expressed that they never imagined themselves speaking at City Council. One staff member recalled that a member who presented recommendations at council felt supported by their colleagues and was able to show up as their full self.

Despite the facilitation team's efforts to include all members, some interviewees noted that certain members did not complete the term or became more withdrawn after difficult interactions with the group. Balancing louder and quieter voices was challenging, even with skilled facilitators. One facilitator mentioned that designing the group agreements was one of the most complex and comprehensive tasks they had undertaken, but these bespoke agreements were essential for the group's inclusivity.

A member suggested that the inclusion of neurodivergent members might benefit from more small-group activities or non-verbal activities.

The opportunity to share a meal was considered important, even though two members mentioned they would be fine with less elaborate meals if cost-saving was necessary. Several members appreciated the City's effort to offer a variety of foods from different cultures present in New Westminster. Sharing meals informally promoted relationship building and social cohesion among the group.



*"Everyone was empowered, whether personally, or from a group perspective",  
Assembly member*

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## 5. CHANGING PERSPECTIVES AND DEPOLARIZATION

Most interviewees shared that the design of the process and the facilitation enabled them to expand their perspectives. While many groups struggle to reach consensus, this Assembly demonstrated that it was possible. In an increasingly polarized world, the opportunity for residents to hear different perspectives is invaluable.” The Assembly offered members the chance to spend time with people they wouldn’t normally meet or engage with, fostering a skill and willingness to hear from others.

One Councilor noted, “On issues such as climate action, density, housing, transit, or active transportation, I see seniors who feel very differently than youth. The Assembly offered seniors an opportunity to hear from young people, which was a really helpful experience. It is sometimes hard for seniors to see the city evolve at such a rapid pace.”

Depolarization is of particular interest to those invested in strengthening democratic participation. In this model, polarizing conversations emerged from the very first meeting, with topics such as homelessness and active drug use eliciting diverse viewpoints. Members, staff, and facilitators agreed that facilitating this assembly was labor-intensive, and required a variety of skills.

Creating community agreements required significant time and attention, perhaps more than in other processes. However, the results showed that most members felt supported in their participation. Various process exercises allowed them to explore perspectives, experiences, and the impacts of decisions on different residents and neighborhoods.

Deliberative mini-publics like this Assembly can sometimes perpetuate the marginalization of certain groups. This Assembly effectively integrated a variety of participants, including trans and neurodivergent individuals. Facilitators skilled in equity, inclusion, and conflict mediation enabled participants to explore various viewpoints and reach consensus on most recommendations. Several interviewees highlighted these specific skills as essential for future iterations of this process.

An unexpected benefit of the Assembly was noted by one councilor: it has the potential to address rampant misinformation in the city. Another: “being able to listen to individual voices on an issue is powerful”.



*“This process was about ‘community practicing being community’, it felt like depolarization was possible”, Facilitator*

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## 6. TRUST AND LEGITIMACY

The transparency of the process adhered to standards for citizens' assemblies. All meetings were open to the public, and meeting minutes and agendas were shared publicly. Announcements were made regularly through the City website. However, due to a lack of broader community awareness, few members of the public attended the meetings. The process was not fully independent, but was co-designed between external facilitators and City staff, with facilitators retaining significant design input. This process did not follow a random stratified selection of participants, but was based on an open call for participation, with a selection made to ensure representative diversity. Criteria for diversity and results are available on the City's website.

Most members interviewed reported that their trust in the city either improved or remained the same. Some members mentioned that the hostility of two councilors towards the process felt hurtful and invalidating. However, several members felt strongly that the process could enhance city accountability to the community.

Members highlighted that the process provided them with a deeper understanding of how the City operates, including the constraints faced by staff and council. This deeper understanding fostered greater respect for the work of the municipal government as a whole. Some younger members expressed that the process strengthened their commitment to democratic participation. Two members are now involved in other forms of participation, one through the Mayor's Climate Action Team and another through the British Columbia Youth Parliament.

Several members emphasized that their trust in the City is contingent on the visible integration of the Assembly's recommendations in future policies. Members expressed skepticism about the full impact of their recommendations and stated they would be monitoring new policies related to the topics they addressed to see the effects of their work. Two members acknowledged that not all topics were directly connected to specific policy decisions and understood if not all recommendations were implemented.

The representativeness of the group enhanced the legitimacy of the process. Several members noted the importance of having representation from all neighborhoods, as well as from renters and youth, voices often missing from city committees. The intergenerational aspect was praised by most, although one member wished for more senior representation.



*"If this type of process is instilled at its fullest intent, I would feel comfortable trusting City Hall.", Assembly member*

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## 7. TOPICS AND POLICY IMPACTS

Crafting the remit of assemblies is often challenging. In this case, the effort to provide a clear, plain language remit and a strong platform for discussing trade-offs was successful, but the connection between the topics and decision-making processes was not always clear. Members had an explicit mandate to advise the City on issues requiring trade-offs or compromises, but the City had not committed to how the recommendations would be used or responded to. It should be noted that two councilors opposed this process.

Participants were able to reach consensus on their recommendations, which were presented in language they developed and approved. Members had the opportunity to publicly present their recommendations at two City Council meetings, which were open to the public. However, none of the remits allowed for binding recommendations.

The Assembly explored the following topics:

- Community Belonging and Connecting (Council's strategic priority)
- Road reallocation projects related to the City's Active Transportation Network Plan
- Climate change and intersectionality (topic selected by the members)
- Cultural observances in New Westminster
- Future of the Community Advisory Assembly Model

Generally, the topics that worked best were those with a clear question and potential for impact. Topics with Council direction seemed to carry more weight. From the members' perspective, the first topic was ideal to start with, as it allowed the group to build cohesion and directly applied to their lived experiences as residents. A staff member remarked that it was particularly interesting for city staff due to its far-reaching implications, eliciting discussions around land-use planning, space utilization, grants programs, city facilities, and events. The range of recommendations was broad, validating many initiatives the city was already working on, such as renters' protection.

The road reallocation topic was not as well-received by members, who found it "overly technical." Some members felt the question about this topic was unclear, as was the impact of their potential recommendations.

The topic of cultural observances provided a useful framework, as noted by one Councilor. They suggested that such topics, along with contentious ones like input on a new City logo, should be brought to a model like the Assembly.

Both the climate and intersectionality topic and the future of the Community Advisory Assembly model were selected by members. One facilitator noted that while the climate and intersectionality topic "might not have been the most strategic," it captured the zeitgeist and articulated it differently. They emphasized the need for space for the city to express what is important to them.



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All members interviewed felt strongly that communicating some sense of the topics during the recruitment process would be beneficial. There was also a call to include more topics from the members themselves, but to align them with potential City work, avoiding the pitfalls of a “long laundry list,” as one Councilor advised against. Members wanted their recommendations to have an impact. Staff mentioned the need to outline some topics at the time of application and ensure clarity on how community-suggested topics could be integrated. Some members viewed the Assembly as a process to share topics of concern to their communities.

Most interviewees recognized that it was still early to evaluate the impact of the Assembly’s recommendations on specific City policies or programs. This report is being written two months after the completion of the Assembly’s term, with the first interviews recorded shortly after.

Two Councilors and two staff suggested coupling the Assembly with a participatory budget to give members and the community a stronger sense of ownership over the process.

## 8. SOCIAL COHESION AND BELONGING

- *“I have lived here since I was eight, I have roots in New Westminster, now I feel that tenfold!”*
- *“I know so many people in my town, NW could be such a connected place, this is them already doing that in action.”*
- *“I felt so lucky that I was a part of this. It was great to know that there were other civic-minded people who cared about NW. and proud to be part of NW. it was a kinship. Committed to the betterment of NW. There is a love of community. Want to thank City Hall for this opportunity to be part of a lovely democratic process. “*
- *I feel like so connected from people from all over the different hoods! It’s recognizing the hoods. We share the same concerns and challenges. It really broadened the appreciation of the different neighbourhoods*





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As the quotes above highlight, the members overwhelmingly shared a stronger sense of belonging and social cohesion. Members mentioned having people they now recognize on the streets and share coffee with, which they would never have met otherwise. They also shared that they now felt connections to other neighbourhoods and their specific challenges or issues. A broader appreciation and understanding of the makeup of the City was reported by most members interviewed.

This also translated to a commitment to continue to interact with the City in different capacities. Most have now signed up to the Be Heard website.

A staff member highlighted “We tried something unique: rich meaningful conversations. Some of [the members] have made lasting relations. We don’t get a lot of those heartwarming stories. It was heartwarming to see the empathy, it was one of the by-products that we should be processing.”

Some of the staff interviewed also mentioned how being part of this process reinforced their personal sense of belonging and connection to the City. It was a process that was not fueling negative sentiments that staff often have to field in their daily work.

## 9. BROADER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Efforts were made to increase the visibility of the process to the broader community throughout the assembly’s term. Public announcements were made at the outset, and results were communicated regularly. However, there is little indication that the broader community awareness of the recommendations was achieved.

A councilor mentioned that communicating this process to the public was challenging, particularly given the anger some felt at the loss of other committees. For some seniors who had been part of other committees and applied, it created the impression of an “elite club.” Generally, the wider New Westminster community was perceived by interviewees as mostly unaware of the process, while a small number of community members and two councilors were described by an interviewee as “vehemently opposed”, raising questions about how to effectively communicate this process, something that the councilors interviewed were keenly interested in.

Broader awareness can be understood from two aspects:

- **Awareness of the process and ways to apply to become a member**
- **Awareness of the work and recommendations of the assembly**

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Several members mentioned that the Be Heard website is not well-known by the broader community of residents, nor is it easy to navigate and use (the requirement for residents to register makes it less accessible). Members of the assembly, facilitators and staff suggested several options to broaden awareness, which can be grouped into the following categories:

#### **Mediums for sharing information:**

- Pamphlets or flyers in residents' mail or at their doors
- Postcards (similar to those used by city staff for Official Community Plan consultations)
- Using utility bills to share links or basic information
- Including information about the assembly in the Parks and Recreation guide
- Utilizing social media (though this medium did not garner consensus, as some felt many residents might be moving away from social media or finding it unreliable)
- Reviving the New West Record or another form of community media

#### **Integration with community through events:**

- Presence at large in-person events organized by the city
- Holding some of the later meetings of the Assembly in public spaces, allowing for public interaction with the assembly. Interviewees emphasized that this should only be done after members had time to build relationships and experience working together. One interviewee suggested using a public session to test and validate recommendations with a broader community group.
- Organizing a session specifically with high school students, supported by social studies teachers, to enable younger residents to build their capacity for civic engagement.

One councilor was curious about how assembly members connected with their communities about their work. This raises the question of creating capacity-building opportunities for assembly members to become spokespersons for the process. This model has been used in some assemblies, mostly at the national level. Another councilor noted that assembly members could become community ambassadors, creating a link between their neighborhoods and the city by hosting their own community conversations.



*"The answer to all of this is community",  
City Councilor*

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## 10. INTERFACE WITH CITY STAFF AND COUNCIL

This Assembly did not demonstrate a strong influence on public decisions yet. It may still be too early to evaluate this. The City did share the recommendations publicly and in a timely manner. It may also be too early to evaluate how the City monitors and reports back on the implementation of the recommendations through public progress reports. The purpose of the Assembly would also need to be clarified, in terms of how it integrates with City decision making.

A Councilor suggested that they “would have liked to see [the Assembly members] come to council more or to have Council hold a few sessions where they sit in and listen to the discussions.” An interviewee mentioned that having Councilors more present would have provided an opportunity for those opposed to this model to see it in action. A facilitator proposed tying the Assembly topics to areas of interest for the Council, areas where they want to hear from the community. A workshop with Council members could explore strategic interests and align the Assembly with decision-making processes.

One Councilor expressed interest in exploring politically contentious topics that could benefit from careful deliberation with community members. An example is the Irish Citizen Assembly, which examined abortion in Ireland. This allowed elected officials to follow the Assembly's recommendations and create a referendum based on those recommendations.

A facilitator emphasized the importance of bridging with staff, to provide accessible and useful information to members for their deliberations and to share staff opinions that are not often voiced. This integration would help create clear questions for Assembly members, leading to useful input for staff to incorporate. A staff member suggested that buy-in from across departments would significantly enhance the Assembly's success.

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# CONCLUSIONS

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Overall, this pilot satisfied the majority of the principles laid out by the OECD for good practice in Citizen Assemblies. In terms of equity and inclusion, this model was remarkably successful. However, it could improve in areas such as the clarity of the remit, the link to decision-making, and connections to the broader community. Several evaluations were conducted, both qualitative and quantitative, adhering to international standards for this type of process.

The overwhelming consensus from all interviewees is that this model is worth continuing, provided it does not displace or replace other methods of public engagement, including community advisory committees and other forms of public involvement. This finding aligns with the unanimous recommendation by Assembly members to Council that the Community Advisory Assembly model should continue beyond this pilot year. The Advisory Assembly is a complementary tool in the engagement spectrum. Council and staff should consider how this model of engagement is communicated and shared with the wider community of residents. The choice of topics should be carefully considered, aligning the work of the assembly with the priorities of both council and staff. Questions that intrigue council, are politically challenging, or require insights into residents' lived experiences would provide an ideal starting point.

A stronger integration with the broader community should be pursued, including a comprehensive communications strategy for both the recruitment phase and the Assembly's term. Integration with other modes of public engagement should also be considered. Some topics addressed by the assembly could benefit from information gathered through other forms of public engagement, while the Assembly itself could validate and test its recommendations with a broader community section.

The role of Council should be further discussed. This could involve Council having more input on the topics addressed by the Assembly and offering more opportunities to interact with the Assembly, either as active listeners or during special council meetings to hear and respond to recommendations.

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While I do not advocate for binding recommendations, I recognize that interviewees would like to see stronger integration of their recommendations into decision-making or greater responsiveness to their suggestions. The risk associated with assemblies is that if they do not yield tangible impacts, the quality of trust between the public and the municipality could suffer.

Most research on deliberative mini-publics such as assemblies focuses on tangible impacts on policy, programs, or services. However, evidence from the interviews also suggests that intangible effects on belonging, trust, depolarization, and civic literacy should be considered.

New Westminster conducted a bold experiment in democratic innovation. Few cities of its size have undertaken such an ambitious project. I see potential in harnessing the civic energy of the members of this pilot in the future and in pursuing this model with some adjustments.

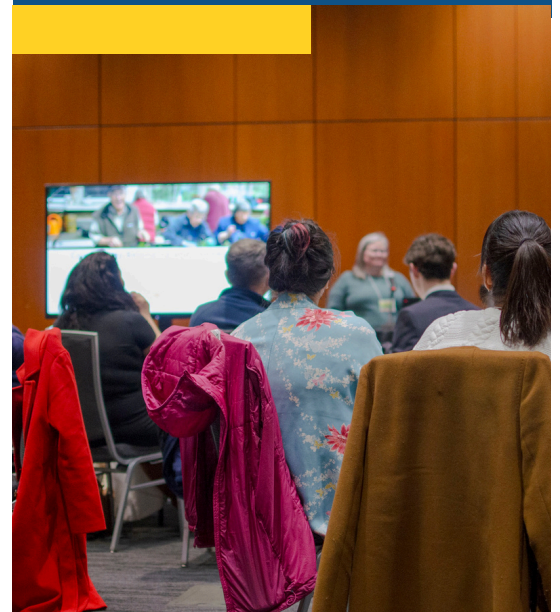
*“Surpassed my expectations!”*

*“It gave a much clearer view of what citizens actually care about”*

*“Cannot recommend enough to continue this process. Totally magical experience”*

*“Fantastic experience, I get to hear from various voices, an amazing group of people”*

Members of the Assembly



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# NEW WESTMINSTER COMMUNITY ADVISORY ASSEMBLY EVALUATION

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