Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE

September 8, 2015: 6:30 p.m.
Meeting Room #1 (East Room), City Hall (511 Royal Avenue)

MINUTES

VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Jonathan X. Coté	- Chair
Councillor Patrick Johnstone	- Member
Jennifer Arbo	- Community Member
Chinu Das	- Community Member
Nadine Nakagawa	- Community Member
Gabriella Scali	- Community Member
Nancy Shaw	- Community Member

VOTING MEMBERS REGRETS:

Councillor Mary Trentadue	- Member
Daniel Fontaine	- Community Member

STAFF:

Lisa Spitale	- Chief Administrative Officer
Blair Fryer	- Manager of Communications & Economic Development
John Stark	- Senior Social Planner
Lynn Roxburgh	- Planner
Susan Buss	- Deputy Chief Librarian
Ashleigh Young	- Communications Coordinator
Philip Lo	- Council and Committee Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

1.0 ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

The following items were added to the agenda:

4.2 City Council Committees – Lisa Spitale, CAO.

MOVED and SECONDED
THAT the agenda be approved as amended.

CARRIED.

All members of the Task Force present voted in favour of the motion.

2.0 ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

2.1 Adoption of the May 12, 2015 Minutes

MOVED and SECONDED
THAT the minutes of the May 12, 2015 Public Engagement Task Force meeting be adopted.

CARRIED.

All members of the Task Force present voted in favour of the motion.

3.0 PRESENTATIONS

3.1 Overview of CNW engagement/outreach/communications inventory

Lynn Roxburgh, Planner, provided an On-Table PowerPoint presentation titled "Public Engagement: what we do now." The presentation contained results of an internal survey sent to identify communication and engagement tools currently used by the City, to highlight challenges faced by staff, and to anticipate barriers to public participation. Ms. Roxburgh also emphasized the importance of shaping policy around commonly identified barriers.

Procedural note: Item 3.3 was considered immediately after Item 3.1

3.3 Draft public engagement framework

John Stark, Senior Social Planner, provided an overview of the draft public engagement framework, and summarized the internal survey results within the framework in an On-Table handout.

Mr. Stark advised that, according to the survey results, engagement tools currently used by the City were not focused within any particular step or tool within the framework; however, the results provide an indication that the majority of engagement efforts are currently being placed in the Informing and Consulting steps.

Mr. Stark suggested that there are two approaches that could increase public engagement: increase the intensity of tools that are currently being used (e.g. CityPage, the City's public website, additional staff contacts, etc.), or shift engagement efforts to the Consulting and Co-Creating steps.

Mr. Stark also suggested that staff may evaluate the appropriateness of each step of the framework for specific projects, noting that, for example, 'ad-hoc' committees within the Co-Creating step often require additional staff time.

Discussion ensued, and the following points were raised:

- An external survey may yield different results than the internal survey, as barriers such as language, literacy, and access to technology may affect what the public sees as effective engagement;
- The draft framework does not suggest strategies to overcome identified barriers;
- Building relationships and trust may help overcome the limitations of each engagement tool;
- Gathering feedback on a specific tool and increasing its intensity may provide more quantifiable data to evaluate its effectiveness;
- Instead of focusing on tools that are typically used, staff may be informed about the potential outcomes of a variety of engagement tools, and be allowed to select the most appropriate tools for specific projects;
- Capacity within the organization may be a barrier, as a small number of staff currently perform this function, and are continually relied on by other staff who do not do this as often;
- In-house expertise, such as a new staff mentor position, along with a staff engagement "tool kit", may help maximize the knowledge within the City;
- The staff mentor would work with all City departments using the common engagement framework, resulting in less departmental "silos"; and,
- Part of the tool kit may be a flow chart which identifies the most effective tools according to what staff is trying to accomplish.

Discussion shifted towards the public's awareness of the items listed in the "What Do We Do Now?" and "Why Do We Do It?" slides from Ms. Roxburgh's earlier presentation, and the following points were raised:

- Some members expressed surprise at the number of tools currently being used;
- Some members felt the current engagement process was "status quo" or a formality, instead of a genuine intent to raise awareness;
- Engaging the public earlier and throughout the stages of a process may help mitigate the perception of public consultation as a formality;
- Inviting more public engagement in the budget process may be helpful, as most major projects are derived from the budget process;
- The wording, diversity of questions, and types of choices that people are allowed to make in a consultation process encourages engagement;
- Limiting people's choices to binary "yes/no" responses often discourages participation;
- Staff may follow-up on surveys and inform participants of results via staff reports; and,
- Over-engagement, such as over-utilization of voting as a decision-making tool, may not be effective.

Members of the Task Force were asked what they thought were missing from the "Anticipated Barriers to Participation" slide from Ms. Roxburgh, and the following points were raised:

- "Language" barriers include the use of bureaucratic and legislative language, which often cause people to "tune out";
- Staff noted that statutory notices may be redesigned to be more visually appealing with more interesting language despite legislative constraints; that while there is not currently a process to monitor social media for current discussion topics, many staff are also members of the community who are aware of the issues;
- Images and videos are often more effective communication tools;
- There was a suggestion to include a video library and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to respond to queries, as part of a larger "knowledge repository" which can be accessed on the City's public website;
- Staff noted Residents' lack of understanding on issues may lead to complaints, therefore some projects may require more focus on the Informing step;
- Better information sharing between the City and stakeholders is required; for example, better information flow is required between the City and businesses that may be affected by civil work;
- The August 29th wind storm was cited as an example where residents were not able to access adequate information; and,
- Residents who are happy and satisfied with the City's direction often do not engage.

Discussion ensued regarding methods to engage satisfied residents, and the following points were raised:

- The City has faced criticism that it is more focused on a vocal sector of the population, which is often unrepresentative of the rest of the population;
- Engaging solely with unsatisfied residents constantly puts the City and staff in "crisis management" mode, instead of conducting true public engagement; and,
- Staff are interested in engaging satisfied residents, to discover why they are satisfied, and how to keep them satisfied.

3.2 Public engagement activity close-up

John Stark, Senior Social Planner, provided a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the results of ten Development Services projects which were profiled for their levels of public engagement.

Discussion ensued regarding ways to draw people into the engagement process in a representative way, and the following points were raised:

- Members noted that staff are diligent in having a physical presence in the community, as Planning Department staff held traveling forums and were at many events and festivals in the City;
- The City is often successful in identifying "champions" and positive influencers for City initiatives; and,

- Staff could be more innovative and make the engagement process fun and enjoyable. For example, it was noted thatCentury House staff used Tim Horton's gift certificates as incentives for participation, and over 200 responses were received.

Discussion continued regarding the Public Hearing process, and the following points were raised:

- The current Public Hearing format appears to be divisive and unsatisfying;
- Willingness to compromise is essential to public participation, so while Public Hearings are often seen as divisive, it is through conflict and dialogue that compromises are reached;
- Staff should engage applicants and stakeholders early on and incorporate their input into the process; and,
- Some Public Hearings will always be controversial, and the *Local Government Act* dictates that Council receive public input, deliberate and decide without a mandate for collaborative decision making. Some Public Hearings will have a clear "Yes/No" outcome where one side will be unsuccessful.

Susan Buss, Deputy Chief Librarian, provided an overview of Library operations and a presentation summarizing the Library's public engagement activities, noting the following information:

- The Library Champions program provides prize incentives for individual newcomer "champions" to raise awareness of Library resources within their own community;
- Staff have had difficulties synthesizing the idea of the Library Champions program down to accessible language for newcomers; and,
- Many cultures have different ideas of what a public library system is and entails, and what resources are available there.

Ms. Buss advised that an Open House has been scheduled for October 5, 2015 to recruit additional Library Champions.

Ms. Buss provided information regarding the Teen Advisory Group (TAG), where teens advise on library services and make vetted purchases for the library, and the customer survey, which is conducted every two years. Ms. Buss noted that the 2014 customer survey was promoted aggressively within the community, with prominent advertising and granola bars at SkyTrain stations as an incentive.

Ms. Buss reported that new residents are often unsure of City Hall's purpose, and that they may have misconceptions with respect to City functions, how to communicate to staff, and how to access services.

Discussion ensued, and the Task Force noted the following comments:

- The Library may benefit from having a blog or increased social media activity;

- Food and prize incentives could be effective tools to promote public engagement;
- The Library is generally perceived as a positive and comfortable environment, in part due to the following:
  - The Library is a welcoming, non-commercial and inclusive place where people felt comfortable asking questions;
  - All frontline staff receive customer service training;
  - Responsiveness to feedback, with Sunday hours as an example of changes implemented in response to feedback; and,
- Staff may consider putting additional City services in the Library and other locations of positive engagement.

4.0 NEW BUSINESS

4.1 Public engagement external survey development

Blair Fryer, Manager of Communications & Economic Development, led a brainstorming session to create the framework for a public engagement external survey. The following items were discussed:

1. **Introduction/Preamble to the Survey:**
   - Introduce the Public Engagement Task Force, its composition and its mandate;
   - Explain the purpose of the survey, and how public input will help achieve this goal.

2. **Purpose -** *What do we want to accomplish?*
   - Validate internal survey results;
   - Discover why people may not be engaging;
   - What would be helpful for staff to know?;
   - What topics should be considered under "engagement"?

3. **What barriers do we need to be aware of?**
   - Language – spoken, written, as well as bureaucratic;
   - Cultural barriers, including the potential fear of authority;
   - Socio-economic;
   - Age (at both ends of the spectrum) and access issues;
   - Level of civic knowledge – knowledge of governance and what the City does and does not do.

4. **Who are we asking?**
   - Use results of representativeness analysis to target responses;
   - Desired number of responses is between 300-400 responses.

Who will we have challenges reaching?

- Satisfied residents. It was suggested that users of Parks, Culture and Recreation facilities and family programs could be targeted for feedback;

- People who may not perceive their opinions as valued, such as renters and young adults;
- People who do not have the time to participate.

5. **How are we asking? What tools are we using for survey dissemination?**
   - Equip staff with survey-loaded iPads at civic facilities;
   - Request the assistance of Residence Associations, faith-based groups, service agencies, and business groups
   - Set up a survey kiosk at the Library, or dedicate a library catalogue computer to conduct survey (with staff assistance);
   - Source of income, employment status, education level, and postal code could be used to determine respondents' socio-economic status.

6. **What questions should we ask?**
   - Ask questions similar to those from the internal survey so comparisons can be made;
   - How do you define "engagement"? Do you feel that it is important?;
   - Current level of awareness and engagement – low, medium, high;
   - What limits your engagement? What will motivate you to engage?;
   - What ways do you want to engage, and where?;
   - How do you learn about the City?;
   - Who currently does engagement well? (Provide choices or allow blank option);
   - What are the deterrents or sources of frustration which limit engagement?;
   - Was the last engagement a positive experience?

7. **Constraints**

It was suggested that different question 'paths' could be created for responses to current "level of engagement", where a response of "low" would result in fewer questions, and "medium" and "high" would steer the respondent towards more in-depth questions.

4.2 City Council Committees

Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer, advised the members of Council's recommendation to review the current number of advisory committees and their effectiveness, and to work with the task force on public engagement *vis-à-vis* the advisory committees.

Ms. Spitale reported that there are currently 38 Council advisory committees and task forces in total, which may cost approximately $100,000 per year to run. Ms. Spitale suggested that an effective committee should be doing work which is directly aligned to Council priorities or department work plans.

Ms. Spitale suggested developing a survey regarding how advisory committees can be effective engagement tools. The result of the survey may be used to development a conceptual framework for the review.

Discussion ensued, and the Task Force noted the following comments:

- Advisory committees should not be merely an "information sharing" tool;
- Advisory committees may be most effective as part of the Co-Creating step;
- Opportunity cost *vis-à-vis* the quality of advice may be factored into the real cost for running the committees; and,
- A committee or task force may have a specific end goal, and may dissolve after the goal has been reached.

5.0 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No items.

6.0 REPORTS AND INFORMATION

No items.

7.0 CORRESPONDENCE

No items.

8.0 NEXT MEETING

October 13, 2015 at 6:30 p.m. in Meeting Room #1 (East Room)

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION, the meeting adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Certified Correct,

Mayor Jonathan X. Coté
Chair

Philip Lo
Council and Committee Clerk