

OUR CITY. OUR FUTURE.

What We Heard

Youth Engagement Forums



ST. JOHN'S

January 2023

Context

One of the recommendations in the Youth Engagement Strategy which Council approved in Oct. 2022 was to create more youth-focused events such as youth forums, live youth events on social media, and 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.

The Youth Engagement Working Group received approval from Council in July 2022, to host one in-person youth forum and two virtual forums 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 is may impact their experience living in St. John's.

Forum 1 - October 18th

The Youth Engagement Working Group hosted a Youth Forum at City Hall on Tuesday October 18th.

Twenty-nine youth participated in round table discussions with Mayor Breen, Councillor Bruce, Director of Economic Development, Culture, & Partnerships Elizabeth Lawrence, Sustainability Coordinator Edmundo Fausto, and Metrobus CEO Judy Powell.

The topics discussed were Sustainability, Entrepreneurship & Economic Development, and Public Transit.

Questions Topic 1: Sustainability

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 else did you hear? What questions came up? What do people need to more information about or want to talk about?

Question 1 - Concerns

- 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 around the water shed

Question 2: Tangible Actions

- Make changes for new builds and retrofit existing
- Increase composting in the City
 - Opportunity for volunteers to maintain
 - Interest in more information sessions, especially for indoor composting
- Increase the frequency of recycling pickups and have it available in apartments
- Plant fruit trees
- More electric 24-hour chargers
- Advocate for low low-carbon products
- Improve infrastructure for megastorms
- Investigate or educate about landfill gases for energy
- Initiate collaboration with the Province on energy generation

Question 3: 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

Question 4- 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

Questions about Entrepreneurship, Economic Development and Affordability

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?

Question 1: 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)

Question 2: 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

Question 3: 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

Questions about Public Transit

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?

Question 1: 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

Question 2: Tangible 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
- Driver Training

Question 3: What else?

- 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.

Forum 2 – November 29th

The Youth Engagement Working Group hosted a Virtual Youth Forum via Zoom on Tuesday November 29th.

Fifteen youth participated in round table 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.

Questions about Parks, Trails & Open Spaces

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?

Question 1- 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

Questions 2 & 3: 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

Question 4: Priorities

- More promotion of the City as a special location for open spaces in social/online/website; use Instagram to show what's happening in parks and open spaces
- Volunteer program for community clean up, possibly in high schools (volunteer hours)

Questions About Arts & Culture

- 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?

Question 1 – 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

Question 2: 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

Question 4: Priorities

- 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

Questions on Active Transportation

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?

Question 1 – 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’

Question 2 & 3 – 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

Question 4 – Priorities?

- Increase the number of routes available – very positive reactions to the newly announced Canada Games Route on Elizabeth Avenue
- Ensure that designated routes are safe for all pedestrians year round
- Encourage more cycling and alternate modes of transportation – this could include the city developing a bike sharing/rental program (e.g., NYC Citi Bikes)
- Add cycling infrastructure (e.g., Bike Racks) to existing City mapping tools

What's Next?

- The Youth Engagement Working Group will host its final event on Jan. 26th to discuss what they heard, learn more about what the City already has planned to address some of these issues, and then prepare a report with recommendations for Council.