

WHAT YOUTH WANT



CityHive

**A SUMMARY OF METRO VANCOUVER'S
WANTS AND NEEDS AHEAD OF THE
2022 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS**

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CityHive is a settler-led organization that is continually working to learn more about the territories on which we work from our Host Nations: xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Thanks to oral history and both youth and elders from these Nations, we can work to imagine what these lands looked like pre-contact: more water, mud flats, and eel grass, consensus-based governance, and a reverence for the natural world as a fellow being and teacher.

Since colonial occupation, the “Metro Vancouver” region has changed drastically. Our work focuses on engaging with municipalities and other institutional power-holders, which are inherently colonial and have caused/ continue to cause harm on Indigenous communities. Sitting in the middle of this complexity, and continually working to unlearn and re-center Indigenous voices in our work, is part of CityHive’s journey in both decolonization and reconciliation. Part of what we’re committed to is working in right relations with the Host Nations, and also making sure that our values of decolonization reflect not only in how we work, but also in our operations, in our programs, in our curriculum.

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OPENING STATEMENT

CityHive has been transforming the way that youth 18-30(ish) engage in shaping their cities for over five years now. Our organization was born out of frustration that two youth experienced when trying to get involved with city council—since then, we've impacted 22,000+ youth through our workshops, events, and programs in partnership with municipalities across Metro Vancouver.

We've previously run get-out-the-vote efforts and hosted results watch parties during various elections, **but this year felt different.** After two extraordinarily challenging years with COVID-19, what we've seen is this: our democratic sphere and senses of civic agency feel fragile and threatened; and, despite this, more youth than ever are showing up to our virtual and in-person programming to break down barriers and create the communities they envision. We are exhausted, we are overwhelmed by a looming future with ever-growing challenges, and **we are ready to make change**—whether that's with seats at existing tables, or building new systems altogether.

We decided to respond to this moment and leverage our relationships with youth across the region to launch *What Youth Want*, a campaign to **1)** meaningfully engage youth under 30 with the upcoming municipal elections, and **2)** highlight the key issues, needs and ideas of youth to be addressed by their local governments. This work is about more than getting out the youth vote or educating young folks about the powers of local government: it's

equally about educating candidates and incumbents and ensuring they actually seek and embed youth perspectives in their campaigns and eventual tenures.

What Youth Want is a non-partisan campaign that includes the following:

- A.** A regional survey about youth priorities (completed)
- B.** The publication of a What Youth Want brief to share with elected officials and/or candidates (this brief)
- C.** Educational, community-building events convening institutional power-holders and youth changemakers from across Metro Vancouver (ongoing)
- D.** Hosting an all-candidates debate in the City of Vancouver, focused on identified youth priorities and youth engagement (upcoming)

This report provides a snapshot of youth perspectives on key issues and engagement strategies from across Metro Vancouver. It is intended to catalyze candidates and other stakeholders to engage further and prioritize youth-led solutions in their leadership.

Finally, we are indebted to our wonderful alumni volunteers, Gala and Victor, who analyzed survey data for us. We are also grateful to the volunteers and staff who lent us their graphic design expertise to create this beautiful report. Thank you.

Yours in city-shaping,
Veronika Bylicki
Executive Director & Co-founder

THE ISSUES: OVERVIEW

In Section 1 of our survey, we identified the top nine issues facing Metro Vancouver and asked survey respondents to a) rank their importance and b) share insights and recommendations for addressing them locally.

Here are those key regional issues, ranked in importance:

- 1. Housing & Affordability**
- 2. Climate Change & the Environment**
- 3. Mobility & Transportation**
- 4. Jobs, Economy & Opportunities**
- 5. Social Isolation, Belonging & Mental Health**
- 6. Systemic Discrimination**
- 7. Civic Participation**
- 8. Drug Use & the Opioid Poisoning Crisis**
- 9. Recreation, Arts & Culture**

Of these issues:

Only **30%** of youth feel that their city is currently doing a great job in addressing housing and affordability. For youth renters specifically, that plummets to **7%**.

Only **38%** of youth feel that their city is currently doing a great job in addressing drug use and the opioid poisoning crisis.

Only **31%** of respondents ages 26-34 feel that their city doing a great job in addressing social isolation, belonging, and mental health.



“I really feel like so many of the issues are deeply connected - I would like to see a massive shift in our society where we prioritize the health and well being of our society and stop prioritizing economic systems that benefit the few and harm the many.”

- RESPONDENT

THE ISSUES: HOUSING & AFFORDABILITY

With housing and affordability as the top-ranked issue in the upcoming municipal election, survey respondents had many ideas and solutions for policy consideration.

Streamlining approval process for projects that promote affordability and equity

Allow missing middle/denser housing without rezoning

Ensure a percentage of housing developments are for low-income residents

Create more affordable/ public/ non-market/ co-op housing

Improve and increase social housing

Block and/ or limit foreign investment and corporations from buying homes

Prevent landlords from owning multiple properties

Ban single family zoning

Cities should build their own housing for low/ middle income residents

"[We need] housing affordability for young people. All my friends are being forced to move away."

- RESPONDENT

"If there [are] no youth in the city, the city cannot be sustained."

- RESPONDENT

Survey respondents envisioned shifting our existing detached house into "passive house" style apartments, stopping large-scale developments that gentrify areas, creating gentle density, and offering more communal living spaces, like community gardens.

THE ISSUES: CLIMATE CHANGE & THE ENVIRONMENT



Respondents identified a general desire for more pro-activity, stronger stances, urgent action, and ambitious solutions within municipalities. These sentiments are particularly relevant for climate action and adaptation initiatives. As the second-ranked most important issue, our respondents had the following suggestions for municipal leaders:

Reduce emissions to zero, ban the use of fossil fuels, and stop the development of all new fossil fuel infrastructure

Consumer-focused policies (e.g. \$0.25 cup fee or \$1000 electric bike credits) lack impactful action; increase pressure on large companies

Enforce removal of invasive species

Provide incentives for more climate-friendly cooling options

Increase pressure on large companies to be more sustainable

Invest in urban farming initiatives

"We need stronger urgency in making meaningful, lasting changes around [the] climate crisis and how it's entangled with all other issues (e.g. systemic discrimination, job opportunities, etc.)"

- RESPONDENT



THE ISSUES: MOBILITY & TRANSPORTATION

As mentioned earlier, all of these key issues are interconnected—the accessibility and abundance of transportation and mobility options directly relate to climate targets, how we move around for work and recreation opportunities, where we choose to live, and the impact of commuting versus time spent engaging with our communities on our mental and physical wellness. Here are several youth-driven solutions to our regional mobility challenges:

- Overall, increase transit infrastructure and improve existing networks
- Reduce car dependence with less incentives/impose traffic tolls in busy areas
- Improve pedestrian/cyclist safety
- Improve bike and e-bike infrastructure, such as separated All Ages and Abilities (AAA) bike lanes
- Refurbish the West Coast Express
- Prioritize connecting the North Shore to rest of Lower Mainland through public transit

“We need to be more ambitious in imagining a world without emissions. Transit should be organized around electric bicycles and cars excluded wherever possible.”

- RESPONDENT

“There are car lanes on every street and my neighbourhood bus only comes once every half an hour.”

- RESPONDENT

THE STATE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Section 2 of our survey focused on respondents’ experiences with and perspectives on civic engagement. Evidently, most youth surveyed feel a strong sense of civic duty and connection to their neighbourhoods, and have ideas for positive transformation—still, they often find it challenging to have their voices heard (or taken seriously) by local government.

98%

of respondents feel a strong sense of duty and responsibility to be an active citizen, including voting.

44%

However, only of respondents agreed with this statement: “I feel like my municipality does a good job of engaging me and my peers in local decision-making.”

80%

of respondents wish they could participate more, but don’t know how.

TOP BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

1. I don’t have enough time
2. I don’t feel like my issues are represented or heard
3. I do not know where to get information to participate more

TOP SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT*

1. Access to information and communication channels
2. Proactive engagement and community connection
3. Systemic changes

“I think there are opportunities to take bold, innovative, and creative action on a number of civic issues, but I’m just not really seeing it being done.”

- RESPONDENT



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: WHAT'S BROKEN?

Only 44% of respondents agreed with this statement: "I feel like my municipality does a good job of engaging me and my peers in local decision-making." With nearly all surveyed youth expressing a strong orientation towards civic participation, how come they still feel overlooked and underrepresented?

Identified Problem Areas with Current Engagement

Council goes beyond their jurisdiction and is biased towards keeping the status quo

Meetings take too long

Public hearing process is broken—allow written comments only

Lack of overall civic literacy and education opportunities about how cities work

There's an over-representation of white homeowners with time

Corporations and police departments are influencing decisions

Lack of accessible summaries of plans and meetings

Limited public gathering spaces

Need greater consideration for the long-term impacts of plans

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: POSSIBILITIES FOR TRANSFORMATION



Proactive Engagement and Community Connection

Youth are busy, and more likely to be balancing multiple institutional affiliations (such as school, multiple workplaces, affinity groups). For engagement to be meaningful, councillors and staff need to value youth perspectives enough to actively seek them out and create easy opportunities for input.

- Organize **street engagement** or events, like pop-up booths
- **Partner with local small businesses**
- Politicians **need to be out in the community** and in the same places as youth
- More **engagement** and **visits to schools**
- **Partner with youth** on youth-driven initiatives and events
- **More advertising** and events in accessible, well-trafficked places (like transit)
- **Actively reach out** to various communities, particularly marginalized groups
- Create **engagement opportunities** that are **shorter time commitments/low barrier**

Improving Access to Information and Communication Channels

A desire for improved municipal communications and civic literacy was expressed repeatedly. These included:

- More **online engagement** and **campaigns** through QR codes and social media
- Have **clear explainers** and **resources** for how to get involved, how council works, how to access voting records, etc.
- Have **plain-language summaries** of reports/council meetings/hearings
- Create **monthly newsletters**
- Having an app, **centralized platform**, or improving websites
- Text or email **notifications** of agenda items
- Opportunities on the street to engage, like **pop-up booths**
- **Monthly infographics** about goings-on
- Have **posters** around town and various workplaces

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: POSSIBILITIES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Systemic Changes

Many respondents showed an interest in and identified with the intersection of all the issues that were discussed, while some were interested in a systemic shift in the way we imagine our communities and cities altogether. Below are several identified systemic changes youth want to see council work towards.

- **Simplify** outdated council rules
 - Create **ward-based** voting systems
 - **Reduce** obstructionism
 - Move towards a **proportional representation** system
 - Add explicit **transgenerational equity lens** to equity framework
 - Promote **thriving-wage cities** with **4-day work weeks**
 - Public hearing process is broken—allow **written comments only**
 - **Guaranteed** time off work to participate in public engagement/town halls
- **Embed** direct democracy or consensus-based decision-making processes
 - More focus on **representative democracy** and getting representative samples, rather than expecting direct participation
 - **Formalize youth representation** on city councils and committees, and pass youth input requirements



NEXT STEPS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We feel so fortunate to be able to work with engaged, visionary, generous youth across all corners of our work. No matter the intensity or complexity of issues we may be working on in a program or at an event, our community is thoughtful, caring, and genuinely invested in co-creating futures that are welcoming and promising for all people.

We invite municipal candidates, staff, campaign managers, policy advisors, and other institutional power holders to consider the perspectives and opinions in this report as a jumping off point to inform deep, ongoing youth engagement.

We are not a monolith, and this was a small sample of 18-34 year-olds from across Metro Vancouver. If engaging with young people is not already a part of your work or campaign plan—now is the time to start. The ideas are already here!

Thank you to all of our survey respondents for taking the time to share their thoughts with us.

Thank you to our incredible volunteer data analysts, Victor Ngo and Gala Munoz-Carrier. You made this report possible.

Thank you to our volunteers and staff for spinning a fairly boring Word document into something beautiful and energizing.

Thank you to our street team volunteers, who were out canvassing for survey responses at a variety of public events in Metro Vancouver.

Thank you to the following local businesses who donated gift cards to incentivize survey responses: Rain or Shine Ice Cream, Massy Books, Parkside Brewery, Juke Chicken, Foamers' Folly, JJ Bean, and Tell Your Friends.





CityHive

@CityHiveVan | info@cityhive.ca | www.cityhive.ca