



# City of Richmond

## Report to Committee

**To:** Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee      **Date:** November 15, 2023

**From:** Elizabeth Ayers, General Manager, Community Services      **File:** 11-7375-02

**Re:** **2023 Community Services Community Needs Assessment Study**

### Staff Recommendation

That the findings and recommendations outlined in the staff report titled “2023 Community Services Community Needs Assessment Study”, dated November 15, 2023, from the General Manager, Community Services, be received for information.

Elizabeth Ayers  
 General Manager, Community Services  
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REPORT CONCURRENCE		
<b>ROUTED TO:</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE</b>	<b>CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER</b>
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW</b>	<b>INITIALS:</b> 	<b>APPROVED BY CAO</b> 

## Staff Report

### Origin

As part of the 2019 City budget, Council approved funding for the Community Services Division (the Division) to conduct a Community Needs Assessment. Due to the pandemic, the implementation of the project was delayed until the fall of this year. The Division has conducted three previous community level needs assessments in 2001, 2009 and 2015 to support parks, recreation and cultural services planning and delivery. These studies allow the City to consider resident perspectives in the context of current and projected population and demographic information, current and emerging behaviour trends related to parks, recreation and culture, and identify needs across segments of the population, to subsequently inform responsive future planning efforts.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #1 Proactive in Stakeholder and Civic Engagement:

*Proactive stakeholder and civic engagement to foster understanding and involvement and advance Richmond's interests.*

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #6 A Vibrant, Resilient and Active Community:

*Vibrant, resilient and active communities supported by a wide variety of opportunities to get involved, build relationships and access resources.*

This report supports the five Focus Areas and actions from the City of Richmond Wellness Strategy 2018-2023, and the seven Focus Areas and actions from the Recreation and Sport Strategy 2019-2024.

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the findings from the study and outline recommendations, and next steps.

### Analysis

#### Background

The 2023 Community Needs Assessment study (the Study) provides an enhanced and in-depth understanding of resident perspectives on the Division's programs, services and facilities. The objectives of the Study are to highlight areas of strengths and where the Division is doing well in meeting needs of the community and to shed light on unmet needs, gaps in services and programs, and areas requiring improvement to support parks, recreation, cultural and library services' planning and delivery.

Key research focus areas of the Study include:

1. Usage of programs and services, and perceptions of quality, accessibility and inclusion;
2. Awareness and relevance of Community Services programs and services; and
3. Impact and contribution of programs and services to well-being.

### Methodology

To inform a comprehensive understanding of community needs and inform actions that the Division may take to enhance community well-being through its programs, services and facilities, information from the community was collected using three methodologies:

1. One thousand (1,000) Richmond residents participated in a phone survey, which was the primary tool used to solicit insights from the community. The survey, offered in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, was conducted over the period of February 16 – March 13, 2023. The representative survey sample of 1,000 residents reflected the community's 2021 Census Profile and considered demographic factors, such as area of residence in Richmond, age, gender, and primary language spoken at home.
2. Five hundred and four (504) residents completed an online survey hosted on Let's Talk Richmond. The survey was available in English, and simplified and traditional Chinese, available from February 16 – March 13, 2023.
3. Fifty two (52) participants attended one of eight focus groups held over April 25 – 27, 2023. Focus groups were conducted to supplement the community-wide phone survey and were targeted to recent immigrants, adults aged 55+, and adults aged 18 to 54 years, with the intent of better understanding what prevents non-users from participating in Community Service's offerings and to identify unmet needs. The sessions were conducted in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Translation services in diverse languages were also available.

Additionally, a review of relevant documents, policy, administrative data and existing literature was conducted to place the results in a wider City and socio-demographic context.

### Communication and Recruitment

The communication and recruitment approach to the study aimed to achieve inclusive and representative community participation throughout the data collection and communication process. Communication efforts to inform and promote these engagement opportunities to the community included a project webpage, news release, newspaper advertisements (in English and Chinese language papers), multi-language posters, a segment in the Community Services e-newsletter, social media posts, reader boards at community centres, digital bus shelter advertisements, and outreach through stakeholder groups.

Community association/societies were invited to provide input on the online survey, supported the promotion of the phone survey and assisted in identifying and recruiting participants for the focus groups.

With the goal to connect with harder to reach groups and ensure diverse voices were represented, focus group recruitment also involved active outreach and leveraging partnerships with community partner organizations that support more vulnerable communities. In an effort to make participation low-barrier, arrangements were made to provide participants with taxi vouchers and interpreters for

their preferred language. Also, Community association/societies provided parking passes and free childminding services to support participation.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

The findings and considerations are a compilation of data collected from the phone survey, comments received through Let's Talk Richmond, and focus group conversations, which allowed staff to delve more deeply into stories and circumstances, particularly of vulnerable residents.

The insights shared by all participants through this Study are invaluable to understanding community need, optimizing future planning and addressing potential gaps. The provided recommendations seek to increase the impact and reach of the Division as population growth, changing demographics and cityscape, and evolving behaviour trends and patterns continually influence the community. As well, in many instances, recommendations build and/or expand on initiatives and practices already being undertaken to address the gaps and areas of improvement raised.

The main findings, considerations and recommendations from the Study for each of the three focus areas are presented below. The first section summarizes insights for the Division, followed by a section focused on Library Services.

### Community Services Findings and Recommendations

#### **Focus Area 1: Usage of programs and services, and perceptions of quality, accessibility, and inclusion**

##### *1. Strengths*

1.1 Overall usage levels are high and residents make excellent use of the Division's facilities, programs and services:

- 98.9 per cent of residents are using a service at least once a year, 93.4 per cent once a month, and 83.7 per cent at least once per week (whether recreation, sport, parks, arts, culture, heritage or library programs).
- Community centres, fitness and aquatic facilities, casual physical activities (swimming and skating), and special events and festivals are among the most frequently used offerings.

1.2 Given that participation levels are high, it is not surprising that the percentage of respondents that reported an actual or perceived barrier to their participating is relatively low:

- 90 per cent indicated that they do *not* experience any barriers to participation in facilities or programs due to a disability.

1.3 Residents feel Community Services places and spaces are welcoming and inclusive:

- 77 per cent of residents indicated that they felt welcome at programs, services and facilities.
- 84 per cent noted that the Division's programs and spaces enhance social connections between Richmond residents.

2. *Considerations*

2.1 Lower use of the Division's programs, services and facilities was found among:

- 16–24 year olds.
- Residents who are not primary English or Mandarin speakers.
- Lower income households (earning less than \$50,000 per year).

2.2 Although there is little indication of barriers to participation, 10 per cent of respondents did note experiencing barriers to participation in facilities or programs due to a disability.

2.3 Items impacting the ability to participate in programs, facilities and activities, noted by residents include:

- Lack of personal time or being too busy (53 per cent), was most commonly cited by residents as the primary reason for not being able to participate in programs or activities, or utilize facilities.
- Community centre membership policies, more specifically, only being able to use one's membership at a predetermined location, was noted as a limitation.
- The capacity of popular programs offered at prime times.

3. *Recommendations:*

3.1 Undertake additional consultation with segments of the population that have lower usage levels: 16–24 year olds, residents who are not primary English or Mandarin speakers and lower income households (earning less than \$50,000 per year), to support planning efforts.

3.2 Explore program and service delivery options to find innovative ways to expand capacity for high-demand and/or popular programs.

3.3 Continue to review, maintain and invest in Community Services infrastructure in alignment with population growth and cityscape changes over time to support accessible spaces and places, and protect highly used and valued City amenities.

3.4 Investigate innovative ways to increase physical activity, support health and well-being outcomes, and improve understanding of these outcomes among groups indicating lack of time as a barrier.

- Collaborate with the Community Social Development Department on the evaluation of the Recreation Fee Subsidy Program to determine ways to increase awareness, improve processes and assess eligibility requirements and thresholds to support lower income households.
- Review membership rules and policies, explore options that support the removal of barriers, enhance access to facilities and programs, and improve flexibility.
- Develop and regularly review divisional and departmental key metrics to inform planning and decision making (e.g., establishing maintenance standards).

3.5 Explore options to improve access for users who may have accessibility challenges.

**Focus Area 2: Awareness and relevance of Community Services programs and services***1. Strengths*

- 1.1 Both printed and digital sources are being utilized by residents to find information about Community Services programs, events and activities:
- The City's website (68 per cent) is the most popular source of information.
  - 41 per cent of respondents indicated they turn to the local English language newspapers for information.
  - 35 per cent noted they look to facility specific program brochures for information.
- 1.2 The Division's program, services and facilities are, for the most part, relevant and meeting the needs of the community:
- 75 per cent of survey respondents noted that the programs they participated in during the past year met their and their household's needs.

*2. Considerations*

- 2.1 Usage percentage levels indicate there is an opportunity to do more to build awareness, and further enhance promotion and information sharing:
- Residents would like to have more information that is readily accessible, that is information that "comes at them" rather than them having to seek and source information.
- 2.2 Although the Division is doing well in meeting the needs of residents, differences in needs were observed for select age groups and demographic characteristics:
- Recent immigrants are seeking more opportunities that have a specific focus on meeting new people, engaging with their neighbours and learning about the community.
  - Adults under 55 years-old feel "left out" and programs are not aligned with their needs. They are looking for more diverse and expanded program opportunities.
  - Parents with young children would like to see children's activities offered at the same time and location as their adult activities.
  - Residents would like to see more variety and higher quality of arts programming, exhibits, and performances.

*3. Recommendations*

- 3.1 Explore ways to enhance social media presence and digital marketing campaigns as well as determine appropriate use of print methods to broaden the reach of communication and marketing efforts. Adapt awareness building initiatives in alignment with community need.
- 3.2 Evaluate divisional and departmental marketing and communication activities, and initiatives to improve coordination, cross-promotion, effectiveness and outreach.
- 3.3 Review and build evaluation mechanisms to track effectiveness of communication and marketing initiatives, and strategies.

- 3.4 Undertake additional consultation to better understand program needs of adults under the age of 55, families with young children and needs for arts programming, exhibits, and performances.
- 3.5 Collaborate with the Community Social Development Department to determine ways to foster social connections for immigrants seeking opportunities to meet new people, engage with their neighbours and learn about the community.

### **Focus Area 3: Impact and contribution of programs and services to well-being**

#### *1. Strengths*

- 1.1 Residents recognize the value and contribution of the Division's programs, services, and facilities, to personal development and well-being as well as to their households. The top three individual benefits cited by respondents include:
  - Improved health or increased physical activity (76 per cent).
  - Improved skills and abilities (38 per cent).
  - Learning something new (30 per cent).
- 1.2 A high percentage of residents recognize that Community Services programs, services and facilities play a beneficial role in, and are important to achieving personal benefits and benefits across the broader community:
  - 90 per cent of respondents indicated that they strongly agree or agree that Community Services programs and spaces enhance the community's well-being.
  - 80 per cent of residents felt that Community Services programs and spaces provide important opportunities for children and youth to socialize.
  - 83 per cent indicated that Community Services programs and spaces provide good opportunities for older people in the community to stay connected or engaged.

#### *2. Considerations*

- 2.1 Residents re-affirmed the value and impacts of the significant work that transpires through the Division, however there is an opportunity for the Division to do more to build awareness of the contributions of its programs, services and facilities, and benefits to the community.

#### *3. Recommendations*

- 3.1 Inject a renewed focus on promoting the benefits of participating in Community Services programs, services and facilities in communication and marketing efforts.

### **Library Services Findings and Recommendations**

#### **Focus Area 1: Usage of programs and services, and perceptions of quality, accessibility and inclusion**

##### *1. Strengths*

- 1.1 The library is open seven days per week from Monday to Sunday, with weekday hours being 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. and weekend hours being 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., at all locations:

- The library maintains some of the best operational hours in the province.
- Many focus group respondents indicated the library was their favourite community service space.
- Focus group respondents indicated they would like to use the library more often.

1.2 The Library provides strong support for new comers and non-English speakers in collections, services and programs:

- Library users who spoke English and Chinese noted that they do not experience barriers to participation in library services or programs.
- Among focus group participants who are new to Canada, the library was one of their first stops to learn more about their new home.

## 2. *Considerations*

2.1 Residents who primarily use languages other than English, Cantonese or Mandarin at home were 50 per cent more likely to wish libraries were easier to use.

## 3. *Recommendations*

3.1 Consider expanding services and collections and explore diversifying digital content to include more languages to meet the needs of residents who primarily use languages other than English, Cantonese or Mandarin at home.

3.2 Assess avenues to better identify, for the community, the dialects and languages spoken by staff that can assist in removing barriers to access.

3.3 Explore options to expand the multilingual collection when space planning for new library facilities.

3.4 Determine how to simplify access for non-English speakers and newcomers as part of the Richmond Public Library website priority project for 2024.

## **Focus Area 2: Awareness and relevance of programs and services**

### 1. *Strengths:*

1.1 Overall usage levels are strong and residents visit the Richmond libraries with regular frequency:

- Survey respondents aged 16–24 years were most likely to visit the library over any other age cohort and more than other Community Services areas.
- Borrowing library materials (75 per cent), holds pick up (32 per cent) and attending events and programs (11 per cent) are among the most frequently used library services.

1.2 Richmond libraries are recognized as knowledge repositories, information hubs and safe spaces that are both welcoming and inclusive:

- Across community centres and libraries, 77 per cent of residents indicated that they felt welcome at programs, services and facilities.



## 2. *Considerations*

2.1 58 per cent of phone respondents indicated they visited at least one Richmond library location at least once in the last year and 29 per cent indicated they visited the library at least once per week or more.

## 3. *Recommendations:*

3.1 Usage and visitation percentages indicate there is room for growth and improvement:

- Assess how to improve communication and marketing strategies to expand the library's reach to residents who may not be aware of the diverse range of services available at the library.
- Explore practical service solutions that can be implemented to make it easier for our community to use the library more.
- Prioritize collection enhancements in physical books and digital content in response to community suggestions.
- Assess service models for facilities including extended evening, weekend and holiday hours.
- Explore options to improve access for users who may have accessibility challenges.
- Identify cross-promotion opportunities with other Community Services offerings for 16–24 year old's, given that this cohort already uses the library extensively, which could support increased participation by this group in other Community Services programs, services and facilities.

### **Focus Area 3: Impact and contribution of programs and services to well-being**

#### 1. *Strengths:*

1.1 Richmond libraries are recognized as vibrant and evolving centres of community life.

Research shows that intangible values can be tied to public libraries, including:

- As a place or centre of community, and contributes to the overall provision of community empowerment and development.
- Plays a pivotal role in providing access to social and cultural well-being.
- Enhances cultural understanding, and upholds democratic values by providing a central location where residents can equally meet across demography and culture.
- Supports values of equity, diversity, and inclusion through programs and collections.

#### 2. *Considerations and Recommendations:*

2.1 Consider developing new programs and policies to support the library's key role in creating a safe space for community to engage in dialogue about divisive topics, and to advocate for intellectual freedom and freedom of speech.

2.2 Explore avenues of funding to support continued collaboration with the City in expanding *Community Services Pop Ups* to connect more residents in need with the appropriate community resources and supports.

2.3 Work to pursue new partnerships to ensure user awareness of available social services in our community to continue to serve all residents, including the most vulnerable.

2.4 Assess co-location of social services or volunteer organizations with, or even within libraries when planning for new facilities.

### **Community Services Next Steps**

Following this information gathering phase, next steps entail sharing and disseminating learnings, and exploring avenues to advance the recommendations, including but not limited to:

- Continue to assess the data collected to further learnings.
- Develop a communication plan to disseminate and share the findings of this study with the community, key stakeholders and Community Services delivery partners (e.g., workshops, printed material, presentations, etc.).
- Develop guides and resources to ensure staff and encourage partners to become familiar with the findings to support planning and decision-making, and to address identified needs.
- Develop implementation strategies and actions plans for the recommendations to enhance the understanding, integration, and development of strategies/initiatives to act upon the findings and recommendations.
- Collaborate with community partners and community stakeholders to strategize and find ways to meet the needs of the community.

A summary of findings will be shared and made available to residents via the City's website.

### **Library Services Next Steps**

The recommendations made from the Study will be used to inform future library collections, services and program planning and help to highlight areas where gaps in services may exist. To advance the recommendations, next steps will include:

- Employ data to inform the Library's 2023 Strategic Planning currently in progress.
- Develop collection resources to further enhance community development, empowerment and cultural understanding.
- Widen the use of library spaces through new community partnerships to increase safe gatherings, promote awareness of available social services and to support well-being.
- Work with the City to align enhancements to marketing and communication.

A link on the Richmond Public Library's website to the summary of findings will be made available to residents through the City's website.

### **Financial Impact**

None.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the Community Services Community Needs Assessment highlight that residents value and benefit from the plethora of quality recreation, sport, parks, arts, culture, heritage and library programs, services and facilities. It also emphasizes and affirms their role and contribution to individual and community health and well-being, enhancing quality of life, and supporting a more active, creative, and connected community. Staff will proceed with the preparation and implementation of actions to advance the next steps outlined.



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