

VILLAGES PLANNING PROGRAM

Urban Indigenous Engagement Summary Report

2024 - 2025



Villages Planning Program

URBAN INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Villages Planning Program Team participated in convening two Urban Indigenous Engagement Events, held as part of phase 1 and 2 of the planning process.

1. Urban Indigenous Engagement Framework Pilot
2. Urban Indigenous Engagement Workshop

The City concurrently ran government to government engagement with colleagues at xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation). Each event was designed to ensure that Urban Indigenous voices are not only heard but meaningfully reflected in the City's planning and decision-making processes. The goal was to listen carefully and involve Urban Indigenous Peoples in a thoughtful and respectful way.

The objectives of the events were to:

- Share information about the Villages Planning Program;
- Provide space for questions, feedback and dialogue;
- Accurately capture community concerns and ideas;
- Build stronger relationships with Urban Indigenous residents; and
- Begin the process of centering Indigenous ways of knowing in the City's planning practices.

Participants were invited through focused outreach by the City's Indigenous Relations Office, which included contacting an Urban Indigenous mailing list and connecting with Indigenous organizations. To support accessibility, Staff provided follow-up via text and phone calls to Elders, offered honoraria, and reimbursed transit, taxi, and childcare costs to remove barriers to participation

Details on each event as well as key findings are summarized on the following pages.

"The City has a responsibility to ensure all Indigenous Peoples in Vancouver have meaningful opportunities to take part in city planning and decision making. These commitments are outlined in the City of Vancouver UNDRIP Strategy and Action Plan, specifically under Action Group 2: Urban Indigenous Engagement, which focuses on creating inclusive and effective engagement frameworks that reflect the priorities and realities for Urban Indigenous Peoples."

- (Draft Urban Indigenous Engagement Framework)



1. Urban Indigenous Engagement Framework Pilot 2024

Event Overview:

The Urban Indigenous Engagement Fair was held on Saturday, October 26th, from 12:00 pm to 3:30 pm at 312 Main St. There were approximately 15 meaningful interactions during the event.

Objectives:

- To inform Urban Indigenous residents about the launch of the Villages project.
- To gather initial feedback about the project and project goals.
- To support community members who wish to learn more and engage further.

Format:

The event was structured as an engagement fair showcasing several City of Vancouver and Park Board projects. It opened with a brief presentation introducing each project, after which attendees circulated through a series of information booths to speak with project teams and learn more. The Villages team's booth provided an overview of the initiative, including proposed Village locations, the project work plan, and the timeline.



Key Findings:

Indigenous-Centred Housing Design

Participants expressed a strong desire to move beyond standard, colonial housing models by exploring other designs that deeply reflect Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices (e.g. teepee). This direction aligns with the overall emphasis to centre Indigenous art, culture, and design in new buildings. There is a specific need for seniors housing, including a focus on the needs of Indigenous Elders for Villages.

Village Identity and Terminology

Feedback regarding the name "Villages" was mixed. While some participants felt the term resonated positively and recalled places where they grew up, others felt it carried negative connotations. Participants emphasized the importance of developing these areas to include recognizable landmarks and "placemaking opportunities" that contribute to a strong sense of local identity and belonging.

Cultural and Community Spaces

Many participants commented on the need for integrating dedicated Indigenous spaces within Village plans. These spaces are essential for cultural maintenance, including smudging and ceremony rooms, and larger areas needed for gatherings such as feasts, Powwows, and learning Indigenous languages. Even small, intimate cultural spaces were seen as valuable for helping people emerge from isolation, alongside the need for spaces where people can gather and hold ceremonies.

Food Access and Sovereignty

Participants highlighted the importance of achieving food security and food sovereignty. Ideas proposed included integrating on-site food systems, such as hanging gardens and green roofs, into new developments. Furthermore, there was strong interest in utilising vacant lots as interim community gardens or healing spaces, with suggestions to explore strengthening bylaws related to unused empty lots to facilitate this.

Engagement and Inclusion

Future engagement efforts must focus on achieving deeper involvement, specifically low-income urban Indigenous individuals who are most in need of housing and support, and who are not often involved in standard City processes. There is a strong desire for Village development to feel organic and community-led, drawing a comparison to the development style of areas like Kensington Market in Toronto.



2. Urban Indigenous Engagement Workshop 2025

Event Overview:

The event was held on Tuesday, October 21st, from 8:30 am to 12:00 pm (followed by lunch) at the Japanese Hall, 487 Alexander St (DTES). There were approximately 29 guests who attended the event.

Objectives:

- To provide an update on the draft Urban Indigenous Engagement Framework.
- To inform Urban Indigenous residents about the Draft Official Development Plan (ODP) and Villages Planning Program.
- To seek input on proposed Villages emerging directions.
- To support residents who wish to learn more and engage further.

Format:

The event included opening and closing protocols, through ceremony, speaker and witnessing. City staff presented on the ODP and Villages projects, followed by facilitated table discussions that ran in two 20-minute rounds. Discussions for the Villages Planning Program centred on getting feedback on the proposed Emerging Directions, which can be found [here](#).

The event functioned as a critical step in building dialogue, much like laying the foundation for a shared structure; it ensured that the Indigenous community's priorities and realities informed the City's official plans and emerging development directions.



Key Findings:

Housing

Many participants emphasized the need for more affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate housing. A need for additional social housing units was also discussed as current rents are too high and waitlists too long. Some participants suggested measures to support housing security, including Indigenous priority placement, right of first refusal and strong tenant relocation measures. More specific recommendations included Aboriginal senior's units with better design standards such as reliable elevators and mobility-friendly features; units that can support families and intergenerational living; and minimum livable space standards. Some participants shared barriers to delivering Indigenous housing, including community resistance and approval delays. Some concerns were voiced regarding the negative effects of new growth plans such as gentrification and displacement, and participants noted that many urban Indigenous residents wish to remain living near the Downtown East side.

Shops and Services

Participants shared an expectation for new developments to actively support local culture and daily needs, rather than focusing only on residential growth. Support was expressed for mixed-use buildings that include commercial spaces and amenities. Lease agreements should support long term tenancy for small businesses. Amenities should be located conveniently close to transit. Specific services identified by participants include affordable groceries, childcare, dog parks as well as dedicated Indigenous spaces such as a longhouse for ceremony.

Transportation & Green Space

Feedback highlighted mobility challenges, noting that some proposed village locations are considered too hilly and difficult for elders to navigate. Across the transit system, primary concerns focused on issues of affordability and overcrowding. Participants also identified the need for more designated parking. Regarding green space, there is a strong desire to protect existing parks and secure the addition of new ones, including innovative ideas such as developing a food forest. Practical infrastructure requests included the provision of secure scooter and bike lockups.

Other Key Themes

Feedback also questioned the use of the term "Village," the rationale for defining boundaries, and whether current art initiatives are genuinely community-focused or solely geared toward tourists. There was also an emphasis on centering Indigenous art, culture, and design in new buildings, ensuring spaces are included for people to gather and hold ceremonies, such as a dedicated space for an urban Indigenous longhouse.

OTHER COMMENTS

Some of the information received during the workshops are outside the scope of the Villages Planning Program. All comments provided to us are valuable in informing and shaping our planning processes and practices moving forward. These comments have been circulated to the relevant City of Vancouver departments and external service providers. This included feedback from community about:

- Centralized growth plans (e.g., Broadway Plan) seen as increasing pressure on nearby neighbourhoods and contributing to displacement.
- DTES concerns such as policing impacts during major events and the need for more outdoor gathering space.
- A call for more mental-health dialogue and mandatory trauma-informed approaches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We respectfully acknowledge that this engagement took place on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation)

We thank the 44 participants, witnesses and speakers who attended and contributed their voices, experiences, and testimonies to this important conversation. We also extend our sincere thanks to Annita McPhee (Tahltan Tlingit First Nations) for her skilled facilitation, which helped create a safe, welcoming space for meaningful dialogue. Finally, we offer our thanks to the Indigenous Relations team for their invaluable support and partnership in co-creating the engagement plan grounded in xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw, and səliłwətał ceremony and protocol.

