

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE

June 28, 2016: 6:30 p.m.
Committee Room #2 City Hall (511 Royal Avenue)

MINUTES

VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Jonathan X. Coté	- Chair
Councillor Patrick Johnstone	- Member
Councillor Mary Trentadue	- Member (arrived at 6:48 p.m.)
Chinu Das	- Community Member
Daniel Fontaine	- Community Member
Nancy Shaw	- Community Member
Rnold Smith	- Chamber of Commerce Representative (non-voting member)

VOTING MEMBERS REGRETS:

Jennifer Arbo	- Community Member
Nadine Nakagawa	- Community Member
Gabriella Scali	- Community Member

GUESTS:

Robin Prest	- SFU Centre for Dialogue
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STAFF:

Blair Fryer	- Manager of Communications & Economic Development
John Stark	- Senior Social Planner
Lynn Roxburgh	- Planner
Ashleigh Young	- Communications Coordinator
Debbie Johnstone	- Committee Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

1.0 ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

There were no items.

2.0 ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

2.1 Adoption of the April 12, 2016 Minutes

MOVED and SECONDED

THAT the minutes of the April 12, 2016 Public Engagement Task Force meeting be adopted.

CARRIED.

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

3.0 PRESENTATIONS

Procedural note: This item was discussed following item 4.1

3.1 Presentation and feedback on draft Public Engagement Strategy

Robin Prest, SFU Centre for Dialogue, provided a PowerPoint presentation and summarized the draft Public Engagement Strategy. Following the presentation Mr. Prest requested feedback from the Task Force. The following comments were provided:

- The strategy is an adequate representation of the year long journey that the Task Force has experienced;
- Dividing the document into two parts (one focusing on the principles of the strategy and the other focusing on its implementation) could be considered;
- Sections one and two of the strategy would be important and could be further developed and highlighted; whereas, sections three and four could act as an appendix or resource document following the strategy;
- Key ideas in sections three and four could be better utilized as their own recommendations or actions;
- Providing more structured recommendations and actions could better illustrate the intent of the Task Force;
- Recommendations could be prioritized to clearly indicate a timeline for the implementation of the project;
- Many of the recommendations and actions provided have a completion date of March, 2017. Concerns were expressed regarding whether this would be a realistic goal;
- Community impact levels could be added to each recommendation;
- Implementing the strategy in a phased approach, or providing a simplified document, could create a more positive reaction;

- Council could place a focus on the recommendation section of the strategy; therefore, all action items throughout the document should be clearly illustrated in this category;
- A detailed list of public engagement tools could be provided to staff along with the strategy document;
- Providing a clear explanation to staff regarding why public engagement would be beneficial to their role in the City could lead to a better understanding and willingness to adapt their work plan accordingly; and,
- Evaluating the capacity for resource management when implementing the strategy was suggested in order to provide a more realistic timeline for Council and the community.

Mr. Prest advised the Task Force that their comments would be reflected in the next version of the draft strategy.

4.0 NEW BUSINESS

4.1 Key task force recommendations for implementation plan

Robin Prest, SFU Centre for Dialogue, provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the previous recommendations the Task Force had suggested for inclusion in the Engagement Strategy.

The Task Force requested additional feedback and further discussion with regard to the following recommendation/ action items:

Recommendation 1: Bring engagement to the people to increase accessibility and diversity of input.

Action: a) Pilot a “pop up city hall” kiosk, tent or truck that brings frequently required city services and information to major community events:

- It was suggested that the explanation for this item may not be a clear reflection of what had been intended through previous Task Force meetings. Along with a “pop up city hall” an interest had been expressed in utilizing auxiliary workers to act as public engagement advocates in the community;
- A pool of auxiliary staff could be trained to act as a public engagement team, and could target areas where feedback is required; and,
- A ‘pop up city hall’ may be a good opportunity to distribute information regarding general issues; however, utilizing public engagement

ambassadors to reach out to the City regarding specific issues could be beneficial.

Mr. Prest suggested that in order to make this initiative more clear, the idea of utilizing public engagement ambassadors be added as an additional action item to the engagement strategy.

Recommendation 3: Pursue opportunities to engage residents and stakeholders in ways that maximize collaboration, relationship building and quality of recommendations.

Action a) Pilot deliberative dialogue as a model for collaborative decision-making:

The Task Force requested information regarding how this action item differed from the steps currently taken by the City. Mr. Prest clarified the action with the following information:

- A reflective group of the population (approximately 100 people) would be provided detailed information regarding a specific City project;
- In order to recruit people for the group, the City could accept applications, and/or Residents' Associations could provide representatives to attend the session;
- Information would be provided and discussed with the selected group throughout the course of a day ;
- Following this, the group would develop recommendations for the project that would be presented to Council; and,
- It was noted that during public engagement workshops with the community, this action item received the largest amount of support.

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

- Concerns were raised regarding the resource intensive nature of this action item. It was further noted that full day sessions would be a large time commitment for both community members and staff;
- Specific guidelines or criteria would need to be created to ensure that this action would be utilized for an appropriate project;
- In order for the process to be successful, the project would need to be an item with the potential for several possible outcomes; and,
- Due to the large amount of staff time and the specific criteria that would need to be created this action may not be suitable as a quick start item.

Action b) Study the feasibility of participatory budgeting - a process where community members propose, develop and vote on projects with City funding and staff assistance - and report back to Council with potential benefits and costs:

Mr. Prest clarified that participatory budgeting was not intended to indicate that the group would be setting the City's budget. Instead, a set amount of money would be provided towards projects that are important to the community. Community members could then request funds from the City and, if approved, would work with staff in order to plan a budget that could be presented to the community. Mr. Prest suggested that the focus of this action would be to allow the community to generate and initiate their own projects.

The Task Force discussed this information, highlighting the following points:

- Citizens would need to be provided with a great deal of information to make informed decisions regarding funding;
- Enquires were made regarding whether this action could conflict with other grant programs within the City;
- Discussions with current Grant Committees could take place to clarify if there would be a need for this type of community funding;
- Rather than having this action as a top priority it was suggested that the item be re-evaluated later on during the public engagement process; and,
- Obtaining information from other municipalities that have implemented this approach could be beneficial.

Recommendation 4: Select and implement engagement technologies consistent with New Westminster's Intelligent City Strategy to increase the breadth and depth of public involvement.

Action c) Pilot tool(s) such as Twitter or Google Hangouts to enable remote viewing and/or participation in common engagement process:

- Social media platforms are often ephemeral, therefore investing a large amount of time and resources into this action item could be problematic;
- Providing real time updates can be resource sensitive;
- Twitter and/or Google Hangouts could engage a different aspect of the community that would otherwise not be engaged;
- The current structure of Council meetings could make it challenging to implement a pilot tool, such as a twitter feed;
- It was suggested that residents could submit questions to Council via twitter prior to the meeting or during the open delegation portion of the meeting;

- A real time question and answer period with Councilors and the Mayor via Twitter could provide a different level of engagement for the community;
- Information and suggestions from the public regarding key projects could be hash tagged, and that information could be monitored by the City and included in a report for staff and Council to review (i.e. #canadagamespool); and,
- It was suggested that this action item receive further clarification and evaluation when determining if these suggestions would be plausible to implement in the City.

Action d) Study the feasibility of a civic 311 phone and social media information service and report back to Council with potential benefits and costs:

- Utilizing a single phone number to access a variety of information from City Hall with multi-language options could be beneficial;
- It was suggested that the City could offer the service for a 12 hour time period (rather than 24 hours) in an effort to decrease costs;
- New Westminster could ‘piggy back’ on the infrastructure of other larger metro areas which could also reduce the potential cost;
- Reverse 311, a service that communicates information out to citizens who subscribe to the service, could also be an informative tool;
- The City of Surrey has adopted an online information system (Watson Online) that functions in a similar way as 311 which could also be considered; and,
- Concerns were raised regarding potential barriers that could be experienced when pursuing a platform that may not reach some residents in the City. Seniors may not be comfortable utilizing online technology, which could prevent them from acquiring information.

The Task Force agreed that a feasibility study on both 311 and Watson Online be considered, and further information be provided regarding the financial impact this could have on the City.

Recommendation 5: Integrate public engagement into the City’s annual strategic planning process.

Action a) Work with Council and/or senior decision-makers to proactively identify the role of public engagement in shaping 3-5 key decisions over the 2017/2018 fiscal year:

- Rather than implementing public engagement in three to five key projects, it was suggested that staff provide Council with the opportunity to consider public engagement in all projects;
- A public engagement component could be added to each staff report to clearly evaluate the level of engagement that could be required;
- Providing a record regarding the amount of public engagement considered for certain projects may provide residents clarity and a better understanding regarding how Council obtains information and reaches decisions; and,
- Implementing public engagement as a standard protocol for all staff reports could promote department accountability, and may encourage staff to utilize different engagements tools.

Recommendation 7: Implement a Public Engagement Unit (PEU) within the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer.

Action a) Confirm structure and responsibilities as part of the City’s current organizational review; and,

b) Confirm unit leadership to start in April 2017.

- It was suggested that the PEU be a centralized unit that acts as a resource to assist with capacity building work and to ensure that certain standards are being met by each department;
- Recommending this action as a “quick start” item may not be realistic until more clarification is provided regarding the structure and expected outcomes of the PEU; and,
- In order to be successful, it was suggested that the public engagement process needs to be integrated and consistent through all departments within the City.

Following these suggestions and comments, Mr. Prest concluded the discussion through a final question:

If all of the action items discussed in the engagement strategy were accomplished, would members feel that their expectations for the Task Force were met? Would this be enough to explain to people in the community what the role of the Task Force involved?

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

- Providing additional information regarding why it is advantageous for the public to engage, and could be better explained in the strategy;

- A completion report, or an evaluation regarding the implementation of the engagement strategy a year following its implementation could be considered to ensure that the intended initiatives are being met;
- Larger projects (such as the Canada Games Pool replacement project) could also provide follow up reports to Council regarding their public engagement experience; and,
- Previous discussions had suggested that a budget allocation tool be implemented on the City website to illustrate the scale that Council must consider when making decisions. It was suggested that this could be easy to implement and may be a good way of educating the public on how and why certain decisions are made.

5.0 UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There were no items.

6.0 REPORTS AND INFORMATION

There were no items.

7.0 CORRESPONDENCE

There were no items.

8.0 NEXT MEETING

September 13, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. in Committee Room 2.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION, the meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Certified correct,

Mayor Jonathan X. Coté
Chair

Debbie Johnstone
Committee Clerk