



The Corporation of the City of Courtenay

Staff Report

To: Council

File No.: 5080-01

From: Director of Recreation, Culture, and Community Services

Date: July 31, 2024

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

PURPOSE: To provide an overview of the approach for the creation of a Community and Social Development (CSD) Framework and Action Plan and to seek council approval of the scope of the proposed work and next steps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The primary goal of community development work is to build relationships around place, strengthening the social fabric of the community to make it healthier, stronger, and more resilient. The key deliverable of this proposed work is the creation of a Community and Social Development (CSD) framework and action plan illuminating the City of Courtenay's unique identity, role, and priorities within the community and social development domain. The CSD framework and action plan will be achieved by actioning and evaluating an asset-based community development and health promotion approach, as directed in the Official Community Plan, 2022 (OCP, 2022) via two distinct strategies:

- **Better Together Strategy:** Partnering with the community and social development sector to illuminate assets and to strengthen coordinated upstream action towards social well-being.
- **Neighbourhood Network Strategy:** Building neighbourhood networks in Courtenay.

The creation of a CSD framework is an iterative process and it is expected that it will evolve as these two strategic approaches are implemented. The two strategies, once fully developed, operationalized, and evaluated over the next two years will lay the foundation for a long-term action plan for Courtenay. While the framework and plan will initially serve the Recreation, Culture, and Community, Services department, it is anticipated that the framework and plan may have wider application within the City in the future.

BACKGROUND:

Courtenay is in transition moving from a small municipality to a larger urban centre. The community's population and households grew between 2016 and 2021 (9% and 11%, respectively). Similar trajectories continued from then to 2023 and are expected to continue over the next two decades. This population increase has been accompanied by a change in demographics, including a significant increase in the number seniors¹. With this growth, the demand for basic needs such as housing, food, health care facilities, schools, and child care spaces has risen, as well as the need for municipal infrastructure and services to support those needs. Simultaneously, Courtenay has been dealing with significant health, social, economic, and environmental challenges – from a pandemic, a highly toxic drug supply, disruptions to supply chains, and inflation, to the existential threat of climate change. Exacerbating these challenges has been a rapid change in sources of information and the way people communicate with one another. The internet, with multiple

¹ Source: Stats Canada (2021) and BC P.E.O.P.L.E estimates and projections (2023)

social media platforms has become the “go to” source of knowledge leading to fractured and divisive communication among residents.^{2 3 4 5}

One visible impact of this confluence of challenges is the growing number of people on Courtenay streets who are experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, addictions to substances and brain injury. Less visible, though expressed more so online, is the erosion of the social contract, community connectivity, sense of belonging and an increase in loneliness. This erosion or loss of social connectivity, can have profound effect on community resilience, social well-being, and personal health. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared loneliness to be as large a risk factor to health as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution. Studies have revealed loss of social connectivity is linked to dropping out of school, missing social events, loss of employment, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression and suicide.⁶

Increasingly, and with more urgency, Councillors and City staff are called to community and social issue tables for support. In the Comox Valley these tables are for the most part regional, given the close proximity of municipalities and districts, and the fact that these issues are common to all. There, nearly everyone relays that they are working at capacity and primarily reactively to crises - and collectively are questioning if there isn't a better way. Like partners at these tables, the City of Courtenay seeks to clarify its unique identity, approach, and role in the community and social development sector.

In December of 2023, the City established a Community Development Coordinator position to support and advance efforts to strengthen the social fabric and resiliency of the community. A key deliverable of this position is a long-term, integrated CSD framework and action plan, not only to clarify the City's distinct identity and approach, but to help the City and the community it serves, to think, act, and work together in new ways to change the conditions that impact social well-being.

DISCUSSION:

The need and support for a CSD framework and action plan, is a priority within the City of Courtenay's OCP. That the City of Courtenay values and seeks community and social well-being is clear in the vision and cardinal directions within the OCP. OCP goals clearly articulate the City's support for investing in relationships around place as a means to achieve community well-being, as well as advancing reconciliation efforts, as well as support a community development approach in the development and implementation of strategies to achieve priorities.

“The OCP is a collective vision and it is a collective action. Its implementation is a collective journey. The success of the OCP will depend on collective commitment to upholding the vision, directions, goals, and specific policies and actions identified.”

Municipal Role in Community and Social Development

The complex and interconnected social, economic, technological, and environmental challenges experienced in Courtenay are experienced globally, and have demanded that local authorities respond in new ways. Over

² [Societal Consequences of COVID 19](#) (BC CDC, 2023)

³ [Climate Change and Health](#) (BC CDC, 2023)

⁴ [More than 2,500 Lives Lost to Toxic Drugs in 2023](#) (BC GOV, January 2024)

⁵ [Global Views of Social Media and it's Impacts on Society](#) (Pew Research Centre, December 2022)

⁶ [WHO Launches a Commission to Foster Social Connection](#), (WHO, November 2023)

the past decades, beacons of innovation have appeared as municipalities have experimented with different ways to address these challenges.⁷

The work of municipalities in the community and social development domain signals a need for a reimagining of the relationship between local government and community. One that re-distributes power with public services playing a revised role within an ecosystem that embraces communities and residents as partners, rather than customers or clients, in finding better solutions to complex challenges. The work also signals a need to find ways to mobilize community efforts upstream, to get at the factors giving rise to the issues in order to prevent problems before they occur.

“No Society has the money to buy at market prices, what it takes to raise children, make a neighbourhood safe, care for the elderly, make democracy work or address systemic changes.... The only way the world is going to address social problems is by enlisting the very people who are now classified as “clients” and consumers”, and seeing them as co-workers, partners and re-builders”⁸

Several Canadian municipalities have experimented with the establishment of tables of influential decision makers from local government, universities, NGOs, and funding agencies for the purpose of co-creating, implementing and evaluating CSD frameworks and plans. The frameworks are similar in that they generally state common vision and principles for working together as well as priority areas and goals linked to existing strategies or plans to achieve those goals. Each member at the table clarifies their unique role and responsibilities and members collectively decide upon outcomes and measures they will collect to determine impact of their collective investment.⁹

Community and Social Development Framework

Two widely embraced approaches generally underpin municipal innovations towards community and social well-being: 1) an Asset Based Community Development approach (ABCD) and 2) a Determinants of health or Health Promotion approach (HP). The City of Courtenay endorses both approaches in policy (OCP, 2022).

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to working in community and public spaces that recognizes, connects and mobilizes the assets (gifts, talents, and resources) of individuals and communities to build stronger more sustainable communities. See Table 1 for an overview of ABCD.

⁷ [Introducing New Operating Models for Local Governments](#) (Nesta, UK September 2020)

⁸ [Asset Based Community Development for Local Authorities](#) (Nesta UK, September 2020)

⁹ 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).

Table 1: Asset Based vs. Deficit Based Approaches to Community Development

- Community Driven
- Relationship Oriented
- Asset Based
- Place Based
- Inclusion Focused

	Deficit Based	Asset Based
Purpose	Changing Community through increased services	Changing community through community involvement
Method	Institutional reform	Community-oriented production
Accountability	Leaders are professional staff accountable to institutional leads	Leaders are widening circles of volunteers accountable to the community
Significance of Assets	Assets are systems inputs. Asset mapping is data collection	Assets are relationships to be discovered and connected. Asset mapping is self-realization and leadership development.
Production Resource	Money is the key resource. Fails without money.	Relationships are the key resource. Falls apart when money is the focus.
Operating Challenge	How do we get community involved?	How do we channel and build on all of this community participation?
System Dynamic	Tends to Spread itself thinner over time	Tends to snowball over time
Evaluation	Success is service outcomes measured by institutional leaders	Success is capacity measured mostly by relationships.

The flipside of a deficit-based approach, an asset-based approach is community rather than institutional driven, relationship rather than money oriented, asset rather than issue based, place based and inclusion focused. Through specific place-based relationship building strategies, the objective is to empower the community to utilize their assets in order to take action to realize the change they seek.

Health Promotion (HP)

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health and well-being. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment.

A Health Promotion approach takes community development one step further, with the acknowledgement that achieving health and well-being requires not only the illumination and linking of assets, it entails mobilizing community action upstream to address the determinants of the health – or the fundamental conditions for health.¹⁰

This approach makes clear that achieving personal and community well-being requires systems change, building supportive environments and creating healthy public policy. Moreover, it typically requires re-orienting services to support efforts towards change.

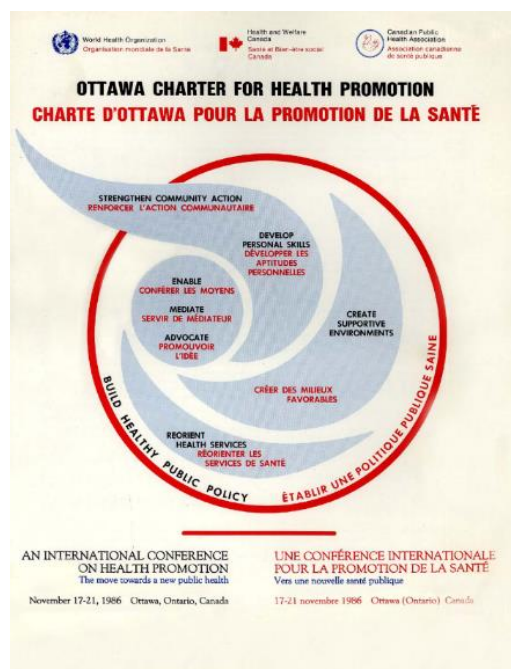
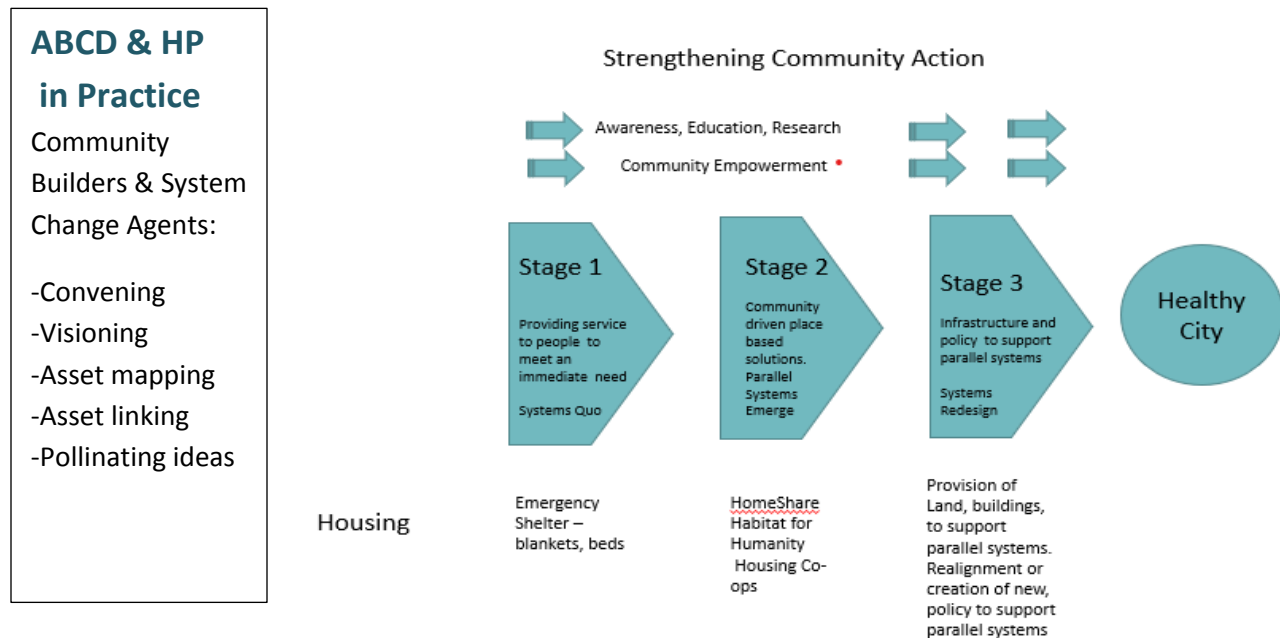


Image 1: Ottawa charter for Health Promotion¹¹

¹⁰ Courtenay’s OCP (2022) identifies 11 determinants impacting the quality of life and social well-being: Food, Housing, Education, Employment, Income and Social Status, Social Connections, Diversity and Inclusion, Connection to the Social Environment, Childhood Experiences, Transportation and Accessibility.

¹¹ [Ottawa Charter for Health promotion](#) (Ottawa, 1986)

Image 2: Asset Based Community Development and Health Promotion in Practice



In practice, community developers support the mobilization of community action along a continuum, using an asset-based approach, towards systems redesign to realize their stated community vision. Community action within one or more health determinant areas occurs in stages along this continuum, moving over time from the provision of service to provide immediate temporary relief, to engaging people who are experiencing the issue in the creation of parallel systems offering longer-term sustainable solutions. With the final stage involving the creation of healthy public policy to support systems redesign. The role of the community developer is to enable this activity, rather than to lead it. They may convene meetings, support visioning, asset mapping, and other activities to mobilize community action.

An Emerging Framework for Courtenay

Drawing from the literature, as well as preliminary observations, discussions, and with input from internal and external champions working in the community and social development domain in Courtenay and the Comox Valley, and building on existing plans and strategies, a CSD framework for Courtenay is emerging (see Image 3).

Image 3: Emerging Asset Based Community Development and Health Promotion Framework



The CSD framework is rooted in principles (described in the OCP) and built upon a solid strong foundation (Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) and the OCP, 2022). The circle in the centre illuminates the draft vision for this work: *vibrant, resilient, sustainable, connected communities*. The two large leaves below the circle illuminate the approach: an asset-based community development and health promotion approach focussed on *strengthening relationships* around *place*. The first ring of leaves around the centre circle are potential goals for this work – goals that optimally support existing plans and strategies in the outer set of leaves. A tree is an optimal image to illuminate the emerging CSD framework, as it is a living conceptualization reflecting the vision, values, and approach to this work of the City and partners at tables leading this work and the context they are working in. It is fully anticipated that the vision, goals, strategies, and plans will change over time reflecting the transitions in partners at the table, and in context over time.

Two specific strategies to advance the creation of an integrated community and social development framework and action plan have been identified that will build on the policies and objectives laid out in the OCP, 2022 while also integrating planning work that has already been completed or is underway both locally and regionally.

1. *Better Together Strategy: Partnering to Support Capacity Building, Coordination and Upstream Action*
 - a. Strategic focus on strengthening partnerships to support, strengthen, and/or advance community efforts to build capacity and coordination of local social service agencies and tables.

- b. Plan and implement a series of community building events with the community of social service providers to illuminate and link their assets and mobilize their efforts along the continuum of community development.
2. *Neighbourhood Network Strategy: Building Neighbourhood Networks*
 - a. Strategic focus on supporting place-based community development in neighbourhoods within Courtenay.
 - b. Enable the establishment and / or strengthening of local relationships within a neighbourhood to build and enable community capacity and resilience that build on the strengths and assets of the community.

Better Together Strategy Rationale

When it comes to social well-being, the political context in which the City of Courtenay is situated is complex. There are multiple government agencies located in close proximity within the Comox Valley having shared jurisdiction over the social determinants of health, including local government, health authorities, school districts, and First Nations.

Community and / or government led tables focused on social well-being are for the most part regional. However, each of the three municipalities as well as the three electoral areas, in the Comox Valley is unique. Courtenay, the largest community, is a hub for goods and services – including critical health and social services. The City feels issues in these areas acutely, yet they are not always at regional planning or decision-making tables.

In order to arrive at the best solutions in this multijurisdictional context, all levels of government must work together and with community leaders who are championing activity to achieve social well-being. The current experience in the Comox Valley is that while planning efforts are underway, service agencies and local governments are in a reactionary place responding to crises with limited capacity; the need for connectivity, strong trusting working relationships, and integrated plans and efforts is high.

The number of individuals and groups engaged in activity to achieve social well-being in the Comox Valley is significant. In 2018, there were 191 registered non-profit organizations (NPOs) in the Comox Valley, 94 of which were in Courtenay.¹² These figures are likely higher today with the influx of population and increased social concerns. In addition to registered societies, several large service-focused non-registered coalitions or groups exist, primarily focused on the provision of immediate temporary relief to address basic social needs. Gaps as well as overlaps in the service are observed as well as thematic issues (i.e. growing rather than decreasing need, coupled with limited capacity and funding for service provision). A fulsome map of assets at these the tables and within the broader community does not exist.

Many of the same local government and community-based leaders participate in multiple tables and are questioning their unique identity and role, and the extent to which they are best able to support this work. These observations point to the need for a framework and an action plan – one that clarifies the City's roles, responsibilities and priorities and plan of action as it relates to this multi-jurisdictional and complex service provider network. Minimally within that plan, a strategy is required to support, strengthen, and advance efforts at these tables towards community and social well-being.

¹² [Comox Valley's Vital Signs 2018](#), (Comox Valley Community Foundation, 2018)

Neighbourhood Networks Rationale

The establishment of neighbourhood networks has been one of the most successful and replicated municipal strategies to realize community and social well-being. Investing in relationships and strong neighbourhood networks are stated goals in the OCP,2022. Strong relationships in neighbourhoods have resulted in enhanced communications, community safety, accessibility, emergency preparedness, care of children and the elderly, and food security. Municipalities have benefitted not only by added capacity of community partners taking on issues that would otherwise come to local government, they have benefitted from improved communications with their communities and strengthened community engagement in the planning and development of local area parks, homes, recreation facilities, etc.¹³

Next Steps

Staff are proposing to utilize an ABCD health promotion approach to create, implement, and evaluate two strategies designed to strengthen relationships and increase community capacity and resilience. The data from the process as well as the strategies themselves will assist with fine tuning the framework and informing the creation of an integrated long-term action plan, defining the unique identity, roles, and priorities for the City of Courtenay.

Table 2: Proposed Community and Social Development Framework and Action Plan

Framework Foundation (Our Unique Approach)	City Role & Responsibility (Our Unique Self)	Strategies & Outcomes	Fit with OCP
Asset Based Community Development	Building Relationships around Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convening • Visioning • Asset mapping • Linking assets • Pollinating ideas 	Neighbourhood Network Strategy (Consider a pilot with planning activities) Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened relationships • Increased neighbourhood capacity and resilience • Enhanced communications • Alignment of city plans and policy with community aspirations and needs 	Goals, Directions, Approach Policies: Part C- SI 6,7, 21, 24
Health Promotion/ Determinants of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilizing community action towards systems change • Reorienting services • Creating healthy public policy • Building supportive environments 	Better Together Strategy (Support/facilitate capacity building and coordination of community based social service providers) Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened relationships/trust • Increased Capacity • -Enhanced communications • Map of assets, linkages between assets 	Goals, Directions. Approach Policies Part C SI 1,6,7

¹³ Introducing New Operating Government Models for Local Government (Nesta, September, 2020)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map of community action • Mobilization of collective upstream action 	
--	--	---	--

Timeline

Since January, 2024, substantial activity has been underway to advance the development of a CSD framework and plan. Activity has focused on relationship building - engaging with service providers in the community and with internal staff, with a view to understanding and illuminating the local landscape of activity (as well as policies and infrastructure) to support community and social well-being. Activity has also included substantial document research and consultation with experts in the field working at municipal, provincial and federal levels.

The next steps of this project will occur in five distinct phases commencing September, 2024 and having a completion date of later summer, early fall 2026.

Image 4: Proposed Timeline

Project Timeline



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

- S1 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 has established a Community Development Coordinator position to oversee the proposed work. The department has earmarked one-time funding of \$110,000 in the operating budget to support the creation of a community and social development framework and action plan. The funds will be used to procure the resources necessary to support planning, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed initiatives and completion of the framework. Staff will also be pursuing grant opportunities as they arise and are in alignment with the work being undertaken.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

Recreation, Culture, and Community Services will lead the development of the Community and Social Development framework and action plan, alongside community and partners. Staff anticipate significant coordination with Development Services - particularly with the Neighbourhood Network strategy. The project will likely engage other City departments such as Communications, and Infrastructure and Environmental Engineering, once the strategies are more fully developed.

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

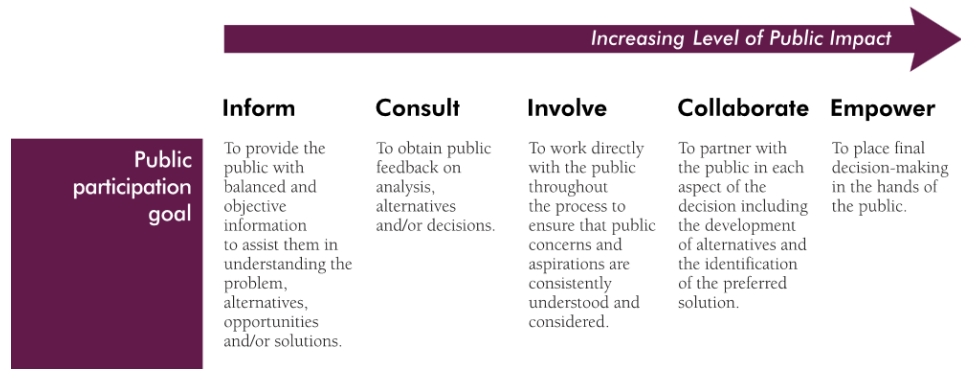
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

This work will explore ways the City can deepen and strengthen its relationship with community, with the understanding that building relationships strengthens trust, capacity, and resilience, and can play an important role in restoring an eroding social contract.

This work, will not involve the typical broad informative or consultative survey. Feedback to date from community partners includes the sentiment that the City and region has the information it needs through already completed work (such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Substance Use Strategy, Resident

Satisfaction Survey, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, OCP, etc) to proceed into collective action and framework development. As such, staff will focus efforts on deepening community engagement through specific place-based strategies for neighbourhood network activation and through collaborative tables to support capacity and coordination amongst service providers. To augment the community voice that will come through strategy development and implementation, staff will examine and integrate the broader community voice relative to community and social development that has already been collected through existing City and regional plans and strategies.

Staff will follow the continuum of public participation from inform through to collaborate based on each particular stage and type of work based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



© International Association for Public Participation www.iap2.org

OPTIONS:

1. 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.
2. THAT Council provide alternate direction.

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