



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

# Briefing Note

**To:** Council

**File No.:**

**From:** Susie Saunders, Director Recreation, Community and Culture

**Date:** April 23, 2025

**Subject:** Community and Social Development Framework and Plan Update

**PURPOSE:** To provide Council with an update regarding progress towards a Community and Social Development Framework and Action Plan for the City of Courtenay.

## BACKGROUND:

At the July 31, 2024 Council meeting staff provided a report outlining the rationale, approach, scope and steps to establish a Community and Social Development (CSD) Framework and Action Plan for the City of Courtenay. Staff presented an emerging CSD Framework, drawn from and aligned with the City's Official Community Plan and the Comox Valley Regional District's Regional Growth Strategy. (OCP 2022, RGS 2011). Two strategies were put forth to action and inform the establishment of a long-term CSD Plan:

1. *Better Together Strategy: Partnering to Support Capacity Building, Coordination and Upstream Action*
  - a. Strategic focus on strengthening partnerships with and between local social service agencies and tables to support, strengthen, and/or advance community efforts to build capacity and enhance coordination.
  - b. Plan and implement a series of community building events with social service providers to illuminate and link assets and mobilize efforts along the continuum of community development.
2. *Neighbourhood Network Strategy: Building Neighbourhood Connections*
  - a. Strategic focus on supporting place-based community development in neighbourhoods within Courtenay.
  - b. Enable the establishment and / or strengthening of local relationships within neighbourhoods to enhance and enable community capacity and resilience that build on the strengths and assets of the community.

At the July 31, 2024 Council meeting the following motions were put forth and carried:

*THAT Council endorse the proposed scope, work, and subsequent steps detailed in the staff report concerning the establishment of a Community and Social Development (CSD) Framework and Action Plan; and*

*THAT Council direct staff to execute the 'Better Together' and 'Neighborhood Network' strategies outlined in the staff report, which are designed to enhance community capacity, resilience, and social well-being.*

## DISCUSSION:

### CSD Framework and Action Plan Update

Following Council direction, staff has continued to advance the development of a CSD framework and action plan, according to approved approach, scope, and steps. There are five distinct phases to this work which commenced January 5, 2024 and will conclude in summer 2027. The discovery phase has wrapped up with its focus on research, assessment, initial relationship building, illumination of a living CSD framework and initial strategies to inform the development of a CSD plan. The planning phase has commenced, and a process is underway to hire consultants to support work in this phase (as well as activity in upcoming activation and evaluation phases). Building on an evaluation of both process and outcomes, the final phase will see the establishment of a CSD leadership table and the co-creation of an integrated long-term CSD plan for the City of Courtenay.

Figure 1. below, *CSD Project Timeline*, illuminates the phases and the current timeline for completion of each. The timeline for this work been adjusted since the Council Meeting of July 31, 2024. The date of project completion has been extended by six months. The revised project timeline reflects a more feasible pace for the work given the changing context and the need to support existing work in this domain, while strengthening and expanding relationships in these sectors and increasing awareness and support for the this CSD work.

Figure. 1 CSD Project Timeline



### Summary of CSD activity in this reporting period

An asset-based community development approach requires significant attention, time, and effort as staff work towards establishing and strengthening relationships amongst the social and community development sector. However, this ground work is pivotal as it can build trust, desire, capacity, and/or commitment

necessary for collaborative work together to establish the CSD framework and plan. The literature and experience of BC municipalities reveals the most successful community and social development frameworks and plans are co-created by key people who have a mandate to address, are interested in and affected by, the determinants of health.<sup>1 2</sup>

Establishing relationships with Indigenous people, and other groups disproportionately affected by current systems, policy and culture is critically important. Their knowledge and wisdom are understood to be foundational to CSD work. With respect to this initiative, primarily due to increased demand for their services and limited capacity, relationships with urban Indigenous peoples and Indigenous serving organizations are in process but in early stages. A relationship with K'ómoks First Nation has not yet been established in relation to this work, however now that the CSD initiative and strategies have taken shape and form, staff will initiate a process to formally request engagement.

#### *Key relationship building and promotional activity*

- Administering grants and providing oversight to large and smaller partner led projects that provide immediate and temporary assistance to meet basic needs with respect to shelter, food, clothing medical, legal or administrative supports<sup>3</sup>.
- Administering grants and providing oversight to smaller community led projects that bring community together to create, long-term, alternative sustainable and affordable food and shelter/housing options.
- Participating in multiple collaboratives and groups, acting as an advisor and liaison between City and community, communicating developments, pollinating ideas, developing and/or sharing information and/or resources.
- Meeting with researchers, policy makers and funders in the Comox Valley and neighbouring jurisdictions to investigate municipal best practices with respect to the development of a CSD framework and plan, as well as resources to implement and evaluate such plans.
- Promoting the CSD framework, the Better Together strategy and Neighbourhood Network strategy via eight presentations to City and community groups in various venues.
- Building relationships with strategic partners such as Vancouver Island Health Authority, Comox Valley Community Health Network, Comox Valley Community Foundation, School District 71, Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, the Comox Valley Substance Use Collaborative, The Comox Valley Regional District, Lush Food Action Society, the Comox Valley Arts Council, Farmers Market Association, etc.
- Building relationships with Indigenous people, and supporting their voice in leadership roles<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Introducing New Operating Models for Local Governments](#) (Nesta, UK September 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Two examples of municipal innovation within BC: 1) [A Healthy City For All: Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy 2014-2015 \(Phase I\)](#) and [Healthy City Strategy – Four Year Action Plan 2015 – 2018 \(Phase II\)](#); and 2) The City of Penticton's [2023 – 2026 Social Development Framework](#) (December 2023)

<sup>3</sup> Key community and social development projects and grants managed or administered in the August 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025 period: Strengthening Communities Grant, the Winter Response and Storage Solutions Grant, Share the Harvest Community Garden, partnership with the Farmers Market, CV Substance Use Strategy Collaborative, Comox Valley Nature (Vanier Park), Menstrual and Gender Equity in City operated washroom facilities.

<sup>4</sup> For example, an agreement has been signed with the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society to administer the Comox Valley Substance Use Strategy.

*Key activity undertaken to advance the Better Together strategy:*

- Participated in three (3) exploratory and planning meetings with individuals and groups representing key agencies that have as a mandate supporting, linking and inspiring coordinated upstream CSD work in Courtenay and the Comox Valley. As a result of this work, an event planning table is emerging. While a decision has not been made with respect to hosting a single city-wide event to, or a series of smaller events, five (5) core event themes have been articulated:
  - Acknowledging and celebrating successes
  - Visioning a thriving community
  - Exploring collaborative CSD initiatives
  - Inspiring systemic transformation
  - Expanding and strengthening social connections

Through discussion the following potential event activities have been put forth and are being explored:

- Host a ceremony to celebrate community change-makers: Organize a pre-conference event to honour individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving community health and inclusivity.
- Conduct a visioning or re-visiting the vision session: Organize an interactive session where attendees actively contribute to formulating a collective vision for Courtenay's future by the end of the event.
- Host a "Plan-a-Palooza" session: Provide a platform for community groups and local government representatives to showcase their plans/key activities addressing one or more of the determinants of health. Engage participants in a process to illuminate activities on a systems-change continuum, and priority areas ripe for collaborative action.
- Facilitate asset-based action-oriented discussions: Lead breakout sessions focused on identifying actionable ideas/steps engaging diverse sectors in systemic change. Identify assets available to advance ideas, with each session producing a concrete action plan.
- Organize networking activities: Implement structured networking opportunities that result in the formation of new collaborative partnerships among attendees.

While an important goal is to “expand and strengthen” social connections suggesting a larger inclusive public event, the target audience for collaboration and partnership is service providers, local government, K’ómoks First Nation, other support agencies, and community change agents.

*Additional key activity to advance the Neighbourhood Network strategy:*

- Two (2) City-wide Neighbourhood Network gatherings were convened with participants including leads from the key social determinant areas (i.e. food security, belonging and welcoming for newcomers, immigrants, and unhoused residents, education, health, elders, arts and culture). In addition, this work includes self-identified residents keen to champion work in their neighbourhoods representing Puntledge, Harmston, and Bill Moore areas. City planning and development staff came to learn more about the project and to illuminate related work. Some of the outcomes of initial gatherings include:
  - A neighbourhood asset mapping exercise was piloted.
  - Ideas to activate neighbourhoods were cultivated (i.e. Park pop ups, Love our Laneway project, growing the urban forest and an edible understory, back yard sharing gardens, community gardens, Indigenous gardens, creating pollinator corridors, neighbourhood heritage walk, community emergency preparedness, etc.).

- Neighbourhood Network Ambassadors, (individuals interested in promoting the work and sharing resources amongst their broad networks) Neighbourhood Champions, (individuals interested in leading work in the areas where they live, work, learn and/or play), and potential strategy advisory leads have been identified.
- Three (3) follow-up meetings were convened to advance the development of neighbourhood activation ideas and/or to secure resources for such ideas. One idea gaining momentum involves engaging youth in climate change activity to grow the urban forest and an edible forest understory. Early outcomes of these meetings include:
  - Strengthened internal communications and collaboration between several City departments engaged in complimentary work (i.e. Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering through the Youth Climate Corp (YCC), Parks through their strategy to increase tree canopy, and Development Services via the Urban Forest Strategy).
  - Strengthened communication collaboration between external groups with aligned aims (i.e. the Youth Ecological Restoration society (YER), works with younger students and is now looking at ways to tie in graduate students into the YCC program, and Comox Valley Arts envisions engaging students in the project through art – illuminating the Urban Forest Strategy.)

### **CSD Framework, Next Steps**

A Request For Qualifications (RFQ) has been issued to secure a consultant or team of consultants, who will over the next 18 months support the development, implementation, and evaluation of the CSD strategies. This summer it is expected that leadership for each strategy will be formalized, a detailed plan for each strategy will be developed and will include communications, implementation, and evaluation components.

#### *Neighbourhood Network Strategy*

Commencing in the fall and continuing into the spring and summer of 2026, it is expected that least four (4) neighbourhood networks will be established and activated, comprising the initial nodes in a city-wide network of neighbourhoods. It is expected that the activation of initial neighbourhood networks may be focused around parks, recreation, and culture due to the embedding of community development within this City department.

#### *Better Together Strategy*

By the fall of 2025 – the event planning table will be formalized, Better Together event goals and objectives and evaluation plans will be finalized, including a draft program and supporting materials and logistics. The city-wide event will be held to illuminate, link, and inspire upstream efforts within community and social development sectors. Key outcomes will include a clear vision (for the CSD framework), a map of the landscape of activities underway to realize the vision (plotted on a systems change continuum, illuminating the thrust of current activity, gaps, overlaps, and priority areas for collective action). Assets and ideas to work upstream together will be shared and action plans will be created.

A plan to evaluate both process and outcomes for each strategy will be developed and implemented. A mid-term report on strategy development progress is expected in summer 2026, illuminating not only the City's unique role and approach with this area of work, but also emerging priority policy directions.

Building on and integrating process and outcome evaluation coming out of the two strategies, by the spring of 2027 a CSD leadership table will be formalized and a CSD framework and a long term integrated CSD plan, will be co-created by a leadership table, committed to its implementation and evaluation. This will then provide recommendations to Council regarding its unique role and priority areas of focus.

## **POLICY ANALYSIS:**

### **OCP, 2022**

#### *Social Infrastructure*

Objective 1: All Courtenay residents experience equitable access to services

- SI 1: Develop and employ a locally-relevant framework for assessing social, equity, and health impacts in policy, development, program and service decisions.

Objective 2: Coordinated, inclusionary, and systems-based responses are in place to address evolving complex social issues.

- SI 6: Consider social determinants of health and adopt an evidence-based approach to policy formation, community education, advocacy, and decision making, including ensuring equity-priority voices are included in the creation, delivery, and evaluation of services
- SI 7: Identify an appropriate role for the City in the delivery of social infrastructure in relation to other organizations, agencies, and jurisdictions that provide services for equity-priority groups

Objective 4: Neighbourhood and community development-based organizing are leveraged as a source of community capacity and resilience.

- SI 21: Support volunteers, organizations, and other social assets to continue undertaking their work within the community
- SI 24: Support and build neighbourhood capacity in strengthening social connections, climate action, and community resilience through neighbourhood-driven initiatives based on asset based community development approaches. Such initiatives could include, but are not limited to: School District No. 71 community use of schools, Neighbourhood Houses, Safe Routes to School Programs, small-scale street-level projects, resilience assessments relating to climate change, and learning events for resident action

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The Recreation, Culture and Community Services department staff will continue to oversee the proposed work, managing the contract with consultants, and the project budget. The department has earmarked \$110,000 to support the creation of a community and social development framework and action plan. Staff are currently working with internal and external partners to secure additional human and material resources (i.e. grant applications, partnerships) as opportunities arise that are in alignment with the work being undertaken.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:**

This work will be carried out by Recreation, Culture, and Community Services staff, who will be responsible for project oversight and administration. When possible, the work will build upon and support aligned work in other City departments.

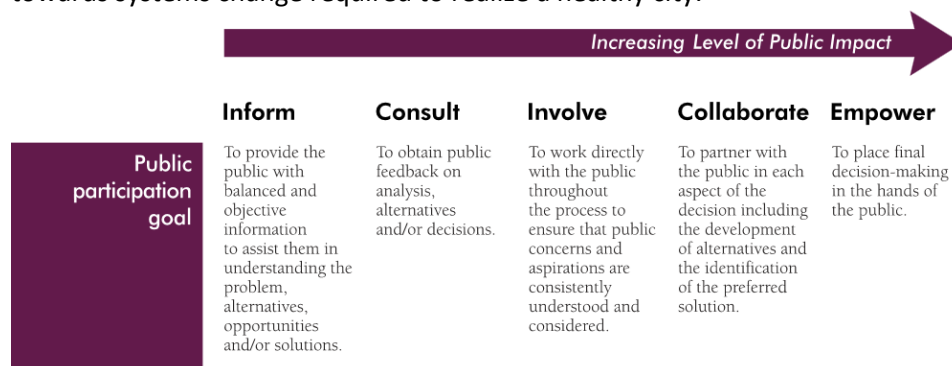
## **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:**

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Social Infrastructure - Identify roles for the City in the delivery of social infrastructure outlined in the OCP; Implementation plan for delivery of social infrastructure

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

This asset-based community development and health promotion approach involves a deep dive into community. We shall focus on a handful of neighbourhoods, and work with those service providers in the community that have as a mandate or a keen interest in the community and social development domain. We will work collaboratively with these segments of community with a view to empower community action towards systems change required to realize a healthy city.



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**RECOMMENDATION:** THAT Council receive the “Community and Social Development Framework and Plan Update” briefing note.

Prepared by: Joanne Bays, Community Development Coordinator  
Reviewed by: Susie Saunders, Director Recreation, Culture and Community Services  
Concurrence: Geoff Garbutt, M.Pl., MCIP, RPP, City Manager (CAO)