

What we Heard & Recommendations

Youth Engagement Forums

ST. JOHN'S



Aug. 2023

Context

- Council approved the Youth Engagement Strategy in Oct. 2022; one of the recommendations was to create more youth-focused events such as youth forums to demonstrate the value of youth voices in decision making. These activities can help create a welcoming environment for youth thereby increasing their connection to the City, a strategic direction in the City's Strategic Plan.
- In July, Council approved a Youth Forum for 2022 to include one in-person youth event and two virtual events as a way of bringing young people together to talk about issues important to them, and for youth to learn more about what's happening within the city organization that may impact their experience living in St. John's.
- The Youth Engagement Working group worked with city staff to plan these events.

Event One – Oct. 18, 2022

- In-Person Youth Forum at City Hall
- Twenty-nine youth participated in round table discussions with Mayor Breen, Councillor Bruce, Director of Economic Development & Partnerships Elizabeth Lawrence, Manager, Sustainability, Edmundo Fausto, and Metrobus CEO Judy Powell.
- The topics discussed were Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & Economic Development, and Public Transit.

Event Two– Nov. 29, 2022

- Virtual Youth Forum via Zoom
- Fifteen youth participated in break-out room discussions with Councillor Bruce, Transportation System Engineer Marianne Alacoque, Manager of Parks & Open Spaces Brian Head, and Arts & Cultural Development Coordinator Théa Morash.
- The topics discussed were Parks, Trails, & Open Spaces, Arts & Culture, and Active Transportation.

Event Three– Jan. 26, 2023

- Virtual Youth Forum via Zoom.
- Twelve youth participated in break-out room discussions with members of the Youth Engagement working Group and staff lead Victoria Etchegary, Manager, Organizational Performance and Strategy
- The purpose of this event was to share what was heard at the previous two events and seek agreement or new ideas on recommendations.

Sustainability

Questions:

1. What environmental/sustainability challenges are you most concerned with?
2. What tangible actions can the City carry through on to achieve results?
3. What do you feel the City is going well regarding environment and sustainability?
4. What do people need to more information about or want to talk about?

Concerns About Sustainability

- Transit budget
- Zones impacted by climate change and plans/incentives to prevent building
- Greenhouse gases, including at the Robin Hood Bay facility
- Creating/maintaining green spaces including community gardens
- Bike lanes and alternative transport
- Balancing development and green space
- What other municipalities do above the water shed

What the City is Doing well

- Expression of interest requests relating to sustainability
- Engaging companies to finance green initiatives
- Using garbage for energy
- Repainting bike lanes and making new ones
- Tree planting
- Rainwater from Metrobus roof used to wash buses

What They Want to Know More About

- Master Plans and Green Strategy
- Composting at home
- How green spaces are prioritized
- How to recycle in apartments
- Whether recycling bins could be more prominent around the city

Suggested Actions and Staff Notes

- Make changes for new builds and retrofit existing
 - Staff Note: The City strives to make new builds as green as possible. This includes the new Mews Centre (which incorporates geothermal heating, LED lighting). For retrofits, the City is currently implementing a multi-million-dollar energy performance contract which will reduce the City-owned building emissions by over 1,118 tonnes of CO₂e (about 11% of 2018 emissions). With this project, and the provincial efforts to implement a low-carbon electric grid, we anticipate the City is on track to achieve 70% of its 2030 target. The City's Sustainability team reviews opportunities to retrofit facilities to achieve [Council's climate targets](#), including opportunities for retrofits on an ongoing basis.
- Increase the frequency of recycling pickups and have it available in apartment buildings
 - Staff Note: Increasing the frequency of recycling pick up has been evaluated before. An increase in service would come with a cost: More trucks and more staff. Apartment buildings are private businesses that private their own waste management services,
- More community gardens
 - Staff note: The City of St. John's supports the community's desire to establish community gardens. If a community garden committee has been established, please connect with the healthycommunities@stjohns.ca group to propose a new garden. The City can support the community's effort in various ways as outlined in the following Community Gardens [guide](#) to grow a community garden on City-Owned Land.

Suggested Actions and Staff Notes

- Electric Vehicles
 - More 24 hr. chargers
 - Podcast about EVs to talk about benefits/investment
 - Staff note: The City recognizes that EV chargers are important to enable the transition. Level 2 chargers have been installed at [5 locations](#). Churchill Square will be added this summer, and the New Mews Centre will be added upon its completion. Since the installation of the Level 2 charging network, the City has regularly been reviewing usage rates to ensure the charger usage has not been saturated. As the City sees increase in demand for the existing chargers, expansion will be considered. Other specific requests may trigger an expansion as well. The City has identified various locations for partners dedicated to own and operate faster charging infrastructure (like NLPower, NLHydro and others) to setup fast chargers in City property (e.g., Bannerman Park, Bowring Park, and other locations). The City continues to share its willingness to partner to enable a faster charging network within its municipal boundary.
- Improve infrastructure for mega storms
 - Staff note: Ongoing through capital works projects
- Investigate or educate about landfill gases for energy
 - Staff note: The City issued a Request for Interest to identify and learn more about how companies could help make beneficial use of our landfill gas. Ideas were received and the City is working on a path forward. This effort is ongoing and at the exploratory stage.
- Initiate collaboration with the Province on energy generation
 - Staff response: see previous response.

Suggested Actions and Staff Notes

- Improve frequency of cardboard recycling
 - Takes up a lot of space
 - Not easy for everyone to get the Robin Hood Bay (RHB) City needs to talk more and share more success stories about what it is doing well to support sustainability
 - Staff note: Cardboard can be broken down. Consumer awareness and choices impact the amount of recycling and types of materials. Staff know that not everyone has easy access to the RHB site which is a factor in why City offers programs such as curbside collection and bulk collection.
- Plant fruit trees
 - Staff note: Significant portion of our plantings are to naturalize areas using native stock: spruce, larch, etc.
 - Fruit trees do not typically have a high, broad canopy that's desirable in street trees to provide shade, passive cooling over asphalt and heat retaining infrastructure.
 - Street trees generally perform poorer compared to trees in open spaces due to localized air pollution near the source, salt desiccation, poor growing conditions and damage. Trees that are stressed and performing poorly grow slower and put less energy into fruit production. They are also more prone to pests. Fruit trees are naturally more prone to pests and when combined with typical street tree environments the issue is exacerbated..
- Advocate for low low-carbon products
 - Staff note: Staff would like more feedback on which types of products the group is referring to as there is a wide-variety.

Planned Actions to address WWH

- Easier access to information on composting in the city such as classes and rules and regulations
 - Staff note: Online education sessions are available 24/7, 365 days a year from the [Curb It Website](#) There is also a tab called [Educate](#) with resources and other information. These can be promoted more and targeted to the 18-30 demographic.
- Document and integrate composting sites with the city's mapping solution
 - Staff note: The city does not currently offer City-run composting sites. Community compost bins would require coordination between several divisions and these programs also require continuous monitoring / management / staffing in order to maintain.

Entrepreneurship, Economic Development and Affordability

Questions:

1. What can the city do to support people to start their own business?
2. What can the city do to support small business owners?
3. What are the areas of concern related to affordable living?
4. What can the city do to support affordable living?

Supporting Business Start Up

- Education
 - Clearly accessible information on entrepreneurship resources and programs
 - Share success stories from entrepreneurship programs
 - Promote Junior Achievement
- Storytelling
 - Storytelling about the path towards successful entrepreneurship
- Exposure
 - Share more examples of successful entrepreneurship
 - Workshops and in-person sharing
- Target
 - Entrepreneurship education starting earlier (high school)
 - Workshops that target younger versus older youth (e.g., high school vs. university)

Supporting Small Business

- Lower Costs/Barriers
 - Fees associated with starting new businesses
 - Regulations associated with starting a new business
- Support Business Accessibility
 - Retrofit
 - Ramps for businesses
- Stories/Diversity
 - Share stories of existing diverse success cases
- Labour Market Participation
 - Incentivize businesses to hire vulnerable populations
 - Incentivize building and retrofitting of green buildings

Affordability and Cost of Living

- Housing
 - Incentivize density and building more affordable units
 - Community agency operation of City-owned housing
- Transit
 - Wider sidewalks
 - Increase transit routes, frequency, and reach

Suggested Actions

- Housing and affordability
 - Have a tenants' working group to achieve balance with landlord working group
 - Develop a “how to” guide for renting in St. John's and include such things as:
 - Set up mailing
 - Garbage
 - Bus routes
 - Should have both online and printed versions
- Entrepreneurship/economic development
 - Job fairs – connect business owners/entrepreneurs with existing events
 - Share more success stories – video format
 - Use data available to city and share it
 - Can the city do anything around rent caps?

Planned Actions to address WWH

Recommendations:

- Develop list of easy to access resources about programs and services available, which can be accessed via paper and digitally.
- Access to frequently asked questions and a chat bot on the website.
 - Staff note: New Business Start-Up guide available via paper and digitally in English and French on [City Website](#). City has new website [Business and Investment](#); easier to access information. [List of resources](#) for business startup available. Chat bot not a feasible option at this time, may be able to add a request form on [Advantage website](#).
 - Staff note: There is opportunity to continue to dialogue with the Youth Engagement Working Group and through surveys to the online panel around various entrepreneurship topics.
- Spotlight of youth-owned businesses on Advantage St. John's channels.
 - Advantage social accounts could profile business support agencies, especially those that assist youth entrepreneurs during 2023 Small Business Week in October e.g. Futurpreneur; YMCA; Metro Business Opportunities Agency; etc.
 - Reflect diversify in any business featured in any spotlights (not just tech firms).

Public Transit

Questions:

1. What challenges are you currently facing with public transit?
2. What tangible actions can the city take to improve public transit?
3. What else did you hear? What else do people want more information about?

Challenges

- Lack of shelters for some bus stops combined with bad weather
- Harassment or feeling uncomfortable while using transit
- Overcrowding at peak times such as mornings
- Reliability generally
- Infrequent service
- Inconvenient transfers, routes, longer commutes
- Lack of access in places such as Mt. Pearl & Southlands
- Not pet friendly

What else did you hear?

- Can drivers provide emergency response support if needed? What role can they play in addressing harassment?
- People want to better understand the budget, costs of operating
- What else can be done to improve fleet?
- Go Bus vs Metrobus and costs
- Are all routes needed for the hours they operate?, ex. Route 22.

Suggested actions

- Announcements for stops
- Better maps online for planning (ensure accessible format)
- Visa/debit pay system on board
- Transit in Southlands
- Improve timing/frequency
- Expand network for greater coverage

Suggested actions

- Expand ZIP network
- Bus pass available on mobile device or ability to link to Google Pay
- Update app interface to be more user friendly – incorporate tracker
- Kneeling buses for accessibility
- Bike racks year round
- Adapted stops for evening to be dropped at a location on route but not bus stop (safety)
- Drivers to have “Ask Me” sign – encourage welcoming city for newcomers
- Keep costs low
- Update website
- More shelters – accessible after snow and heated if possible

Planned actions based on WWH

Recommendations for focus:

- Improve online experience (website, app, etc.)
 - Staff would need more specifics on user experience as there is a website and app already that are well used.
- Accessible considerations for user centered design/universal design for all users
 - This will be addressed through a new Accessibility Plan in development.
- Other improvements are ongoing. Check out the latest [Strategic Plan update](#) to Council for details.

Parks, Trails & Open Spaces

Questions:

1. How do Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces impact your daily life in the City?
2. What aspects of Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces are currently missing for you?
3. What challenges do you have related to Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces?
4. What should the City prioritize?

Impact on Daily Life

- Enjoy that trails in the City allow for active transportation
- The trails are great for getting to bus stops when there is no snow/ice
- Many amenities in parks
- Just being able to get outside to enjoy open space and be active

What's missing? Challenges?

- Safety on trails and being able to use them year round
 - Salting
 - Snow clearing
 - Visibility in evenings e.g., Rennies River
- Lights in dog parks
- Access to some amenities only in summer such as water fountain in Bannerman Park

Suggested Actions

- Volunteer program for community clean up, possibly in high schools (volunteer hours)
- Community gardens
 - Make a list of what is available and some means of connecting as volunteers
- Promotion of trails and parks – more about the destination and what you can do there versus facts about the space, i.e. places for picnics – use social media more for this
- Pave more trails – make them accessible

Planned Actions based on WWH

- Promotion of trails and parks with a focus on making places “destinations.”
 - This has been shared with communications staff for ongoing promotion
- Document and integrate parks, etc. with city mapping solution for easy access.
 - Staff note: The City of St. John’s has mapping on the City’s website for trails and parks through the Grand Concourse website <https://www.stjohns.ca/en/recreation-culture/trails.aspx>
 - In addition, there is google mapping to our Municipal Parks on the City website as well. Ex; <https://www.stjohns.ca/en/recreation-culture/bannerman-park.aspx>.
 - Staff will meet with LIS to see if there are improvements that can be made to integrate all parks and trails with the City’s mapping solution.

Arts & Culture

Questions:

- How does Arts and Culture impact your daily life in the City?
- What aspects of Arts and Culture are currently missing for you?
- What challenges do you have related to Arts and Culture?
- What should the City prioritize?

Impact on Daily Life

- Musical events are good for community to get together and get a sense of community
- Love to see murals and other free art spaces

What's missing? Challenges?

- Free art spaces
- More graffiti walls and commission artists to do murals, especially downtown – less red tape #locations
- More creative social media that is eye catching, sponsored, and tailored to audiences; people often stumble upon events
- Diversity
- Theatre activities from the City

Suggested Actions

- More music, smaller events, less formal
- More diversity, multicultural reflection within Arts and Culture especially for large events
- A day to celebrate diversity in St. John's, sharing from cultures around the world, maybe tie in with the college and Memorial University
- Create one place with key information on Arts and Culture – a space for the City to claim and hyperlink to the organizations they support
- Promotion of crafting – groups, where you can access classes, develop a list and build a community
- Wall on Harvey Rd for public art

Planned Actions based on WWH

- More music, smaller events, less formal
 - Staff note the City offers Music @ Concert Series, pop up performances on the Pedestrian Mall, multiple small-scale Chillfest events (i.e., Kitchen Party).
- More diversity, multicultural reflection within Arts and Culture especially for large events
 - Staff note diversity is a major focus of Canada Day Celebrations & diversity is a focus when programming entertainment at our large-scale events. However, will continue to try to improve.
- A day to celebrate diversity in St. John's, sharing from cultures around the world, maybe tie in with the college and Memorial University
 - Staff note this is already being done at Canada Day celebrations and thorough other Community events supported by CSJ – including SARFest, Tombolo etc.
 - Small scale events for Multiculturalism Day & partnerships with MUN on various initiatives also happen throughout the year

Planned Actions based on WWH

- Create one place with key information on Arts and Culture – a space for the city to claim and hyperlink to the organizations they support.
 - Staff note: It was challenging to keep website current. What's Happening socials launched in 2022 to link and promote activities.
- Promotion of crafting – groups, where you can access classed, develop a list and build a community.
 - Staff note: Programming would come from Recreation (Knitting, quilting classes etc). Check [City Guide](#) for information and registration details.
 - Groups such as Anna Templeton, & NL Arts Council fill this role and offer classes. CSJ would only fill gaps if they exist.
 - Craft workshops are often included in events & festivals; however, these are very short in duration with a limited capacity.
- Wall on Harvey Rd for public art
 - This was completed and a [public unveiling](#) happened in Spring 2023

Active Transportation

Questions:

1. How does Active Transportation impact your daily life in the City?
2. What aspects of Active Transportation are currently missing for you?
3. What challenges do you have related to Active Transportation?
4. What should the City prioritize?

Impact on Daily Life

- Rely on active transportation in their day-to-day lives - “obligatory pedestrians” for example
- Cyclists, walkers, etc. who shared similar perspectives on Active Transportation
- The extent to which the city develops and maintains corridors for pedestrians directly impacts the regions of the city which are ‘accessible’

Missing? Challenges?

- Painting lines on the roads – bike lanes - is not enough to address the concerns of cyclists (and others)
- There is a pressing need for physical infrastructure which separates pedestrians from other forms of motorized transportation (Boulevards)
- Currently, in high demand areas (e.g., Kenmount Rd) safety is a major issue
- Hostility and lack of awareness to pedestrians is a constant challenge
- Wintertime poses additional hurdles for pedestrians

Tangible Recommendations

- Map of cycling safe routes instead of “bike lanes”
- Walkability is a feature people look for when choosing where to live; add layers to existing information on city website/maps to show what is in a neighbourhood, wider sidewalks, cross walks, link to affordability

Planned Actions based on WWH

- Map of cycling safe routes instead of “bike lanes”
 - Staff continue to make improvements to the layers on [map centre](#)
- Walkability is a feature people look for when choosing where to live; add layers to existing information on city website/maps to show what is in a neighbourhood, wider sidewalks, cross walks, link to affordability
 - Keep up with new projects advancing active transportation through [EngageStJohns.ca](#) or on the [City Website](#)