Corporation of the City of
NEW WESTMINSTER

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE

October 13, 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
Councillor Mary Trentadue	- Member
Jennifer Arbo	- Community Member
Chinu Das	- Community Member
Gabriella Scali	- Community Member
Nancy Shaw	- Community Member
Daniel Fontaine	- Community Member
Rnold Smith	- Chamber of Commerce Representative

VOTING MEMBERS REGRETS:

Nadine Nakagawa	- Community Member

STAFF:

Jennifer Wilson	- Assistant Director, Parks, Culture and Recreation
Blair Fryer	- Manager of Communications & Economic Development
John Stark	- Senior Social Planner
Lynn Roxburgh	- Planner
Ashleigh Young	- Communications Coordinator
Renee Chadwick	- Manager, Queensborough Community Centre
Colleen Ponzini	- Manager, Financial Services
Lauren Blake	- Committee Clerk
Debbie Johnstone	- Committee Clerk

The meeting was called to order at 6:29 p.m.

1.0 ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

There were no additions

.2.0 ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES

2.1 Adoption of the September 8, 2015 Minutes

MOVED and SECONDED
THAT the minutes of September 8, 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 Public engagement external survey update

Ashleigh Young, Communications Coordinator, provided an on-table PowerPoint presentation regarding the public engagement external survey update. Ms. Young advised that the survey was activated October 7, 2015, and that 168 responses have been received to date. Ms. Young further advised that while the survey would remain active for the month of October, there would be no firm close date. Ms. Young noted that the survey results would be compiled in November.

Discussion ensued, and the Task Force reiterated that the original goal was to receive between two and three hundred responses.

3.2 Public Engagement Departmental Presentations

Colleen Ponzini, Manager of Financial Services, provided an on-table PowerPoint presentation regarding Finance and Information Technology and public engagement.

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

- Staff engagement regarding budget planning is low, with a small number of people responding to financial plans;

- It could be difficult to demonstrate the cause and effect relationship regarding budgetary decisions, as the public is only included in the latter portion of the budget process;
- Complexity in budgeting could be a reason as to why decisions are often made by the time the public has an opportunity to provide feedback;
- Additional education regarding revenue spending, program subsidies and service taxation could assist with increased budgetary public engagement;
- It was suggested that the budget could be presented as a series of smaller issues to highlight how tax dollars are utilized;
- Other municipalities create two financial reports, an original and an amendment, which may allow for additional public involvement in the finalization of the budget;
- The public may not understand fee structures and distribution;
- Financial statements are often the most requested information in the department; however, there is no information available online in terms of financial planning; and,
- It was suggested that financial reports could be simplified by utilizing graphs and interactive links for terminology.

In response to questions from the Task Force, Ms. Ponzini advised that focus groups were the most beneficial tool for financial public engagement; however, focus groups may have their own challenges.

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

- Focus groups are most beneficial when asked a specific question;
- Specific questions can lead to better conversations and provide better feedback;
- There may be a benefit to asking a focus group the same questions every year to better track responses; and,
- Focus groups should be analyzed to ensure they are a good representation of the whole community.

Jennifer Wilson, Assistant Director, Parks, Culture and Recreation, provided an on-table PowerPoint presentation regarding public engagement in the Parks, Culture and Recreation department.

In response to questions from the Task Force, Ms. Wilson provided the following information:

- Large scale projects benefit from random surveys as well as smaller focus groups;

- Random surveys provide a representative perspective, while focus groups provide staff with a detailed understanding of the nuances and reasons behind the survey themes;
- True public engagement requires time and is resource intensive;
- Parks, Culture and Recreation department benefits from a comprehensive relationship infrastructure that is comprised of numerous committees and day-to-day conversations with the public that is non-issues based;
- Other departments could utilize staff in Parks, Culture and Recreation positions to acquire public feedback and disseminate information;
- Public engagement should focus on demonstrating the importance of public input for changes and decisions made for their community and through that process community spirit and pride is created; and,
- There may be a benefit to a campaign outlining why public engagement is important to the community.

Staff noted that an important way to communicate and interact with the public is through public signage. Blair Fryer, Manager of Communications and Economic Development, advised that the Communications department amended City notices in 2014 to make them more user friendly; however, Mr. Fryer noted that many City notices are required to include regulatory language. Discussion ensued, and the Task Force expressed interest in creating a clear public signage.

4.0 NEW BUSINESS

4.1 Internal barriers to public engagement review & discussion

Jennifer Wilson, Assistant Director, Parks, Culture and Recreation, provided an on-table PowerPoint presentation regarding the feedback from the 2ICs-Challenges and Opportunities.

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

- It is important to demonstrate why the City engages the public;
- Staff vacancies provide Human Resources an opportunity to hire staff with an interest in public engagement;
- Staff requires the proper tools to feel confident when engaging with the community;
- There are different measures of success for each department. For example, the expectation for public engagement should not be the same for the Finance Department as it is for Parks and Recreations department;

- It was suggested that the City website statistics could be shared amongst staff to demonstrate what sections are more popular with the public, and encourage other departments to modify their section to be more user friendly;
- There could be a benefit to educating the public with respect to the various role each department plays in the City; and,
- It was suggested that the City could implement a program similar to the City of Vancouver's 311 program, as it was noted that the program helped eliminate City barriers because it required different departments to work together to provide necessary information to the public.

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

November 10, 2015 at 6:30 p.m. in Committee Room 2.

9.0 ADJOURNMENT

ON MOTION, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Certified correct,

Mayor Jonathan X. Coté
Chair

Debbie Johnstone
Committee Clerk