



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

# Briefing Note

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**To:** Council

**File No.:** 5080-01

**From:** Director Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

**Date:** January 14, 2026

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

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**PURPOSE:** To provide council with an update regarding progress towards a Community and Social Development Framework and Action Plan for the City of Courtenay for the period of April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

**BACKGROUND:**

At the July 31st, 2024, meeting Council endorsed the scope, approach, and next steps to establish a Community and Social Development (CSD) Framework and long-term Action Plan for the City of Courtenay. At that time, staff introduced an emerging CSD Framework aligned with the City's Official Community Plan (2022) and the Comox Valley Regional District's Regional Growth Strategy (2011).

At that time, Council was introduced to two foundational strategies intended to guide early implementation and inform the development of the CSD Framework and Action Plan:

- **Better Together Strategy**, which focuses on strengthening partnerships, coordination, and capacity among social service organizations and collaborative tables, with an emphasis on upstream and preventative approaches to community well-being.
- **Neighbourhood Networks Strategy**, which focuses on place-based community development to strengthen neighbourhood-level connections, resilience, and social cohesion.

On April 23, 2025, Council received the first progress update and was advised that the discovery phase had concluded. This phase included research into current conditions, relationship-building with community partners, and refinement of the emerging CSD Framework. Council was also advised that the planning phase had commenced, including consultant procurement and early activation activities.

**DISCUSSION:**

During the reporting period, staff advanced implementation of the CSD initiative from discovery into early activation of both foundational strategies. Key activities included the retention of consultant teams, establishment of communications and evaluation tools, initiation of research and mapping work, delivery of a community-wide soft launch event, and the rollout of pilot neighbourhood networks.

## Project Timeline



### Key Milestones

#### Program Setup and Coordination

Two consultant teams were retained to support implementation:

- Urban Matters has been engaged to lead planning, activation, and reporting related to the Better Together Strategy, evaluation of both strategies, and to support development of the overall CSD Framework.
- Pollinate has been engaged to lead planning and activation of the Neighbourhood Networks Strategy and to support evaluation and reporting related to neighbourhood-level outcomes.

A communications plan was developed to support consistent and coordinated messaging. Communication tools aligned with City standards are in development and include website content, Council and staff briefing materials, presentation materials, social media content, and promotional materials.

Roadmaps to guide activation of both the Better Together and Neighbourhood Networks strategies were developed by staff and the consultants, and implementation is underway.

#### Better Together Strategy

A full-day orientation and partner engagement session was organized and delivered as a soft launch of the CSD initiative. The session engaged representatives from community organizations and local government and focused on clarifying a shared vision for community well-being, identifying guiding principles for collaboration, and strengthening relationships among participating organizations.

A review of strategic plans and materials from organizations leading community and social development work across the determinants of health has been initiated. This research will inform the development of a digital map illustrating the focus of current CSD activity within the city, including areas of alignment, overlap, and potential gaps along the continuum of systems-change practice.

### *Neighbourhood Networks Strategy*

Criteria for participation in the Neighbourhood Networks pilot program were developed in alignment with the OCP and the guiding principles established through the CSD initiative.

Community outreach was undertaken to identify neighbourhood champions across the city. As a result, neighbourhood networks are emerging in the Old Orchard/Downtown and Urquhart/Lake Trail areas. Community meetings have been held in both areas and initial organizing activities are underway. Additional neighbourhoods, including Braidwood/Sandwich, Tull, and Puntledge, have expressed interest and two more neighbourhoods are anticipated to be onboarded in early 2026.

A city-wide placemaking event, *What Flavour Is Your Neighbourhood?*, was delivered in partnership with community organizations in late summer 2025. The event had approximately 65 attendees and served to increase awareness of the Neighbourhood Networks Strategy and identify additional potential neighbourhood champions.

Neighbourhood seed and placemaking grants of up to \$3,000 per neighbourhood have been developed and are available for pilot neighbourhood networks. The grants are intended to support initiatives that strengthen neighbour connections, build local skills, enhance communication, and advance small-scale placemaking projects.

### *Evaluation*

An evaluation framework and associated tools were developed to support assessment of project impacts and outcomes. Evaluation methods include digital mapping of community practice, ripple effect mapping, neighbourhood surveys, and process documentation. Implementation of evaluation activities is underway.

### **Next Steps**

#### *Better Together Strategy*

The review and mapping of CSD-related plans and initiatives across the determinants of health will be completed to help clarify the current focus of regional, municipal, and community efforts.

Collaborative planning workshops will be hosted in early 2026 to share and validate findings with community partners. These sessions will focus on identifying areas of overlap, gaps, potential priorities for action, and partner roles in advancing coordinated CSD efforts.

Staff will continue to explore opportunities to secure partners and resources to support a larger convening of partners and the public to build capacity and broaden participation in community and social development initiatives.

### *Neighbourhood Networks Strategy*

Staff will receive and review Neighbourhood Network grant applications and approve projects that meet established criteria and guidelines. It is anticipated that applications from two neighbourhoods will be received by the end of December 2025, with projects completed by June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Applications from an additional two neighbourhoods are anticipated by February 2026, with projects completed by August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026.

Pollinate's Neighbourhood Network Coordinator will continue to support participating neighbourhoods in establishing identity, developing communication channels, hosting community events, and implementing

placemaking projects. Outreach will continue across the city with the objective of formalizing at least four neighbourhood networks by the end of February 2026.

### **Program Oversight, Evaluation, and Reporting**

Staff will continue to oversee consultant teams and manage implementation of the CSD initiative. Evaluation data collection will continue through spring and summer 2026, with analysis and reporting anticipated toward the end of summer 2026.

A mid-term report will be presented to Council in summer 2026. The report will outline progress, outcomes, and lessons learned from the Better Together and Neighbourhood Networks strategies and will provide data and analysis to inform the development of the final CSD Framework and Action Plan for the City of Courtenay.

### **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 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 resources (i.e. grant applications, partnerships) as opportunities arise that are in alignment with the work being undertaken.

**ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:**

This work will continue to 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.

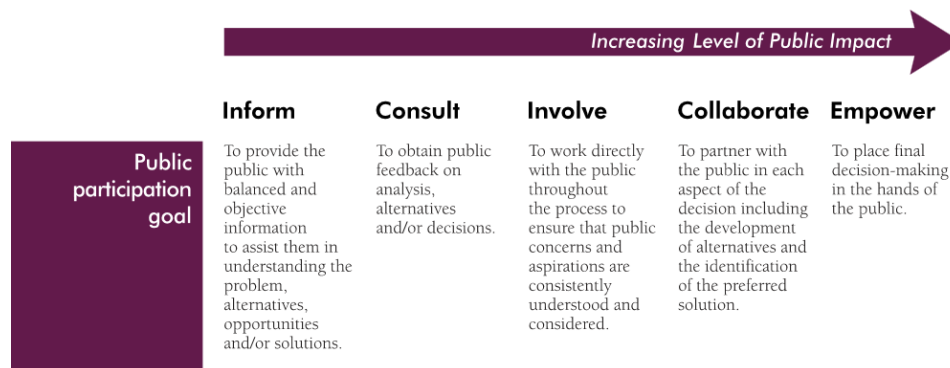
**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:**

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. The project focuses 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. Staff 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 Action Plan Update” briefing note.

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