



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee **Date:** April 5, 2017

From: Serena Lusk, Senior Manager, Recreation and Sport Services **File:** 11-7000-01/2017-Vol 01

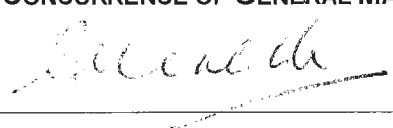


Re: **Supporting Vertical Parenting in Richmond's City Centre**

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled, "Supporting Vertical Parenting in Richmond's City Centre," dated April 5, 2017, from the Senior Manager, Recreation and Sport Services, be received for information.



Serena Lusk
Senior Manager, Recreation and Sport Services
(604-233-3344)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Community Social Development Parks Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO 

Staff Report

Origin

The City of Richmond is part of Richmond Children First (RCF), a group that brings together public and non-profit agencies with a focus on the well-being of children in Richmond. A sub-group of the RCF applied for, and was awarded, a grant from the United Way of the Lower Mainland for the Avenues of Change program in the amount of \$281,995 (disbursed between 2015 and 2018). The Avenues of Change program is designed to reduce the vulnerabilities of children from birth to age six.

In Richmond, the grant money is being used to fund research and programs to aid families living in apartments in Richmond's City Centre. The first phase of this project – focus group interviews – is complete and is the subject of this report.

This report supports Council's 2014-2018 Term Goal #2 A Vibrant, Active and Connected City:

Continue the development and implementation of an excellent and accessible system of programs, services, and public spaces that reflect Richmond's demographics, rich heritage, diverse needs, and unique opportunities, and that facilitate active, caring, and connected communities.

This report supports the Social Development Strategy Strategic Direction 4: Help Richmond's Children, Youth and Families Thrive; Action 12. Seek opportunities to provide support for children and families through: (12.7) providing affordable and accessible child and family-friendly parks and recreation and cultural opportunities, including library programs & services.

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the results of the focus group interviews and identify how the City is responding.

Analysis

Background

Feelings of connectedness to one's community are cited as important factors in achieving good mental health as well as a city's overall vibrancy. Richmond's City Centre Avenues of Change engaged with parents/caregivers, living in the City Centre, to discuss issues around raising families in apartment buildings – often termed as 'vertical parenting'. Three rounds of focus groups conducted in 2016 provided comments around the following areas:

- General experiences of apartment living;
- Social connections;
- Recreation and outdoor play; and
- Services/programs available for families raising children in apartments in Richmond City Centre.

The majority of the 68 parents and caregivers that participated in the focus groups were immigrants, with 96 per cent of the participants identifying themselves as having Chinese heritage and 4 per cent as non-Chinese.

Focus Group Results

The focus group outcomes indicate that young families experience many benefits to living in apartments in City Centre. However, connecting with neighbours and enjoying a sense of community can be challenging, as is common in other major metropolitan cities around the world.

Green spaces, parks, indoor play spaces, community events and children's programs are cited as important avenues for both parents and children to meet and foster relationships, as get-togethers tend to occur outside of the home. This is consistent with other research that indicates that interacting with and supporting neighbours, attending community events and utilizing community programs are all key factors in having a sense of belonging and well-being.

The following section describes key findings from the focus groups and outlines City plans in place for addressing participants' concerns.

1. Experiences of Apartment Living

Most participants were extremely positive about their overall experiences of living in apartments in Richmond's City Centre. They enjoy easy access to local amenities (schools, community centres, library, parks, swimming pool, shopping malls, shops and restaurants) and convenient transportation. About half (46 per cent) of participants have no plan to move; less than a quarter (22 per cent) considered moving within two years.

2. Connections to Neighbours

The participants with a strong sense of community tend to be those who have lived in their buildings for several years. Connections are made to families with children of the same age often while participating in children's programs, attending community events and playing at parks. The social media site WeChat, also makes people feel more connected to each other.

However, connecting to neighbours proves challenging for the majority of participants. The short time spent in elevators and hallways with neighbours is a barrier to establishing deeper connections. Different languages and cultural backgrounds are also a barrier to establishing relationships. As apartment common areas and playgrounds are often empty, parents take their children to community parks and play spaces to connect with others.

Part of the Avenues of Change program involves developing a Neighbourhood Family Connectors Strategy. The goal of this Strategy is to connect parents of young children with each other and organizations providing programs and supports to young children and families. Community Services staff are working with Avenues of Change to ensure awareness of City programs and encourage involvement for families living in City Centre.

Recently, the City participated in a Learn N Share event by providing an introductory session on

Physical Literacy to a group of over 70 parents and children. This active, engaging session was well-received and reached an audience that can be difficult to reach with regular programs and sport activities.

3. *Green Spaces and Parks*

Parks and green spaces are highly valued. Many participants feel their children have good access to outdoor play spaces in City Centre and regularly visit parks. Popular places for outdoor children's activities include Minoru Park, Garden City Park and school playgrounds in City Centre. These outdoor spaces allow parents and children to connect and are very important, as these spaces are conducive to social interaction.

Some participants indicated that they prefer larger parks where they can have picnics and barbeques. They sometimes take special trips to visit the parks at Thompson, Steveston and Cambie. Many participants feel City Centre parks and playgrounds are too small for the high-density apartment population.

Participants' concerns over number and size of parks will be addressed as numerous parks and green spaces are in various stages of development. The City Centre Area Plan outlines that each resident should have a park within a 400 metre walking distance and as the population grows, so too will the number of parks in City Centre.

The neighbourhood and major parks that will be completed in the near future are as follows:

- Four neighbourhood parks in the Capstan Village:
 - A 4 acre park at Cambie Road and Hazelbridge Way that will include walkways, open lawn, a plaza, a rain garden, a children's playground, an off-leash dog park and public art. The park is under construction and Phase 1 will be completed in 2017.
 - A 2 acre park east of Hazelbridge Way and Sexsmith Road that is partially built that will include a water feature, garden and seating areas and a children's playground. The remaining park will be constructed along with a future phase of the adjacent development.
 - A future 2.5 acre park on No. 3 Road, just north of Capstan Way. It will be constructed along with the adjacent developments.
 - A future 2 acre park in the area southeast of Capstan Way and Sexsmith Road.
- Lansdowne Linear Park – a 10 metre wide strip along either side of Lansdowne Road west of No. 3 Road will be constructed as development occurs. The first section between Alderbridge Way and Cedarbridge Way is targeted for completion in 2017. It will include a small plaza, seating areas, rain garden with native planting and interactive public art that is also for playing on.
- A 38 acre waterfront park along the riverfront between Gilbert Road and the future extension of Browngate Road. The park is scheduled to be constructed beginning in 2024.

There are a number of future parks that have not yet been advanced for planning and design but are anticipated to be constructed by 2041 to address the future densification of City Centre:

- With the redevelopment of the Lansdowne Mall site, there will be a total of 10 acres of park and public open space. There is no schedule for the development at present.
- A 6 acre park on a City-owned property on Elmbridge Way just north of Westminster Highway in the Oval Village.
- A 1.8 acre park at Minoru Boulevard and Elmbridge Way.
- Enlarge Cook School Park to 1.48 acres.

4. Play Spaces and Programs for Infants/Toddlers

Participants commented that the play spaces within City Centre are good for older children but not great for toddlers, as they feel equipment is designed for older children. Participants want to have more playground equipment for toddlers in local parks.

The Parks Department will be incorporating a variety of designs for children's play areas in the parks and green spaces. Both traditionally manufactured play equipment and play environments comprised of natural material will be installed as appropriate. The play environments will be designed for children of all ages and abilities. The information derived from this study will be incorporated into the planning processes for City Centre play environments.

While participants highly value many of the children's programs offered in the community, they often find that the age range within the programs too wide; participants would prefer programs for babies and toddlers be separated out from preschoolers.

City Centre Community Centre partners with Vancouver Coastal Health to offer Baby Days, a free program, twice a week. Mandarin Fun and Cantonese Fun are also offered twice a week and directed towards toddlers. Additional infant/toddler programs are offered through the Brighthouse Library. City Centre staff will also be working towards scheduling a Parent and Tot drop-in play gym program on weekends to address working parents' schedules.

5. Indoor Play Spaces and Programs

While many participants value outdoor play, they take their children to do indoor activities when it is too wet and cold outside. Indoor play spaces are an important way for parents and children to connect during the fall and winter months. Free play spaces previously provided at the Richmond Centre Mall and the No. 3 Road McDonald's restaurant were popular and are missed since being removed.

Many participants indicated that they would like more indoor play spaces for children in City Centre, affordable fees and free parking. Children's programs and drop-in sessions were also valued but participants indicated that programs are often at capacity or that their busy lives mean their schedules do not line up with the program offerings.

City Centre Community Centre increased its preschool-age programming for the 2017 winter session and experienced full or near full participation rates. Mandarin Fun, Spanish Fun, French Fun and Reggio-inspired parent-tot classes are new programs geared to a range of preschool-age children. These programs are being offered on weeknights and during weekends. City Centre Community Centre and Lang Centre will also be expanding the preschool-age programs for the summer 2017 session.

In light of the focus groups' feedback, City Centre staff will also be working towards scheduling the Parent and Tot drop-in play gym on weekends, a low cost (\$1.40) drop-in program for young children. This will be in addition to the free Parent and Tot drop-in currently taking place on Tuesday evenings at Lang Centre, as well as the Creative Play drop-in (with a facilitator; \$3.15) at City Centre Community Centre offered four days a week.

To ensure programs are accessible to families, the City, in conjunction with its partners, has a Recreation Fee Subsidy Program available to low-income families who want to register for recreation programs.

In the fall of 2016, the City secured, through development, a new community centre in City Centre North which will contribute to the availability of programs for children and families in City Centre. The program for this facility also includes a "Children's Exploratorium," which is an indoor space that will be available for children's free play. This new facility is expected in 2021.

Response Summary

The City's response to the results of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. Work with the Avenues of Change program by providing information, assistance and expertise to the Neighbourhood Family Connectors program and its associated activities.
2. Continue to design and develop parks and open spaces according to the City Centre Area Plan, which meet a variety of needs including those of families with toddlers while considering the feedback from this research.
3. Adjust indoor programming in City Centre to increase the availability of programming at a low-cost and during a wider variety of times and days.
4. Continue to develop new facilities such as the planned City Centre North Community Centre to add to the inventory of programming spaces in City Centre.

Along with these specific actions, staff will continue to work with the Avenues of Change program and communicate to focus group participants and others involved in the program to ensure they are aware of the City's plans to meet their needs and those of all families in City Centre.

Financial Impact

None.

April 5, 2017

- 7 -

Conclusion

Parents/caregivers raising children in City Centre's apartments find it challenging to establish relationships with their neighbours or find a sense of connectedness. Parks, indoor play spaces, programs and community events are essential for bringing people together. While the participants indicate some service gaps, these concerns are interim in nature as staff can consider these needs in future planning and programming. The City has strong plans in place which, once fully developed, will address these concerns.



Angela Rai
Planner 1
(604-247-4924)