

VANCOUVER CITY PLANNING COMMISSION SUMMIT 2020 CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP



1. Introduction

The Vancouver City Planning Commission (VCPC), is a volunteer citizens' advisory commission mandated to advise the Mayor and Council on planning and development matters affecting the city's future.

On the evening of November 12, 2019 VCPC hosted a Co-design Workshop at Citylab. The purpose of the Workshop was to work with representatives of other city advisory groups and community partners to help design VCPC's May 2020 Summit which will focus broadly on Places, Spaces and Connections. There was also a desire to consider how the VCPC Summit might contribute to the City of Vancouver's City-wide Planning process.

The evening began with a welcome and acknowledgements from facilitators Ginger Gosnell-Myers and Omar Dominguez (a VCPC commissioner). Nola-Kate Seymoar, Chair of the VCPC, gave a brief history of the events and decisions leading to this Workshop (see Appendix 1). Susan Haid, Deputy Director of Long-range Planning at the City of Vancouver and Karis Hiebert, Manager of the Vancouver Plan Project Team, gave a presentation on the Engagement Phase of the City-Wide Plan taking place from now until March 2020. Participants were then invited to address a series of questions through stories about their experience and aspirations for the city.

Participants also received a list of 20 potential themes for the 2020 Summit and identified their top ten most important themes, as well as adding their own ideas. Anyone interested in serving on the Steering Committee or otherwise being involved in the Summit engagement process was invited to provide their contact information. An 'ideas wall' was put up for people to share ideas with the larger group.

This report summarizes the evening's discussions. The main themes that emerged from the table discussions are:

1. Engagement and inclusive planning processes;
2. Importance of community and identity;
3. Change.

The top three topics selected for inclusion in the 2020 Summit are:

1. Housing;
2. Climate Crisis;
3. Transportation.



1.1 Context

The City of Vancouver launched the public consultation phase of the [Vancouver Plan](#) on November 15. In discussions with the City prior to the Co-design Workshop, it became apparent that there was significant alignment between the City's aspirations for a successful engagement process and the themes that ran through the findings and recommendations of VCPC's 2018 Summit on A City for All. VCPC is continuing dialogue with the City to see how the 2020 Summit and related events can most effectively provide input into the Vancouver Plan.

City-Wide (now Vancouver) Plan Phase 1	City for All Summit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include all voices • Advance reconciliation • Support community leadership • Go to where people are • Ensure many ways to be involved • Make it easy, fun + relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging differently • Empowering neighbourhoods + promoting their resiliency • Living and learning what intersectionality + reconciliation means • Identifying key resources to support and scale up good ideas

1.2 VCPC Approach

More and more, VCPC events have provided participants with the opportunity to share their stories and lessons about successful initiatives that help make Vancouver a better, more resilient and inclusive place.

It is clear to us that Vancouverites feel that they are reflected less and less in the city they love. They see new developments tear down the spaces that once defined their neighbourhood and communities, with the new additions reflecting a generic non-localized identity. There seems to be little space for the stories and identities of beloved neighbourhoods to be integrated in this era of mass new development, nor any reflection of Indigenous presence that we now know should never have been erased in the first place. At the same time, Vancouverites are proud of the diverse nature of their city and want to make sure that newcomers are welcome. Future engagement must include these considerations in order to produce the kinds of outcomes in city planning that will create the city we want.

For VCPC that means a focus on:

- Practical Engagement
- Storytelling
- Community + Neighbourhood Empowerment
- Partnerships + Collaboration

The 2020 Summit will focus on these key aspects of city-wide engagement that have been overlooked or rushed through - meaningful engagement on the aspects of planning that matter. We hope to catalyze ideas and action that will contribute to a Vancouver Plan that is owned well beyond City Hall.

2. Co-design: What We Heard

Input into identifying themes for VCPC's May 2020 Summit were solicited through questions to guide small group discussions as well as through a survey of participants. There were 14 different questions, and four questions were assigned to each table with some repeats (see Appendix 2). The discussions were rich, expanding beyond addressing the questions asked. The presentation from the City, and the idea of engagement with the city-wide planning process, were clearly on people's minds, as was the overall focus on Design of Places and Spaces and the built form.



2.1 Table Discussions

The discussions focussed on 'process' – often in the form of frustrated feedback directed at past City engagement processes, and on 'content' – the topics in need of deeper discussion before and during the 2020 Summit, and which need to be addressed in the Vancouver Plan.

2.1.1 Engagement and inclusive planning processes: discussion of engagement and inclusive planning processes mainly centred on engagement with the City of Vancouver and planning at the City level. The comments are also pertinent reminders to VCPC about the kind of participation needed for the VCPC Summit process.

- The need for the City to build trust:* There is considerable distrust and even anger at the City for its past lack of responsiveness, poor engagement practices and exclusion of many groups (especially marginalized groups and racialized peoples). As a Citizen's Advisory Commission to the Mayor and Council, the VCPC is not immune from this critique. That the City needed to invest the time, energy and money into substantive engagement was raised multiple times. The City planning team needs to both engage and reflect the diverse communities in Vancouver- in particular, the planning team needs people with the background and skill sets to engage different cultural and racialized communities.

ii *Good engagement practices:* Suggestions for improving engagement included going to where people are; inviting people into the planning process and making them feel comfortable, not waiting for them to come to you; having multiple events that are varied in timing, geographic location and physical space to make them accessible and welcoming to a wide variety of people; using online engagement. The City and organizers of related events should seek the highest levels of inclusion (American Sign Language at all meetings, wheelchair accessibility, etc.).¹

“The design aspects of community building include tactical investments in social infrastructure and community interaction which bring people together more often.”

Grant Duckworth

- iii** *Diverse engagement:* Almost all tables noted the need to engage groups not normally included in the conversation, especially different equity-seeking groups, racialized groups, ethnic groups, youth and children, transient groups that impact the city (e.g. ESL students), different socio-economic groups and the need to use a gender lens in planning. Also noted was the need to make sure that engagement was deep: “Empower expertise that currently doesn’t look like expertise” and engage people with lived experience.
- iv** *Ongoing and responsive engagement:* Many tables addressed the time lag between consultation and implementation and the need for ongoing consultations; a feedback loop to continually update citizens on how their input is being used and how plans are being implemented; and flexibility so that plans can change as circumstances change. Planning must be a continuous 2-way process.
- v** *Barriers to engagement:* Language, physical, geographic, financial, cultural, accessibility, childcare, trust.
- vi** *Accessible language:* Several tables brought up the need to make language more accessible, not only making sure that the City reaches out to citizens in multiple languages, but also for other organizations (and the City) to minimize jargon and ensure that they can communicate with people in plain, easily understood language, avoiding language, like ‘NIMBY’ (not in my back yard), that alienates people.
- vii** *How cities are made:* A step beyond accessible space and accessible language is the need to provide people with an understanding of how the city of Vancouver has come into being- the colonial history of planning in the city, how planning works, what the jurisdiction and responsibilities of the municipal government are, how the city is impacted by First Nations, regional, national and global forces, etc.
- viii** *Community groups as the basis for engagement:* The City noted that they would be connecting with a wide range of organizations to engage with their stakeholders about the Vancouver Plan and this approach was well supported in comments from participants. Grassroots groups and Advisory Committees were both identified as organizations with access and good will to engage with a wide range of Vancouverites, share learning and ideas from events like the Summit and with the capacity to support two-way engagement.

¹ The City of Vancouver has developed a checklist and resources for ensuring that events are accessible: <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/accessible-events-checklist-and-resources.aspx>

2.1.2 Importance of community and identity: participants linked strong communities to better resilience and the ability to get things done, and deepened the discussion of the connection between community and built form. These comments are specifically aimed at ideas about the themes VCPC's Summit should address.

i *How the built form creates or damages community:*

Tables discussed different types of buildings and space and how public space, community space in buildings, heritage space, retail space etc. all affect the character of a neighbourhood. Several participants emphasized that we cannot think exclusively of housing, but of all types of buildings and space. Retail space came up

several times, with people noting that small businesses are an important part of the cultural fabric as well as economic drivers, and that 'hegemonic' retail design guidelines are homogenizing neighbourhoods. We need also to be aware of how different people experience space/ built form differently- for example, how kids use public outdoor space is an indicator of trust and health. There was disagreement about whether community space in residential towers ('vertical neighbourhoods') such as gyms were contributing to community or were wasteful amenities for the rich. Intangible heritage is critical to community, but also needs space. Views diverged on whether it was better to have cultural spaces and events/programming spread throughout the city or to have a hub for certain cultural communities to focus activities in. Overregulation is a barrier to opportunities for flexible community space and encounters, although it was noted that the City is getting better at making space for those kinds of opportunities, e.g. pop-up public space, community gardens, rooftop gathering places, public pianos etc.

"We are architecting ourselves into loneliness"

Participant

ii *Building an inclusive city:* Many tables noted the need for diversity of built form- high-rise, mid-rise, low rise; housing, commercial, retail. There needs to be room for both home ownership and renters and to consider affordability in a range of tenure and ownership options. This is one of the key ways to ensure that the city is not just for the rich. However, several tables emphasized that all decisions in the City cannot be driven by housing even though the housing issue feels overwhelming at times. Other types of built form such as public and community spaces, retail spaces etc. also need to be addressed. As well, the need to build the right kind of housing was highlighted.

iii *Joy:* Several participants noted that the times in life when they felt most joyful in the city were times when their networks were strong- e.g. as a student, a mother, as a professional where one is connected, empowered and engaged. There are many opportunities available to be connected in the city, but one needs to know about them. Conversely, when networks and connections are weak, when one is excluded or discriminated against because of race, gender, age, marital status, when one is overworked with no time to engage, then the city feels depressing and less safe.

"Life is not being lived here – families are moving out"

Abeer Yusuf

iv *Power:* Many tables noted that there are also issues with who the city is built for and who influences how the city is built and that this goes well beyond municipal politicians and bureaucrats. The influence of developers, higher levels of government, and financial considerations in decision-making were discussed as well as City policies with unintended or at least not well thought out consequences- e.g. how City policies made land assemblies and speculation easy, contributing significantly to lack of affordability. The need to consider the regional context in planning for the city was noted.

2.1.3 Change: change was a strong theme throughout the discussions, both needed change and coming change. There were diverging opinions on the rate of change, with some people seeing the city undergoing rapid change, while others pointed out that much of the city has not changed a great deal.

i *Fear of change:* Participants discussed resistance to change, noting that it often occurs at a neighbourhood level, that people may support needed changes such as increasing density in the city at large, but not in their own neighbourhoods. Some suggestions for addressing this included helping people to recognize that change is always happening; to educate people on the need for change, e.g. around addressing climate change; being careful with language such as calling people NIMBYs without addressing underlying fears.

"The fear of not knowing is why a vast majority of people are against change in the neighbourhood. They just don't know what it means. They think everything I know and love will be gone."

Devon Hussack

ii *Tools for change:* Many tools that incentivize or disincentivize change in the direction we want were discussed such as taxation for highest and best use which drives out small businesses or parking rates which encourage on-street instead of off-street parking. Major tools include:

- *Long-term planning* - long-term planning is one specific tool for change and can help people see the need for change. Short planning timeframes hinder where we want to go and we should be planning out 50 years. To another person planning out seven years was considered a luxury- even a privilege, and hard to do. Others noted the need to make hard decisions now- that if we see the change coming, making the right investments now (e.g. Skytrain to UBC, flood wall for sea level rise) can help us adapt better to change in the long-term.
- *Education* - another tool for change was raised in relation to several areas where change is needed such as zero waste, energy efficiency, need for retrofitting etc. Education is also needed around how decisions in the city get made- e.g. how planning works, what is and is not in the City's jurisdiction. For example, many issues that Vancouverites have called for the City to work on (and in fact the City has done a lot in these areas because of failures of higher levels of governments) are actually not part of the City's responsibility, e.g. housing, mental health, addiction and homelessness.
- *Good design makes good change easier* - gentle density spread out amongst neighbourhoods, not just along arterials, 10-minute communities, retail near housing, walkable communities, can all decrease car-dependency and increase support for density.

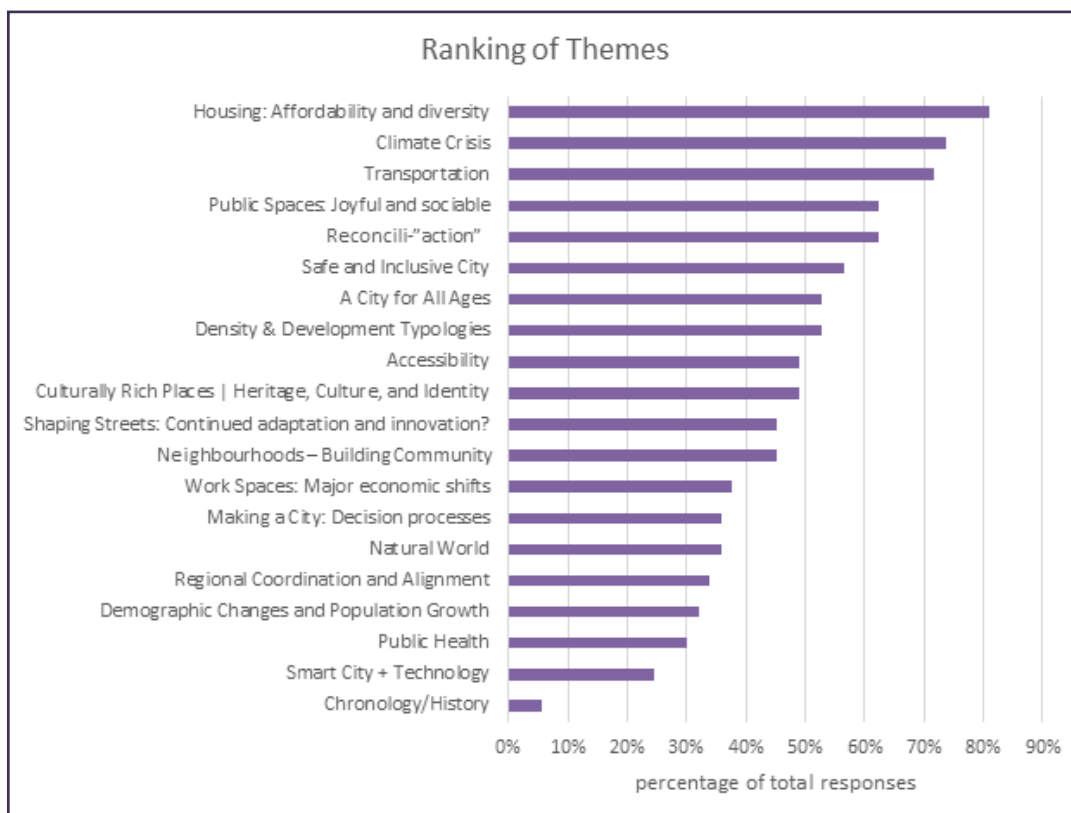


2.2 The Survey

The Survey was more straightforward, asking participants to identify 10 themes out of 20 as key themes for the Summit. Housing was the top choice, closely followed by Climate Crisis and Transportation. Reconcili“action” and Public Spaces were tied for 4th and 5th, followed by Safe and Inclusive City, Density and Development Typologies, a City for All Ages, Culturally Rich Places, all of which were selected by 50% or more of the participants. Rounding out the top ten was Accessibility at 49%. Most themes were selected by a third or more participants, except Smart Cities at 25% and Chronology/History at 6%.

It should be noted that while some topics were not selected as key themes, many participants either identified them as important in the small group discussions or in notes on the survey. For example, while Chronology/History received the fewest votes, history was an important topic in the discussions, with many participants noting that we need to understand the history of planning in Vancouver to understand how the city has been shaped, who has been included and excluded and to see a way forward. Interestingly, many of the least popular categories (under 40%) are also those that relate most directly to planning processes critical to the future of the city. As well, many of the most popular themes are in areas of great importance to the shape of the city, but also ones that the municipal government has the least control over.

Participants enriched the feedback by adding in suggestions for further themes (see Appendix 2) and questioning wording and grouping of themes. Several people noted that climate runs through all other themes or pointed to specific aspects of climate change likely to affect the city such as climate refugees. One person noted that housing is part of a climate and equity crisis rather than a stand-alone category. A couple of people wanted “Truth” added back to “Reconcili ‘action’”. The economy and business as critical issues were flagged in discussions and written feedback. Several participants sought to separate out specific aspects of a category into its own category such as emphasizing aging populations in a City for All Ages. The affordability aspect of the housing category was highlighted as well as social isolation.



3. Next Steps

VCPC compiled this report and forwarded it to all of the attendees at the Co-design Workshop. Following participants feedback and response it was revised and is being passed on to the City as part of our collective input to the Vancouver Plan process. Over the next year VCPC will undertake the following next steps:

1. Forming a Summit Joint Steering Committee (JSC) and developing the JSC terms of reference, noting that it is important that the JSC be reflective of the community. More than 25 people indicated their willingness to be involved in some way but it was not clear whether they wanted to be on the JSC or help with other parts of the process, so we are approaching some people to check on their interest and availability. The JSC for the last Summit consisted of 13 people with half of the members from the Community and Advisory Groups and half from VCPC. It usually met by conference call monthly, and then weekly as the Summit approached. We hope to have the new joint steering committee in place by early December. Once the JSC is in place, they will discuss how to best involve the other people who volunteered for further engagement in this process.
2. Organizing a Community Breakfast Series. There was quite a lot of support for the idea of monthly breakfasts so we are looking for a co-sponsor(s) who can help organize, fund or host breakfasts - our aspiration is to have approximately 50 people at each one. The purpose of the community breakfasts is to share short updates from community groups, advisory groups and the Vancouver Plan Team, as well as beginning deeper considerations of Summit 2020 themes as they emerge.
3. Finding sponsors to ensure that the Summit and Community Breakfasts are free, that child care and transportation allowances are available, and honorariums are available for the full day Summit to support attendance by those who might otherwise be unable to attend.
4. Encouraging other groups to host their own events, projects or programs that they can report on at the breakfasts and contribute to the idea of shaping the city for the future we want and need.
5. Identifying what engagement is being done by other groups on the potential Summit topics in order to avoid overlap.
6. Holding the Summit at the Community Roundhouse on May 14, 2020.
7. Continuing Community Breakfasts to monitor further progress and exploring social media platforms to expand reach to the general public.
8. Completing the Summit Report and presenting it to Council.
9. In parallel with the specific work leading up to the 2020 Summit, VCPC is also working on how to acknowledge its part in the colonial history of planning in Vancouver and how to incorporate that recognition into its inputs into the Vancouver Plan. Commissioners recently participated in the Kairos Blanket experience and in a consciousness raising session led by Brad Marsden on the impact of residential schools.

APPENDIX 1: BACKGROUND

How We Got Here

In 2016, VCPC embarked on a five-year strategic plan to address issues arising from the United Nations' 2015 New Urban Agenda. Resiliency was chosen as the overarching goal for VCPC's work and four themes were identified under that umbrella: Engagement for Real, A City for All, The Design of Places and Spaces, and Financing the Public Good. In 2016 VCPC focused on Engagement for Real, particularly the role and value of Citizen Advisory Boards. In 2017, in partnership with SFU's Public Square and the City of Vancouver's 100 Resilient Cities Office, VCPC hosted a [Summit on Shaping Resiliency: A Summit on Resiliency](#) and Vancouver's Future. Last year in December the VCPC Summit focused on [A City for All](#).

“When it comes to inclusion, it's not enough to have an open space and expect everyone to come fill it...You need to think about the needs of the diverse people you want to include, understand the challenges that bar them from accessing the space you created and then actually invite them to shape the space together...”

Houssam Elokda

To plan the 2018 Summit, VCPC held a workshop with representatives from community groups and the City's Citizen Advisory Committees. The message from participants was clear- the Summit should foreground peer-to-peer discussions on topics important to the future of Vancouver rather than keynote speakers or other external experts. The people in the room saw themselves as the experts on Vancouver and it was their voices that needed to be amplified. A Joint Summit Steering Committee (half from VCPC and half from these committees and community groups) was formed to guide the planning. From May to November VCPC hosted larger monthly gatherings with partners groups.

On December 4, 2018, the City for All Summit was held at the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre. The Summit was over-subscribed and was successful in engaging a wide range of participants including many from racialized and marginal groups. Even so, some groups expressed concern and raised areas where the VCPC's engagement could be strengthened. Experiences, common findings and recommendations were gathered into a [workbook](#) with contact information for each of the projects identified as contributing to A City for All.

The overall focus of the City for All was on how Vancouver can improve resiliency and build social capacity. The 19 roundtables were organized by theme: Belonging, Equity, and Design of Places and Spaces and the frameworks of Resiliency, Intersectionality and Reconciliation. Inevitably, discussions at each table touched on all the themes and frameworks, reflecting the integrated nature of the issues.

VCPC decided to follow a similar process to co-design the May 2020 Summit on the Design of Places and Spaces building further on the work of A City for All.

APPENDIX 2: Table Questions

When answering the survey of the top ten themes for inclusion in the May 2020 Summit, participants were also invited to write down additional themes to be considered as part of the planning process for the Summit. These are as follows:

- How can we honour Indigenous peoples, people of colour, women and other equity seeking groups?
- How can we uncover local assets and the hidden role of long-standing communities?
- Which parts of your identity make navigating Vancouver joyful, safe and/or accessible for you?
Which parts of your identity make navigating Vancouver unpleasant, unsafe and/or inaccessible for you?
- How do we meaningfully engage renters (of all economic and racial backgrounds), precariously housed individuals, and individuals requiring long term supports in our discussions?
- What would Vancouver look like if we took our climate change values seriously?
- How have past decisions and events shaped our current city, and what can we learn moving forward?
- How can we strengthen local identities and neighbourhood and community identities?
How can this be reflected in the built form, and ultimately into the City Wide Plan?
- Why have recent planning processes not produced the results we need?
- How to ensure that inevitable changes occurs under community guidance to ensure acceptable livability?
- What are the most important communities of interest and place in your life at the moment? Are they in Vancouver or elsewhere?
- How could the design or redesign of buildings, neighbourhoods, parks and transportation affect your feeling of belonging and connection to this city?
- What are examples from your experience where the city has not reflected the input of communities who matter?
- What are the perspectives that the City could celebrate in a variety of ways - what are some examples of what this could contribute to through the built form and design?
- How could the design or redesign of buildings, neighbourhoods, parks and transportation affect your feeling of belonging and connection to this city?

APPENDIX 3: Additional Themes

Each table was assigned 4 questions from the following list. Some questions were repeated at more than one table. Some tables stuck to answering the questions, some only addressed one or two questions and others only used the questions for the most general guidance.

- Please include a session at the Summit about the planning fails, the institutional memory and what was learned!
- Systems Change
- Metrics for decision-making
- UN Sustainable Development Goals & targets
- Climate Crisis as an obvious thread in everything else
- Regional approach- planning in Vancouver needs to take into account neighbouring cities
- Health literacy
- Financial literacy
- Critical appraisal
- Loneliness and social isolation should be included in the public health section
- Rethinking financial models of transportation
- Social wellbeing and social isolation
- How would the plan get implemented without clear zoning regulations?
- How can we make the City Plan actionable?
- Also: Empty homes and empty storefronts
- Food systems! (Includes food justice & sovereignty)
- Equity & Inclusion - ensure diversity of choices
- Support for the arts and creativity
- Diverse and sustainable business/economy
- Global refugee crisis
- "Language" technical; operational; isolating
- Consider having an Office for IMAGINATION
- We are not planning for the inevitable flood of climate refugees
- Resilience, either as a part of 'safe and inclusive city' or 'climate crisis' or 'shaping streets'
- A Regenerative City (Regenerative development)
- Knowledge mobilization - building collective intelligence, collaborative action, and evolutionary capacity
- Circular/ regenerative economy
- Affordability
- Trust and caring (?) in the city: how do we watch out for each other? [with an arrow pointing to Safe & inclusive city]
- Access to local, culturally-appropriate food for people of all backgrounds + incomes in all neighbourhoods
- Power dynamics! Ensuring culturally/racially inclusive guest list along in meeting design that creates safe spaces for groups typically marginalized in city planning processes (especially black, indigenous people of colour)
- Compensation for individuals from marginalized communities to allow them to participate
- No fees to participate
- Consult with Vancouver Food Policy Council (perhaps come to a meeting of VCPC?)
- Building better habits: How to behave & share better our public spaces

- Resilience- i.e. global heating, sea levels rise, climate migration
- Wise to resume "common vision"
- Social isolation
- Public transportation
- 3rd spaces
- Micro community (block) events
- Context of "change"- several commenters suggested that change is rapid/accelerating, but most of the city is not/has not changed at all
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Zoning, racial equity and justice
- I see reconciliation but I don't see truth-telling
- Faith groups
- Anti-ableism not 'accessibility'