

# Report to Council



**Date:** October 19, 2020  
**To:** Council  
**From:** City Manager  
**Subject:** Community Trends Report 2020 – Cities and COVID-19 Recovery  
**Department:** Policy & Planning

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Policy & Planning Department dated October 19, 2020 with respect to Kelowna's 2020 Community Trends Report.

## **Purpose:**

To introduce "Cities and COVID-19 Recovery - Community Trends Report 2020."

## **Background:**

Over the last six months the global health pandemic has impacted all aspects of society. The pandemic has changed our day-to-day routines, caused considerable suffering and sent shockwaves through the health care system and global economy. British Columbia has largely limited the loss of life from COVID-19 compared to other jurisdictions, but the province remains under a state of emergency. Although we are still in the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic it is important for cities to identify trends emerging from the pandemic and consider how to build back better as we look ahead to the long-term recovery.

This year's Community Trends Report (CTR) examines the role of city-building in the recovery process from three different perspectives. The report explores how cities grow – considering the relationship between community planning and the recovery. Next, by looking at how we prosper, the report explores opportunities to encourage economic success for all through the recovery. Lastly, the report examines how, through the recovery, we can create healthy communities for all.

The CTR is one of several analytical reports produced by the Policy and Planning Department. While other reports focus on specific areas, such as housing or development statistics, the CTR explores major trends and considers local impacts. The CTR is not meant to establish formal City recommendations,

but instead sets the stage for the City's work on other planning projects or initiatives. Ultimately, the aim of the CTR is to understand how larger trends might impact the community in the years ahead and to determine where greater attention and action may be needed in the future.

### **Discussion:**

The CTR focuses on three different parts of the recovery where there is a strong city-building opportunity.

#### *How We Grow*

The physical structure of our community influences behaviours and impacts public health. For example, many people living in suburban areas rely on a car to leave their neighbourhood and access big box retail for many of their day-to-day needs. The pandemic illustrated that these suburban areas lack resiliency, offering citizens little in the way of local supports in times of crisis. At the same time, public health officials are encouraging people to avoid large crowds and gatherings to slow the spread of the virus. In response, cities are exploring how the concept of the *15-minute city* and creating complete communities could make our cities more resilient in times of crisis. Complete communities provide citizens with all their day-to-day services and amenities such as parks within a short walk or cycle. Overall, the call for complete communities as a pandemic response has reinforced the importance of local services and equitable access to public space to create livable communities that are more resilient in times of crisis.

#### *How We Build Healthy Communities*

Cities are also recognizing the importance of providing access to public space for all citizens during the pandemic. Public spaces provide the benefit of safe spaces for citizens to gather and recreate in a physically distanced manner, while enhancing social interaction and community cohesion. Many cities are looking to reduce the immediate risks of the pandemic by reallocating roadway space from cars to walking and cycling to create safer streets and encourage long-term behaviour change that will reduce GHGs and create a healthier city. Many of the initiatives where cities have re-purposed space have also resulted in a more equitable use of public space, creating places that can be accessed by all in the community regardless of vehicle ownership. Although many of these public space initiatives are currently pilot projects to address the immediate challenges of the pandemic, there is an opportunity to look at how these pilot projects could become permanent to create a healthier more equitable city in the future.

#### *How We Prosper*

Although cities are largely focused on the immediate challenges of making communities safer during the pandemic, early efforts are underway to consider how to support the long-term economic recovery. International organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are calling for a people-centered recovery, encouraging cities to prioritize policies and investments that improve human health, the livability of cities and promote climate action through GHG reductions. Recent reports identify the importance of prioritizing investments in infrastructure

that will reduce GHG emissions and create enduring behaviour change. For example, cities are looking at deep energy retrofits of existing building stock that improve energy efficiency and reduce GHGs while creating employment in the green economy. Other examples include investments in protected bike lane projects and pedestrian infrastructure as opposed to traditional roadway expansion projects to generate economic activity, while encouraging healthier, low-carbon transportation options.

Another component of the recovery is looking at how the pandemic has changed the landscape for local businesses and the broader economy. For example, many cities are looking for ways to enable businesses to remain operational in a way that promotes compliance with public health guidelines to keep citizens safe. Cities are shifting how space is allocated on main streets from cars to various uses for people (e.g. temporary patios and road closures / open streets). This approach provides more space for people to patronize businesses in safer outdoor patio areas, supporting local business and rebalancing the role of streets to serve as public spaces.

Other shifts in the economy include the rise of remote working and the shift away from centralized office space to reduce in-person contact during the pandemic. The increase in the number of people working remotely can also reduce peak-hour traffic flows and lower GHG emissions, curbing demand for roadway expansion. Overall, by changing the way we do business, we can create opportunities to put our cities on a path to lower GHGs and create a safer and more resilient community during the pandemic.

### **Conclusion:**

The long-term impacts of the pandemic on cities continues to be a developing story, reinforcing the need for cities to be nimble and adapt to the changing new-normal. As Kelowna works closely with public health to navigate the acute phase of the pandemic, there is an opportunity for city-building efforts to promote a people-centered recovery and advance the goals of Imagine Kelowna. In the short-term, Kelowna can create great public spaces, embrace diverse transportation options and build a more equitable community, while reinforcing public health and climate action objectives.

Looking ahead to the long-term recovery, the City of Kelowna could operationalize many of the ideas and approaches described in the CTR as new master plans are developed, capital planning decisions are made, and new funding partnerships are formed. As investments are made and projects are prioritized, there is an opportunity to create a city that is greener, more inclusive and healthier than the one that existed prior to the pandemic.

### **Internal Circulation:**

Development Planning

Communications

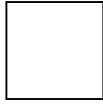
Integrated Transportation

Business and Entrepreneurial Development

Submitted by:

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**Approved for inclusion:**



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