

Case Study: Building Equitable Communities

GBA+ Community Planning in Burnaby, BC

Introduction to the pilot project

In 2023, the City of Burnaby began a process to create new community plans for Edmonds, Royal Oak, and Cascade Heights. These plans presented an opportunity to enhance equity and resilience in the face of significant growth and change.

Around this time, the City of Burnaby Social Planning Committee received a presentation by YWCA Metro Vancouver's City Shift initiative and REACH-Cities, a health research program at Simon Fraser University. They proposed the use of GBA+ (Gender-Based Analysis Plus) as a formalized method to identify and address systemic inequities within City programs and policies. In response, Council directed staff to pilot the GBA+ approach with the Edmonds community plan. The pilot was subsequently expanded to include Royal Oak and Cascade Heights plans.

The implementation of the GBA+ pilot was supported by an informal Advisory Group. This group included the Civic Innovation Lab (established by the City of Burnaby and Simon Fraser University to tackle real-world issues), REACH-Cities, and YWCA City Shift.

The Advisory Group helped support the Burnaby project team to complete related GBA+ training and review shared resources. Through the application of GBA+ and with the support of the Advisory Group, staff had an opportunity to learn and test an approach to make equity-based work more explicit within community planning.

The difference from business as usual - results of the pilot

How the GBA+ pilot shaped consultation

For public consultations, the project adopted new engagement strategies. The project team developed a broader distribution list than was used in the past to ensure increased awareness of open houses and meetings, and organized these at accessible times and locations. In response to community requests for Mandarin translation, a staff member was added to the team to assist with language needs. Additionally, the project team created engagement materials in several languages and used diverse methods of communication, including in-person, virtual, and written formats. Providing language translation throughout the engagement process proved a success. Moving forward, Burnaby is standardizing practices to include language translation across City processes.

An online survey to gather input on the proposed Community Plans garnered over 1,000 responses, gathering expanded demographic information from participants, including age, household income, housing tenure (rent or own), and identity factors such as persons with disabilities, racialized, Indigenous, and newcomers to Canada. Including this expanded set of

demographic questions in surveys was an important practice for Burnaby, and allowed the project team to better understand how representative the engagement activities were for different communities.

Connecting consultation findings to policy directions

As discussions progressed toward land use policy, the project team's focus turned to integrating community feedback into tangible planning outcomes. For instance, in Edmonds, community members voiced concerns about the potential negative impacts of redevelopment on small family-run businesses, fearing closures. In response, policy guidance was created to work with future potential developers during the redevelopment stage to scope opportunities for smaller, more affordable retail spaces where feasible.

This pilot also resulted in a new reporting format that links community feedback with equity considerations in policy development. Continuing to fine-tune this approach, with additional details around what was heard from the community, how the plan looks different as a result, and how this helps to mitigate negative impacts of systemic inequities, would be stages to consider in the future in projects using GBA+.

As these specific planning initiatives have come to close, staff are working on a Council report considering options to continue or expand the application of a GBA+ approach.

Reflections and lessons learned from working with GBA+

Several key takeaways emerged from reflecting on the GBA+ pilot project. These can be summarized as follows:

- Step boldly into this work, and be prepared to make mistakes.
- Recognize that working differently takes additional resources.
- Expand the definition of “planning” work away from the desk.
- Look for and support internal champions that can help push equity work forward.
- Aim high, but recognize social inequities are complex.
- Consider planning detail and scale when matching equity approaches with a project.
- Identify particular goals or targets at the beginning.
- Learn more - and share - about who is in the community.
- Harness the power of community delegations.

Call to Action

Equity is something we should systematically have as part of forming policy - not just in planning, but in all departments. Equity work doesn't specifically have to be with the GBA+ tool, but staff and Council should put some time into determining the first steps and get started. Treat initial projects or programs as a prototype to learn from and improve on. By taking the leap into action and incorporating time for reflection and learning, we can start to transform our cities into more equitable and just places.