

REQUEST FOR DECISION

Subject: Community Conversations Interim Report, 2023
From: Bill Given, Chief Administrative Officer
Prepared by: Lisa Riddell, Community Development Manager
Reviewed by: Emma Acorn, Legislative Services Manager
Date: July 11, 2023



Recommendation:

- That Committee receive the Community Conversations Interim Report for January to June 2023 for information.

Alternatives:

- That Committee direct Administration to bring forward additional information on any items of interest to a future committee meeting.

Background:

On September 21, 2021 Council approved the Community Conversations Policy (A-105) which outlines Council's commitment to meaningful resident engagement to ensure that municipal services and programs remain responsive to changing community needs. In February 2023, a revised Policy A-105 was adopted by Council, directing administration to narrow the scope to remove the ones on Environment, Recreation and Arts/Culture. The attendance at the January and February arts, culture and environment conversations remained very low at 3-4 people per conversation. All participants were invited to participate in the life-stage conversations.

From January to June 2023, 19 life-stage focused Community Conversations took place (4 in January, 3 in every other month). In January, the Early Childhood and the School Age Conversation participants decided to combine their conversations starting in February. Instead of two separate conversations per month, they took part in one.

Here is a breakdown of attendance so far in 2023 compared to 2022 numbers.

	Year	Breakdown by quarter and type of participant								
		Jan to March			April to June			Sept. to Nov. 2023		
		Staff	Public	Total	Staff	Public	Total	Staff	Public	Total
Adults	2022	16	23	39	11	22	33	8	15	23
	2023	9	17	26	10	20	30			
Seniors	2022	13	14	27	11	12	23	5	16	21
	2023	8	24	32	14	25	39			
Early Childhood & School Age										
	2023	17	13	30	16	11	27			

**Municipal attendance at the Early Childhood & School Age Conversation is high because we offer many services for this age group: daycare, out of school care, 3 x Outreach Workers, 1 x Settlement Worker.*

Discussion:

At Community Conversations, participants identify the changing needs of residents. They also identify opportunities to take action in response to those needs. A review of all trends and opportunities identified throughout the first six months of 2023 reveals a few thematic areas under which the majority of trends and opportunities identified can be grouped. These have remained similar to 2022 but not exactly the same. In random order:

- **Internet & Technology:** A lack of Internet access and low digital literacy can create barriers for folks to access supports, systems, coursework and processes that have largely shifted to on-line since the pandemic. Woven into this same theme is the increased time in front of screens for many children and youth and associated concerns.
- **Financial Stress:** Residents of all ages continue to grapple with rising cost of groceries, rent and utilities. This is evident with increase in requests for relief funding, use of the food bank, food recovery etc. Local businesses are also experiencing prolonged financial stress after having endured multiple unexpected business interruptions.
- **Diversity, Inclusion and Connection:** Organizations continue to see elevated levels of interest in and participation in programming, events and initiatives that bring people together. There is particular demand for low-cost, accessible programming that helps people of all ages try new activities, arts or cultural experiences. The desire for in-person programs and events has never been higher.
- **Crisis Response:** The need for crisis response services (one-on-one support as well as financial relief) for folks involved in non-criminal trauma (outside of the Victim Services' scope), remains high.
- **Transportation:** The need for accessible, affordable transportation options in town continues to be raised – specifically around getting seasonal staff connected with programs within the park, itself.
- **Mental Health:** There are more complex mental health situations arising for all ages as we start to see the impact of: isolation associated with the pandemic, influx of newcomers due to the war in Ukraine. There is also less access to in-person, local supports. There is more access to on-line virtual supports. Mental health is also being impacted by concerns regarding recent wildfires.
- **Housing:** Limited access to affordable, stable housing continues to cause stress for Jasperites across all ages. Seniors are looking to downsize, families need adequate housing, staff need stable accommodation to bridge them between seasonal jobs. Unpredictable rent increases such as the one at Cavell Court is still causing significant stress and precarious housing situations for residents.

In response to the topics of discussion at Community Conversations, municipal staff take action if it's possible within existing scope, authority, capacity and budget. Here are a couple of examples:

- We reviewed and re-organized the '[Doing Business in Jasper](#)' section of the website. We also developed a [business continuity guidebook](#) and [workbook](#) to support businesses in planning for unexpected interruptions to their operations. We are currently in the process of having these resources translated into multiple languages to serve our diverse business community.
- We did an in-depth look at our Crisis Response capacity compared to the needs we are seeing in the community, the results of which were shared with Council.

There are many organizations, businesses and agency representatives at Community Conversations who also take action in response to what they've heard at Community Conversations.

Here are a couple of examples of initiatives lead by other organizations but inspired by Community Conversations:

- The *Tween Takeover* program offered by the [Jasper Municipal Library](#) was largely informed by discussions at Community Conversations about the need for programming for 6-10 year olds. The program was extremely well attended and received very positive feedback in the community.
- The [Seniors' Resume Bank](#) now offered by the Jasper Employment and Education Centre was largely informed by discussions at Community Conversations about connecting local seniors with meaningful local employment and supporting local businesses in the process.

Participants from Community Conversations have not been surveyed between January to June 2023. But anecdotally, participants are relaying positive input about the narrowed focus on life-stage conversations. Participants at the Early Childhood and School Age Combined Conversation have also noted that they prefer the single, combined discussion. Community Conversations do continue to promote cross departmental collaboration on projects/initiatives. They also offer increased interaction between Council, Municipal staff and members of the public

Relevant Legislation:

- [Policy A-105: Community Conversations Policy](#)

Strategic Relevance:

Relationships

- Communicate and engage with residents.
- Welcome the expertise, innovation, creativity and commitment of community members, groups, associations and businesses.
- Entrust our staff to develop healthy relationships with the people they serve.
- Nurture our most important relationships which are those within our organization

Financial:

The costs to implement the Community Conversations Policy are within the 2023 Operating Budget.

Attachments:

The notes for each individual conversation can be found on the [Municipality of Jasper website](#).