

*This Youth Engagement Strategy was co-created by the City of Campbell River, and Sustainable Cities International.*

## Youth Engagement Strategy for Campbell River

The City of Campbell River, its staff and residents recognize the value of engaging youth in civic life and planning for the community's future. Fundamental to this understanding is the *right to the city* and the tenant that young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow but the citizens of today, with full rights to access, move around, benefit from, and shape opportunities in the community.

Young people possess a unique perspective, resulting from the very fact that they are young and experience the city as young people; they are experts in their own right on how cities can be made more inclusive of their needs and aspirations. Young people bring a fresh perspective to planning initiatives and cities benefit from the energy and enthusiasm that youth bring to the table.

That said, cities, including Campbell River, often struggle with providing the best support and structure to meaningfully engage youth. Young people have their own schedules, interests, ways of communicating and social norms, which are not always conducive to mainstream decision making. In order for cities to elicit the opinions and contributions of young citizens, a deliberate and focused approach is needed.

Photo Credit: Sustainable Cities

Through a number of initiatives, Campbell River has experienced success in including a youth perspective in community development and planning processes. The public process that informed the development of Campbell River's Sustainable Official Community Plan is a case in point. Here, the City enabled young people to contribute to the vision and direction of their community through youth focused engagement sessions and intergenerational workshops. Moreover, Campbell River has supported a Youth Advisory Committee in the past, and currently has a Youth Action Committee that provides advice to City staff, Mayor and Council.



The purpose of this document is to outline how the City of Campbell River will support further youth engagement in municipal decision making, while fostering youth-led development in the city. The engagement strategy is open ended in its time horizon, in that it does not expire at any point, however a sample work plan for the Youth Action Committee is provided for the 2011/12 and 2012/13 academic years in order to provide a roadmap for the immediate future and functioning of the Youth Action Committee.

## Defining “Youth”

For the purposes of this strategy *youth* is defined as youth in Campbell River between the ages of 13 and 19. Youth 19 years and older are assumed to be young adults while elementary school-age students are considered to be children. Both young adults and children can also provide meaningful input to community visions and decision making processes, but outreach to these age groups is very different from middle and high school age students, and thus falls outside of the scope of this strategy.



## Principles for Meaningful Youth Engagement

Campbell River’s youth engagement strategy is based on five principles for meaningful youth engagement. These five principles for meaningful *youth engagement* were developed at a Youth Peer Exchange in Whistler, BC (2011). The principles are the result of a comparison between the approaches taken by four BC municipalities, including Campbell River, to engaging youth in municipal decision making. Through this comparison, young people identified the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches and collaboratively wrote these principles. Campbell River’s Youth Engagement Strategy embraces this good practice in order to engage youth in a meaningful way.

**Honesty:** Youth engagement processes should be honest and transparent so as to foster realistic expectations.

**Respect:** Youth engagement processes should encourage respectful sharing of ideas between young people and adults in an environment that values the unique ideas of youth and empowers them to express their opinions.

**Diverse Approaches:** Youth engagement activities should be varied in location, length of commitment and level of involvement, in order to ensure accessibility and get as much input as possible.

**Capacity Building:** Youth engagement processes should include opportunities for young people to acquire skills, experience and gain knowledge from unbiased sources so that they can participate fully and make educated decisions during the engagement process and later in life.

**Diversity:** Youth engagement processes should recognize that there are diverse social groupings (age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.) within the youth population requiring different approaches to engagement. The opinions of *all* youth should be listened to.



## Youth Charter for a Sustainable Campbell River

In 2011/2012, the Campbell River Youth Action Committee developed a Youth Charter, a set of statements that reflect a youth vision for Campbell River. The Youth Charter guides the work of the Youth Action Committee and is designed to ensure that planning for the future of Campbell River includes a youth perspective. In order to encourage awareness and action in support of these statements, the Youth Action Committee has sought support from various stakeholders in the community. To date, this Charter has been endorsed by the City of Campbell River, School District 72, and the RCMP. The Youth Charter is included on the following page of this document.

# Youth Charter:

## Vision for Campbell River's Future

Sustainable Campbell River is a City where...

1. Youth have diverse and age specific spaces to meet such as youth centres, coffee shops and restaurants where youth are able to socialize and be themselves.
2. Youth voices and ideas are heard and influence decision-making in the community.
3. There are indoor and outdoor venues to participate in and experience arts, culture, and musical performances.
4. Frequent, affordable transit is available for school, work, and recreation, including service early in the morning, on evenings and weekends. Transit services to McIvor Lake, swimming beaches, Mt Washington and trails like Canyon View are available.
5. Opportunities are available to help youth develop skills and access information relevant to future careers. Diverse job opportunities are available in Campbell River.







**The Youth Action Committee**

The Youth Action Committee’s purpose is to provide youth with an opportunity to share their perspectives and input in City decision making, and to learn about local government. Each year, the Youth Action Committee will focus on a combination of providing feedback on City projects and initiatives, and carrying out a youth-led project, selected and steered by the committee. The Youth Action Committee will be informed of all youth engagement activities taking place in the City, and where feasible, will be engaged in providing feedback on City projects.



**Structure:**

The Youth Action Committee (YAC) will be made up of 10 to 12 youth in grades 9-12 who are interested in contributing to making Campbell River a youth friendly city. The committee will be facilitated by two city staff, one in Recreation, and Culture and one in the Sustainability Department<sup>1</sup> who will recruit members, book meeting space and provide guidance to the group. These adult allies will also serve as the bridge between the young committee members and the adult municipal staff and politicians. There will also be a Chair, Co-Chair and rotating Secretary elected among the committee members.

**Role of the YAC:**

*Input for City Projects, Plans and Initiatives:*

In September the YAC staff liaisons will meet with departmental managers at the City to remind them of the role of the YAC and develop a list of potential projects requiring youth input. This list of projects should represent the full spectrum of city business, including land use planning, waste management, arts and culture, parks and recreation, heritage conservation, transportation and other areas. From this list of projects, several initiatives will be selected and a timeline will be developed for soliciting input from the YAC. For additional projects requiring youth feedback, or those projects requiring broader

<sup>1</sup>The Recreation and Culture Department has been identified as a key coordinating role for the YAC because of its connection to youth services. The Sustainability Department has been identified as an appropriate department to co-ordinate the YAC because of the broad scope of this department’s involvement in municipal activities. A different combination of personnel, from different departments, could be used; however, a broad mandate and link to youth are of key importance. For every hour of meeting time, staff liaisons can expect to commit one hour of preparation. This increases when working on major projects such as the youth centre.

engagement of youth, the YAC staff liaisons will work with City staff to identify other youth organizations and groups, and classes in the School District that could be consulted.

The City of Campbell River will aim to engage the YAC on up to five projects per year, including one larger project that requires peer to peer engagement<sup>2</sup>.

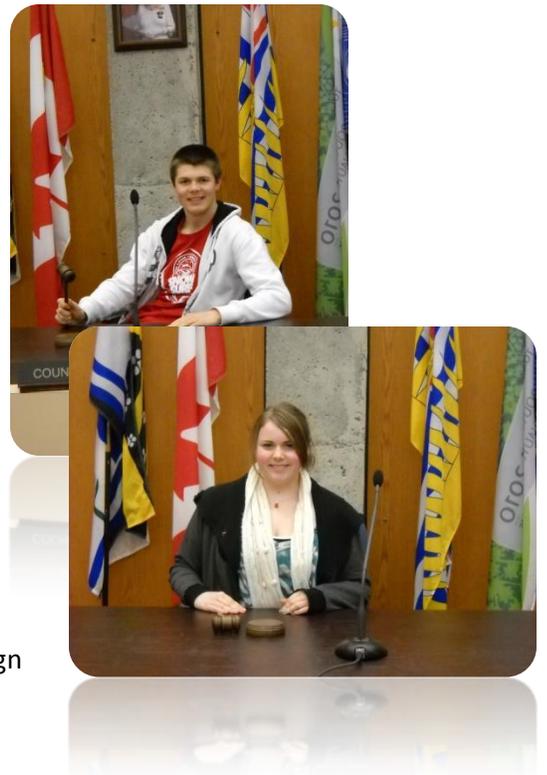
Secondary to providing input on City projects and programs, each year the YAC will spearhead a project. The project will be identified by the committee members and implemented with the support of the staff facilitators and other relevant stakeholders. These youth-led projects will seek to implement the vision outlined in the Youth Charter, but will not overshadow the consultative role of the YAC.

### YAC and Council:

The Youth Action Committee will present to City Council at minimum one time per year to provide Council an update on their projects and plans for the year. Additional presentations to City Council, School District 72 or other community organizations may be scheduled as required.

Both City Council and the School District 72 Board will each be invited to at least one informal meeting over pizza each year, for the purposes of dialogue around youth issues.

The Youth Action Committee will also host an annual roundtable session for organizations that have signed the Youth Charter to report back on efforts they are making toward making Campbell River a youth friendly city. New organizations may be invited to this meeting to learn about and sign on to the Charter.



### Meeting Time, Location and Frequency:

The YAC will meet twice per month after school at Campbell River's City Hall. On average, one meeting per month will be dedicated to project planning and implementation, while one meeting per month will be dedicated to providing input on City projects and plans (as identified by City staff).

<sup>2</sup> Peer to peer engagement is when young people engage their peers in an issue or project, soliciting a broader perspective. This technique requires training of the youth facilitators and requires a co-created plan (youth and adults). As such, it is a more time intensive process, but it speaks to many of the principles for meaningful youth engagement by building capacity among youth as facilitators, engaging a diverse youth population and allowing for a variety of approaches and formats for engaging youth.

Each fall a work plan will be developed for the Youth Action Committee by the staff liaisons. Below is a sample work plan for 2011/2012 and 2012/2013.

**Sample YAC Workplan for 2011/12 and 2012/13 Academic Years**

<b>Fall 2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of YAC Members (September)</li> <li>• 2 Day YAC Retreat (October)</li> <li>• Begin semi-monthly meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Winter/Spring 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue semi-monthly meetings</li> <li>• Consultation regarding:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Heritage Value of Big Rock</li> <li>○ Watershed Management Plan</li> <li>○ Programming for Spirit Square</li> <li>○ Programming for the Tidemark Theatre</li> <li>○ Transit Services</li> <li>○ Youth Recreation Programming for the City</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Develop Youth Engagement Strategy</li> <li>• Present Youth-Charter to Council, SD 72 and RCMP (Ceremonial signing inspiring 2012)</li> <li>• Develop concept/initial stages of business case for Youth Centre</li> <li>• Participate in Local Government Awareness Week</li> <li>• Wrap-up/self-evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Fall 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of YAC Members (September)</li> <li>• Identify City projects requiring youth perspective</li> <li>• 1 to 2 Day YAC Retreat (October)</li> <li>• Begin semi-monthly meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Winter 2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue Semi-monthly meetings focused on YAC-led projects and City initiatives requiring youth input</li> <li>• Provide feedback to MLA Claire Trevena on provincial issues</li> <li>• Work on paper summarizing work completed for the Youth Centre</li> </ul>
<b>Spring 2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback on community initiatives:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Campbellton Neighbourhood Association</li> <li>○ Compost and Energy Challenge Development</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Meet with MLA Claire Trevena to discuss the voting age and other Provincial political issues</li> <li>• Assist with Earth Week Film Festival</li> <li>• Participate in Local Government Awareness Week</li> <li>• Present Council with Youth Engagement Strategy</li> <li>• Complete Youth Centre Paper</li> <li>• Wrap-up/self-evaluation</li> </ul>

**YAC Recruitment:**

The YAC should be made up of students from all middle and high schools in Campbell River and should endeavor to represent grades 9 to 12 evenly. In order to avoid the need to recruit an entirely new group of youth each year, recruitment should focus on grades 9, 10 and 11. Effective methods for recruiting members include announcements at the schools, classroom presentations (by existing members when possible) and Facebook (have YAC members promote using their accounts). Liaison with school counselors, leadership teachers, and Student Council's will also assist in attracting youth for the committee.



the staff liaisons will keep the YAC up to date on any youth outreach efforts taking place in the City, so they can get involved in the project if they so wish. Keeping the YAC up to date on youth outreach efforts is important as the committee will be the primary youth voice to the Community Services Commission and City Council.

The right strategy for youth engagement will depend on the initiative in question. In general, youth engagement is effective when it:

- Is fun and interactive
- Provides time for socializing as well as engagement with the issues
- Doesn't rely on long presentations or lots of reading
- Includes food
- Is peer driven (use youth facilitators in workshops and have young people invite their peers to events or to fill out surveys)
- Relies on existing youth groups, like the YAC, leadership classes, green teams, sports teams, church groups, etc.
- Uses Facebook and other social media (have young people engage their friends)
- Includes competition and prizes
- Invites young people to participate through their networks and sources of information (ie. Facebook, school announcements and classroom presentations, not the radio or local paper).



There are lots of tools for engaging young people. Each situation will require a different set of tools, depending on the complexity of the issue, the spectrum of decision making within the project, the timeframe, the budget, and other factors. The following are a few tools that have been used in Campbell River and other communities to successfully engage youth:

### Simple Votes/Surveys



When an issue is fairly straight forward and does not require a lot of background information and/or discussion, surveys or voting can be an effective means of youth engagement. Surveys can be handed out in class or in the hallways at school. A quick classroom vote is also an effective way of soliciting the opinions of young people. Surveys should be done face to face- youth won't fill them out and bring them back at a later date. Often incentives encourage people to fill out surveys, and youth suggested that candies should be provided to survey participants.

## Focus Groups



Hosting a workshop with a group of youth is an effective way to have them discuss an issue and provide their opinions. These should be held at convenient times for young people to participate (pro-d days, weekends, evenings, negotiated class time, etc) and should include food. Always begin with an icebreaker and include a number of different activities that draw out the information you are seeking. In order to keep the youth engaged and focused these workshops need to be interactive and youth will need to be able to move and change groups frequently.



## Video/Photos

Video making and photography are an effective way of having youth capture and present their thoughts and feelings about a particular issue. You can ask youth to take photos or make videos addressing a particular question (eg. What is your favourite place in the city? What could be improved in this area?) or theme (eg. heritage). This can be done as part of a longer workshop or an ongoing contest (load them onto Facebook or youtube when they are done and ask the youth to share them with their peers). Advertising these types of contests in local newspapers does not reach youth. You may wish to work with school classes such as art or media classes or with a specific youth group.

## Dotmocracy



This exercise can be held with groups who have come up with a number of characteristics that they value in a place/program. Participants are then asked to vote on their preferred characteristic(s) using sticky dots. At the end of the exercise, the facilitator is left with a visual representation of the relative importance of each characteristic.

- Ex. A group of youth have identified trees, good lighting, picnic tables, water fountains and public art as the characteristics of a good park. Each of these characteristics is written on a piece of flip chart paper posted around the room. Participants are given three sticky dots that they can use to vote for the characteristic(s) that is/are most important to them. They can choose to put all three on one characteristic if they believe it is the one and only important characteristic, or they can divide them among three characteristics of equal importance. It is up to them to distribute their dots how they see fit.

## Asset Mapping



Asset mapping requires a large format map of the area in question and sticky dots, stars or felt pens to mark up the map. The facilitator asks participants to identify places and things on a map that they value. The output of the process is a map with assets identified

by the community. The process also results in a better understanding of what makes a community strong, what makes a space valuable and what needs to be reserved/enhanced in a development process. There are many resources available on asset mapping, including *Mapped!*, a manual produced by Sustainable Cities International ([www.sustainablecities.net](http://www.sustainablecities.net)) which focuses on asset mapping with youth.

These are just some of the many tools/approaches available to City of Campbell River staff who want to engage young people in decision making. The key to good engagement is to think about the information that is required, find the appropriate tool/approach and take a risk. City staff have the support of the YAC and the YAC staff liaisons to plan and problem solve. The important thing is to get out there and give it a shot!



### Youth Engagement Training for City Staff

The City will host youth engagement capacity building workshops for staff on a bi-annual basis or as feasible. The workshop will be organized by the YAC staff liaisons and will provide information on engaging young people in decision making processes, the reason for involving youth, and the tools that are available. The purpose of this is to build the confidence and competence of participants to meaningfully engage youth. The workshop may extend to School District 72 and other community organizations, as feasible.

### Share the Results

It is also important to follow up with young participants and let them know how the information and opinions they shared contributed to the overall process. City staff should take the time to share the results of their initiatives with the YAC and other engaged youth. This will engender a better understanding of the value of civic participation among young people and encourage them to continue contributing to their community.



## Conclusion

By re-establishing the Youth Action Committee and identifying two staff liaisons that will support this group, the City of Campbell River has set up a structure for continuous, meaningful youth engagement. In order for young people to be meaningfully engaged in municipal decision making in Campbell River, City staff in all departments will have to work with the YAC and its staff liaisons to find creative ways of soliciting youth input, supporting the Youth Charter, providing young people with capacity building opportunities and truly reflecting their needs and aspirations in the process of creating a youth friendly Campbell River.

Photo Credit: Cal Fehr

