

COUNCIL – AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date:	16 May 2022
Subject:	Measuring Social Well-Being to Improve the Lives of Airdrie Residents
Boards Routed Through:	Community Services Advisory Board
Date:	11 April 2022

Issue:

Council is being provided with information about the Social Well-Being Survey which will allow the City to track factors contributing to social well-being and move Council closer to its 2023 to 2026 goal of ensuring that Airdrie is a Caring Community.

Background:

A strong community is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable. The City of Airdrie believes that the strength of a community rests, in part, on the social well-being of its residents. In adopting the Social Policy in 2020, Council committed to strengthening social well-being in Airdrie. When Council adopted the Social Policy, Administration outlined next steps towards guiding the City to success in upholding the principles of the Policy, one of which was to measure social well-being in Airdrie. The work of Social Planning is to understand and respond to social issues in the community. Collecting quality social data is foundational to this work.

Social Planning came to Council in June 2021 with a plan for a survey to measure overall well-being in Airdrie. At that time, there were concerns about the scope of the project and the City's role in addressing some aspects of overall well-being (such as mental well-being). Following this, Social Planning took Council's feedback into account and narrowed the focus of the planned survey to focus solely on social well-being. Social Planning is returning to Council with an updated survey plan.¹

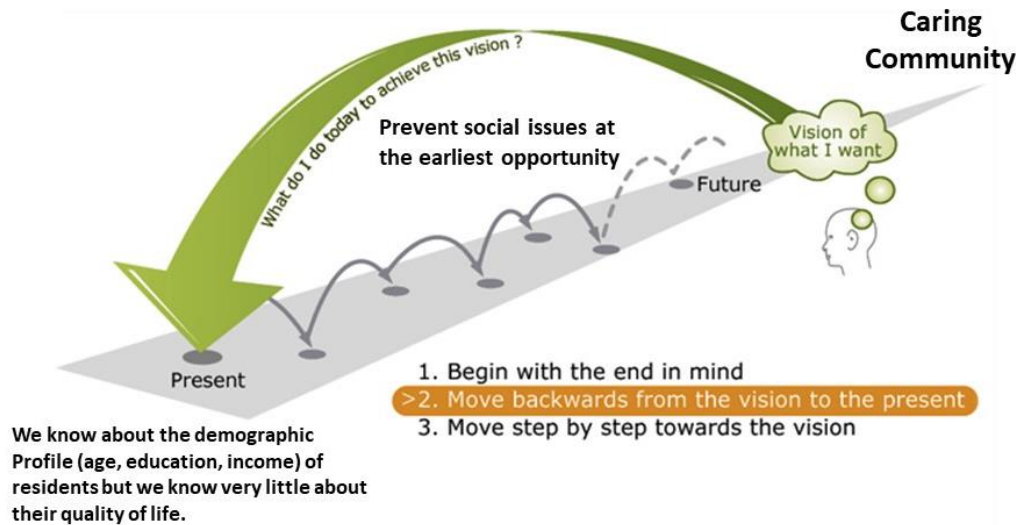
The City of Airdrie is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada, with a projected population of 110,000 by as early as 2035.² As a community grows, the complexity of its social challenges

¹ Further details on this can be found in the "SWBI Background Summary Report" attachment.

² City of Airdrie (2018). 12 Thousand Acres Plan. Retrieved January 26, 2022 from: <https://www.airdrie.ca/getDocument.cfm?ID=6681>.

increases.³ Conditions at the local, regional, national and global scales add to this complexity and magnify change. In light of this complexity, and with the understanding that social issues are often interrelated, many governments are taking a unified and proactive approach to strengthening social well-being. There are hard costs related to social problems. For example, social exclusion or low sense of belonging amongst marginalized youth have been shown to contribute to youth homelessness, unemployment, crime and victimization. This results in increased resource investments in municipal policing, mental health interventions, housing, job training and addiction recovery. Because Airdrie's community is growing so fast, the City does not have a big picture view of how residents are faring and areas where social well-being may be low. With this information, the City can focus resources on addressing those social issues in the most appropriate way, maximizing the benefits to residents.

Alignment to Council's 2023-2026 Focus Areas



The illustration above is what is known as “backcasting,” which starts by defining the future (or vision) and then looks back to assess what would be required to get there. Backcasting is particularly valuable in addressing complex social problems. If Council envisions a Caring Community for Airdrie with a strong sense of belonging, that is diverse and inclusive and provides barrier-free opportunities to residents, Administration needs to know how residents currently experience life in their community. Are there groups whose social well-being is lower than others? Collecting social data about the levels of social well-being and quality of life of residents helps the City and its community partners to prevent issues at the earliest opportunity.

Social data will help Council successfully reach their vision as laid out in their focus areas. At the regular Council meeting on March 21, 2022. Administration presented Council with a final version of their 2023 to 2026 focus areas. Council expressed their direction to address areas

³ Alberta Government (2013). Alberta's Social Policy Framework. Retrieved on October 15, 2019 from: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/e269764d-e3ed-431c-9db3-b65073cc6e51/resource/998e15a5-c992-4a61-b6b4-2957eb6227d6/download/6214203-2013-albertas-social-policy-framework-2013-02-28.pdf>.

of concern identified in the Citizen Satisfaction Survey. This included areas such as the drop in sense of belonging and that a sense of community was a contributing factor in a resident's quality of life. Council's focus areas that target advocacy and a caring community for example, aim to directly address these concerns.

While staff typically ask residents how the City is doing, staff now want to ask how *they* are doing. The results of the Social Well-Being Survey may provide valuable insight into the following key focus areas:

Transportation:

- *Citizens want to move around Airdrie safely and easily in a variety of ways.*

The results may suggest that a given percentage of women reported avoiding certain situations or places in the community. This could help Airdrie Transit in recommending future service delivery models to support a safer community.

Leisure, Recreation and Culture:

- *Four season opportunities for recreation and social connection through events, arts, and culture are highly valued by our community and enhance residents' quality of life.*

By collecting information from residents, staff can improve how City-led events that focus on connection and community building are created.

Caring Community:

- *All residents feel a sense of belonging.*
- *Support and caring citizens who are experiencing social vulnerability enhances social well-being and helps residents to access resources here in Airdrie so they can stay in the community.*
- *Removing social and physical barriers to equity, diversity, and inclusion will enable all members of our community to access opportunities and participate in activities.*
- *Embracing the intent of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action will help create understanding to support stronger Indigenous connections in the community. Airdrie will be a place where all people can live with dignity, value and purpose.*

The results may tell staff that for the most part Airdrie residents are doing well, but a certain demographic is experiencing a lower sense of inclusion. Therefore, the City could look at ways to integrate inclusion and equity objectives, as well as recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, into specific municipal plans and initiatives.⁴

Conversations with Community Agencies

Social Planning had met with a number of social agencies in the community (including representatives from North Rocky View Community Links and Welcoming Airdrie) to try and understand if this type of information would be of benefit to them and their work and how they

⁴ Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (2019). Strategies to Improve Your Inclusiveness. A supplementary resource of AUMA's Measuring Inclusion Tool for Municipal Governments. Retrieved on March 30, 2022 From: https://www.abmunis.ca/sites/default/files/measuring_inclusion_tool_-_strategies_to_improve_your_inclusiveness_20190830.pdf.

incorporate the findings of the Social Well-Being Survey in the work they do. Community organizations felt that this type of work was fantastic and were excited to see the results. Quality social data could help them understand the specific needs of their clients and where there may be barriers to participation, which could help them better serve Airdrie residents.

Further, these agencies commented on how this type of project demonstrates that the City is aware that there are challenges for our residents, and that by acknowledging this and asking for information to try and understand what these challenges might be, residents know that the City is listening and taking the necessary steps to start addressing these challenges.

How Concrete Evidence Can Help a Municipality Strengthen Social Well-Being

Research shows that social relationships (or lack thereof), integration into society, and being included in civic life are powerful drivers of one's well-being. To improve the social well-being of Airdrie residents, staff needs to know how they are doing. For example, Council's Social Policy commits the City to ensuring that all residents feel included, empowered and valued in Airdrie. Currently, Administration does not know the degree to which this is the case. Are there specific groups (such as those of various ages, genders, sexualities and so on) at greater risk? The City needs to start asking these questions. Otherwise, staff will continue to rely on assumptions. This type of information is necessary because it will give the City valuable insight into how residents are doing.

Social data is about understanding a community and the people who live in it: who they are, where they are doing well, and areas where they may be facing challenges.

- It can inform decisions about where to focus our attention for the greatest benefit.
- It helps make informed decisions on resource allocation towards issues that are widespread or the most pressing.
- Understanding the social conditions of the community would allow the City to make strategic decisions and deploy its resources where they will be most effective.

The City of Airdrie currently does not have up-to-date, local social data or a current understanding of our community to help guide decisions. It is critical that the City collect its own local social data because Airdrie-specific community-wide data does not exist elsewhere.⁵

Sample Survey Questions to Measure Social Well-Being

As defined in Council's Social Policy, social well-being is a state of positive social relationships in a community. This state is characterized by social acceptance (a willingness to respect difference in others), social contribution (a desire to give back to society), social inclusion (a sense of belonging), social support (close relationships with others), and social capital (the means, knowledge and relationships required to access resources). Understanding these elements help staff understand the life experiences of Airdrie residents.

Below, are some examples of what types of questions will be asked for each domain under social well-being.

⁵ Although the City would be able to review data and research from other levels of government, their focus would be broad, and updated too infrequently for the pace at which Airdrie is growing. Further, data from these other levels are frequently collected at a regional level, where it becomes difficult to distinguish Airdrie's own unique trends (e.g., Airdrie would be included in the Calgary Metropolitan Area, and simply due to its size, Calgary would dominate any patterns at the CMA level).

Social Acceptance:

- Thinking about your day-to-day experiences over the past year, how often have you been called names, insulted, threatened, harassed because of such things as your race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or other characteristics?

Social Inclusion:

- Thinking about your day-to-day experiences over the past year, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: there are barriers preventing me from fully participating in my community.

Social Support:

- Thinking about your day-to-day experiences over the past year, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I have friends or family who can provide practical assistance in my everyday life.

Social Contribution:

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I believe that it is important to financially support charitable organizations.

Social Capital:

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I am able to access the community resources I need.

Having a better understanding of residents' social well-being experiences more broadly, will allow the City to make strategic decisions and deploy our resources where they are most effective.

Survey Rollout and Timelines

Initial Pilot Survey

Social Planning will run a pilot of the survey with a smaller sample size. Completing a small preliminary analysis prior to a larger roll out, allows staff ensure the survey is both reliably and accurately measuring social well-being at relatively minimal cost. Administration will randomly select a number of households and mail out letters explaining the purpose of the survey, how the City plans to use the information collected and invite residents to participate. This type of social research is highly complex; therefore, time is required to collect the data, clean it, analyze it, and prepare a report based on the results.

Preliminary Results to CSAB/Council

The Social Well-Being Pilot Survey will be in the field in May/June 2022. Administration will return to Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB) and Council in early fall 2022 and share results that include the following:

- Administration will share the results of individual questions with CSAB and Council. This will provide the City with an opportunity to celebrate areas where well-being is high and understand where social well-being may be low.

- For example, the results may indicate that a given percentage of women reported avoiding certain situations or places in the community. This could help Airdrie Transit in recommending future service delivery models to support a safer community.
- As another example, the results might highlight that a given percentage of respondents don't feel connected with others in their community. This can help inform Community Development's special events planning, or help them consider new ways to promote better placemaking and community building.
- A demographic profile of respondents (e.g., age distribution, the proportion of LGBTQ2S+ respondents, etc.).
 - This information would enhance the City's understanding of its population and allow Administration and Council to anticipate potential challenges faced by some groups.

Wider Rollout to a Larger Sample of Households

Following analysis of the pilot survey results to ensure that the survey reliably and accurately measures social well-being, Administration will follow-up with a wider rollout of the Social Well-Being Survey in the Fall/Winter of 2022. This wider rollout will draw on a much larger sample of households, and this will help ensure that Social Planning receives responses from marginalized groups of residents. The goal is to understand the overall conditions in Airdrie, as this will help identify areas where there may be challenges for some groups of residents. The larger sample size for the wide rollout will allow Social Planning to compare how particular groups of residents are faring in relation to the community as a whole, which will help in designing targeted solutions to address areas where social well-being may be low.

Results of the Wider Rollout to CSAB/Council

The wider rollout of the survey will be in the field in Fall/Winter 2022. Administration will return to CSAB and Council in early 2023 and share results that include the following:

- An overview of social well-being and its domains in the population as a whole.
- A breakdown of the results across various subpopulations:
 - E.g., what do social well-being and its domains look like for the newcomer population compared to the population as a whole (are newcomers experiencing challenges or successes in particular areas compared to the population as a whole).
 - E.g., what are the scores like for LGBTQ2S+ population compared to the population as a whole (e.g., do LGBTQ2S+ respondents report lower levels of social acceptance).
- This report will also include the same demographic profile as the preliminary report.
- Information on logistical aspects of the survey (e.g., response rate, attrition rate, time to complete, etc.).
- May include descriptive statistics on the responses to individual questions.

Engagement Plan

This work is one of the broader ways staff can engage Airdrie residents in alignment with Council's strategic priority to Expand and Diversify Citizen Engagement, as Social Planning is taking a novel approach to sampling residents for the survey. Social Planning believes that residents will appreciate the City's interest in how they are doing and that this will encourage residents to respond to the survey. This approach allows staff to engage residents in a meaningful way and can help Council and Administration make decisions on policies, programs and initiatives with their needs in mind.

The goal of the engagement plan for the wider rollout is to build awareness for the project. Working with Corporate Communications, ideas that Social Planning is currently exploring include:

- A video aimed at residents outlining the importance of understanding their experiences and giving a high-level overview of how this information could help guide the work of the municipality. This video will be an important tool for building high levels of engagement and excitement with the Social Well-Being Survey.
- Renting portable signs to advertise the survey, both before and while the survey is in the field, to help ensure residents are aware of the survey and their opportunity to help the City understand how they are faring and the challenges they may be facing.

Further, Social Planning will explore strategies to support accessibility barriers in completing the survey and ensure residents are connected to the most appropriate resources to support their needs.

- First, the online survey platform being used to host the survey is designed to support both desktop computers and mobile devices, offers the ability to preview the survey on both platforms, and help ensure compatibility and ease of use for mobile options.
- The online platform offers translation services, and Social Planning will explore translating the survey into a select number of additional languages (based on the best data available about languages spoken most often at home other than English).
- The online platform also incorporates tools to help ensure that surveys are in compliance with current accessibility standards for online content (such as compatibility with screen readers, helping ensure ease of response for residents with mobility impairments, etc.).
- Finally, Social Planning will explore options to partner with community agencies who may be able to assist residents without access to a computer or mobile device, or who otherwise need assistance to respond to the survey.

Conclusion

The Social Well-Being Survey is an important tool for planning future municipal initiatives, and will help clarify what is important to achieving social well-being. It will help the City answer "Where should the City focus our resources for the greatest social benefit?" Administration understands that this is a new way for the City to approach its work; however, it is important to attempt to measure social well-being, as without this information Administration will not have clear evidence on how Airdrie residents are faring and will need to continue relying on assumptions.

By having a better understanding of how residents are faring in their daily lives, Administration can create effective strategies that guide City policies and make decisions to improve the lives of residents. Further, this information would aid Administration and Council in their advocacy efforts with other levels of government and assist staff in applying for various grants. In summary, collecting quality local social data would allow staff to move away from a reliance on assumptions and allow the City to incorporate the voice of residents in decisions that impact them.

Alignment with South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and AirdrieONE:

Social Policy:

The Social Well-Being Survey aligns with Council's Social Policy's principles of diversity and inclusion, connectedness, equitable access to quality services and proactivity.

AirdrieONE Sustainability Plan:

The Social Well-Being Survey aligns with the socially sustainable communities pillar of AirdrieONE by enhancing social well-being in the community.

Boards Routed Through:

Members of the Community Services Advisory Board appreciated the importance of this survey, and many were excited about how the results could inform Administration's future work, however there were a of comments and questions.

First, some members questioned the target sample size of the pilot survey and worried that Administration would not reach marginalized populations without a very large sample. To address concerns about the survey's ability to reach marginalized populations, Social Planning provided a brief overview of plans for a wider rollout in Fall/Winter 2022 after the survey has been validated using results from the pilot. The wider rollout is part of Administration's plan going forward, and these details have been included in the report and presentation to City Council.

Second, some Board members had questions about the response rate and how this would impact the results. Social Planning reassured the Board that if the response rate was low that additional households could be randomly selected to help ensure a sufficient number of responses. Beyond this, Social Planning explained that they have begun working with Corporate Communications to build an engagement plan for the wider rollout. The Board was also advised that Administration is currently exploring a number of ideas to help build interest and engagement with the survey amongst residents, including (but not limited to): a video aimed at residents outlining the reasons for the conducting this survey and how the data can help the municipality respond to challenges faced by residents; renting portable signs to advertise the survey; and a social media campaign.

Social Planning responded to the Board's concerns and no further questions were asked. A number of Board members indicated that they felt this was a project that could provide valuable insight into Airdrie's community, and that this work would be desired and appreciated by residents. The Community Services Advisory Board unanimously accepted the report for information.

Alternatives/Implications:

Option 1: That Council endorses the plan to measure social well-being to establish a baseline understanding of how its residents are faring as a foundational tool in developing strategies to prevent social problems at the earliest opportunity, in order to achieve Council's vision of a Caring Community.

Implications:

Social data provides evidence to help the City celebrate its community's social strengths and address social issues before they become widespread. It allows the City to focus its resources where they are most needed in the community. A proactive approach to social conditions is not only less expensive than a reactionary approach, but it also helps create a thriving community where residents experience a high quality of life.

Option 2: That Council maintains the status quo and does not collect data on social well-being or broad demographic information about the community.

Implications:

By not knowing how our residents are faring, it is difficult to address signs of potentially larger social issues. Residents in communities characterized by low levels of social well-being often experience a low quality of life and higher rates of social problems. As social problems become widespread in a community, the time, and costs to resolve these issues increases and it may become more difficult to improve the lives of residents and ensure that Airdrie is a Caring Community.

Public Engagement and Communications Plan:

Social Planning continues to work closely with Corporate Communications to create both Communications and Engagement plans.

Recommendation:

That Council endorses the plan to measure social well-being to establish a baseline understanding of how Airdrie residents are faring as a foundational tool in developing strategies to prevent social problems at the earliest opportunity, in order to achieve Council's vision of a Caring Community.

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Attachments:	#1 - SWBI Background Summary #2 - SWBI Quick Reference #3 - SWBI Timelines
Appointment:	N/A