

Community Services Briefing to

Executive Committee

2024 October 02

ISC: UNRESTRICTED

EC2024-1096

Council Innovation Fund Greater Forest Lawn Governance Report Back

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

This briefing reports on the deliverables, costs, and results of the Council Innovation Fund for Greater Forest Lawn Governance and Communications Model Project.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

On December 16, 2019, Council approved a Council Innovation Fund application sponsored by Councillor Carra (PFC2019-1464) to pilot a governance and communications model in the communities of Greater Forest Lawn.

Project description

The Council Innovation Fund application was approved to support:

- Community governance model: A pilot project to collaborate with residents, organized community groups, institutions, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses. This multi-community group would then work with an expert in local governance and community development to create a Terms of Reference and community governance model with the goal that these communities can more directly participate in planning and decision-making that influences City development projects in their neighbourhoods.
- Communications: Engagement and effective communication with residents and interested parties to ensure meaningful interaction and equitable representation of all citizens in Greater Forest Lawn.

To meet these objectives the project planned for:

- An expert specializing in local governance and community development to run community conversations to help draft a Terms of Reference and community governance model for Greater Forest Lawn;
- Multilingual, multiplatform communications;
- Community Connectors: funding to support paid community members to provide equitable and inclusive community representation in community conversations; and,
- Community Brokers: local residents employed through a nonprofit agency to initiate connections and provide residents additional ways to participate.

Due to the challenges of doing this work during the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate priorities of the communities at that time, a community governance model was not developed for ongoing implementation. However, many of the other intended outcomes of this project were achieved. Community research and consultation undertaken by researchers at the University of Calgary was successful in identifying and executing approaches to community conversations. In addition, several City projects worked together to communicate and engage with a wide diversity of residents in these communities to achieve broader community participation and input. Furthermore, and unrelated to this project, a Community Connectors program was implemented through The City's Community Social Work program. \$227,000 was approved for the Greater Forest Lawn Governance and Communications Model project and \$75,530 was spent, leaving \$151,470 available for other Council Innovation Fund projects.

Project deliverables

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was restarted in January 2022 with an adjusted project plan that leveraged two other City projects operating in the Greater Forest Lawn area (Forest Lawn Multi-service Centre and Greater Forest Lawn Communities Local Area Plan) for testing communications and governance ideas. The updated project plan also considered the pandemic's social and economic impacts on residents and communities.

The City actioned several approaches to external communications and engagement in partnership with the Multi-service Centre and Local Area Plan teams to encourage participation from residents and groups that may not traditionally be aware of or involved in City projects. For example, the project co-hosted an event with Antyx Community Arts Society for Forest Lawn Multi-service Centre engagement, translated engagement and communications materials into several languages, provided incentives such as gift cards to encourage participation in project engagement activities, and created a Greater Forest Lawn City projects webpage on Calgary.ca.

The *Track Two Diplomacy – Facilitated Discourse for the Greater Forest Lawn Governance and Communication model*, which was led by a team of researchers from the University of Calgary, recruited diverse participants for a series of cross-sector conversations. Informal diplomacy techniques were used to facilitate contact and broker trust by enabling participants to jointly assess and solve municipal problems across sectors, interests, and identities. Two formal sets of dialogues were held (including four community conversations and two problem-solving dialogues) and over 100 informal preparatory conversations. The key themes that emerged were:

- The need to reimagine how The City and residents communicate;
- Volunteer capacity issues and disconnection between resources available and community need;
- The need for the economic diversity and external appeal of Greater Forest Lawn communities to increase; and,
- Programmatic gaps, service gaps and maintenance concerns in the Greater Forest Lawn area.

These themes will continue to be addressed through The City's ongoing neighbourhood and engagement work in the area. As per the agreement between The City and the University of Calgary, the summary report of the consultant's findings is shared in Attachment 1.

Some planned deliverables for this project were fulfilled by other City projects. For example, the Community Social Work program developed a Community Connectors program which is active in Greater Forest Lawn Communities. These Community Connectors are local residents, paid by The City and other agencies, who initiate connections and provide residents with a way to participate. In addition, the Building Connected Communities project presents opportunities for communities and organizations to host Community Connectors starting in fall 2024.

Project impact and lessons learned

Due to the protracted timeline of this project and the shift in community priorities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this project did not develop a community governance model of community representation for Greater Forest Lawn. However, it did prototype a new governance process described in Attachment 1 which was well-received by participants; built trust and connection across diverse communities, sectors, and perspectives; and led to concrete outcomes as outlined above. The facilitated dialogue process was assertively inclusive in its recruitment, which allowed residents and The City to hear from previously unheard voices in the community. By deploying a third party to apply informal, facilitated dialogues, it created a sense of authenticity, credibility and residents saw value in jointly stewarding talk to action. There is an opportunity to apply a similar approach to future City of Calgary projects in Greater Forest Lawn or other communities. For example, the Greater Forest Lawn local area planning project used a co-hosting method for their Creating Cultural Connections sessions that aligns with Track Two diplomacy techniques.

ATTACHMENT

1. Attachment 1 – Track Two Diplomacy Report – EC2024-1096

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General Manager Katie Black concurs with the information in this Briefing.