

Connected Communities: Asset-Based Community Development

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Community Development Committee recommend that Council direct Administration to:

- 1) Develop and share materials based on Asset-Based Community Development principles with relevant City services working with communities and external organizations to better connect residents and communities; and
- 2) Refer a budget request as outlined in the Service and Financial Implications section of this report to be considered as part of the 2024 Adjustments to the Service Plans and Budgets and be included in the Standing Executive Committee Item – Strategic Discussion on Building and Delivering on Plans and Budgets; and then if approved, provide funding to a community-based organization to promote and implement an Asset-Based Community Development approach.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this report is to respond to a [Notice of Motion on 2022 November 15 \(EC2022-1249\)](#) to “bring a report through the Community Development Committee no later than Q2 2023 that explores utilizing an Asset-Based Community Development approach.”
- This relationship-driven approach focuses on identifying and mobilizing assets in the community, including individual residents, local groups and institutions, physical assets, community culture and traditions, which can be an important tool in fostering community connection and meet residents’ shared objectives.
- The City’s Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator and Community Social Worker programs are two well-established City-led programs that promote connection and belonging among residents by building on existing skills and assets. This report recommends a third initiative that will be delivered by a community-based organization to further promote resident-led approaches to community building.
- **What does this mean to Calgarians?** The recommendations better equip Calgarians to create opportunities and respond to local needs and challenges. Calgarians would have additional resources at the community level to increase knowledge and share skills, increase leadership capacity, strengthen social connections, and in turn enhance their sense of belonging, civic participation, community economic development opportunities, and reduce crime.
- **Why does this matter?** The recommendations in this report will support Calgarians to build strong community connections, many of which have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

How is Asset-Based Community Development being used in Calgary?

The City and community organizations in Calgary already utilize the principles of the Asset-Based Community Development approach to help build more connected communities.

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This allows residents and organizations to focus on their strengths and identify ways they can harness their skills, time, and talent. To varying degrees, the principles of Asset-Based Community Development have been successfully integrated at The City of Calgary in the Neighbourhood Support service line through two community-based programs:

- i) a universal Neighbourhood Partnership Coordinator program to support all Community Associations throughout the city; and
- ii) a targeted Community Social Work program in select communities where there is the greatest opportunity to create positive change, as determined, in part, by the Calgary Equity Index.

How would the recommendations build on the current Asset-Based Community Development approach in Calgary?

Administration is recommending implementing a third approach to complement the well-established neighbourhood work of our universal and our targeted programs. Both programs are, and will continue to be, delivered by City of Calgary staff, and this third approach would be delivered by a community-based organization, with funding from The City. This additional initiative has two implementation components (Recommendation 1 and 2), to complement The City's current service offerings in communities.

Community groups such as Community Associations, see value in the Asset-Based Community Development approach and see opportunities for enhancing how it is currently used. However, most community groups do not have the capacity or volunteer membership to take on a community initiative without additional training and/or funding. Community and non-profit organizations currently face challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers. The recommendations in this report address these challenges by providing resources to support local community involvement by individuals and community organizations.

- **Information Sharing:** The City would develop and share materials with community organizations on how to implement an Asset-Based Community Development approach in their communities. Materials would also be shared with relevant City services to increase understanding and awareness of the approach for staff working in community. This work will be undertaken with existing resources.
- **Capacity Building and Community Connectors:** The City would financially support one community-based organization for two deliverables. The first would be to build and support capacity and provide training to other community groups. The second would be to hire up to 10 community connectors who will work with community-based groups. Community Connectors are residents who take on leadership roles to build new and existing relationships in the community and create a social network and natural support systems within their local area. Financial compensation increases the likelihood that these positions are filled and valued appropriately. Administration has been successfully engaging Community Connectors through the Community Hubs Initiative, in partnership with The United Way of Calgary and Area. There would be a budget implication for this work, as detailed in the Service and Financial Implications section below.

The recommendations in this report provide organizations with resources to improve their state of readiness to hire community connectors, which should enable a wider range of community organizations to take part in community-based initiatives. Administration will evaluate and report

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back the findings to support decisions on if, or how, this approach should proceed after 2026. The evaluation would also determine Calgary-specific outcomes and support continuous improvement within the program.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required |

Administration reached out to community organizations to explore their perceptions of, and experiences with, the Asset-Based Community Development approach. A survey asked organizations what support was needed to implement the approach, what challenges or barriers might be involved and any Calgary-specific considerations to be aware of. Administration also hosted an internal workshop for City staff with an Asset thought-leader in 2023 March.

The recommendations of this report were informed by the feedback received through the community consultation.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

Providing Calgarians with additional support at the community level to shape and nurture civic participation can lead to increased involvement in relevant City programs and services. It can also lead to communities feeling more supported by their local government while increasing social inclusion, improved social connections, increased leadership capacity among residents, community economic development opportunities, and reduced crime in Calgary.

Environmental

Not applicable.

Economic

By providing Calgarians with additional training, support, and removing systemic barriers to participation, The City is supporting the Council-approved Resilience Strategy which embraces participation for all Calgarians. Providing these supports for volunteers also meets the outcomes around social inclusion and economic participation that increases their skills, confidence, capacity, and sense of community. Strong, connected communities are vibrant and attractive to business.

Service and Financial Implications

Other:

Recommendation 1 can be undertaken with existing financial resources.

Recommendation 2 has budgetary implications. This report recommends a budget request to be referred to the 2024 Adjustments to the Service Plans and Budgets and be included in the

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Standing Executive Committee Item – Strategic Discussion on Building and Delivering on Plans and Budgets. The budget request will include:

- One-time budget of up to \$1,222,000 annually for 2024 and 2025 to build and support capacity and provide training to community-based organizations; and to hire up to 10 community connectors delivered by, or working with, other community-based organizations.

RISK

Discussions with community organizations identified limited volunteer capacity and lack of knowledge to implement the Asset-Based Community Development approach. This could result in little to no interest from community members in taking up the recommendations outlined in this report. To mitigate this risk, Administration is recommending training, capacity building, and funding to increase the state of readiness for community organizations. In addition, the community connector portion of the program is voluntary to allow the community organizations that have sufficient capacity to opt in.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Les Tochor (A/Chief Financial Officer and General Manager)	Corporate Planning and Financial Services	Inform