

Keeping the Pop-Up Plaza Past COVID-19: A Communication Plan



SPPH 552
Claire Styffe

Background

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Vancouver introduced a number of pop-up plazas in both downtown and residential neighbourhoods.¹ Pop-up plazas are constructed by closing off a side street to car traffic and bringing in outdoor furniture and other amenities to create an urban public space. The purpose of the pop-up plaza is to allow people to get outside and be in their community in a safe manner, to improve mental health during this difficult time, and to help support local businesses who may be struggling due to COVID-19 restrictions.¹

Research has indicated that urban public spaces can have a number of positive impacts for individuals and communities. They have been associated with improving community engagement, increasing vibrancy, and reducing crime.^{2, 3, 4, 5} Interventions that allow for individuals to improve their sense of connection to community and civic participation can lead to increased social capital, which has been associated with a number of positive health outcomes including improved cardiovascular health and increased mental health.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

There are currently 22 pop-up plazas located in Vancouver, each with slightly different characteristics to adapt to their local community.¹⁰ The pop-up plazas are however intended to be temporary, and are meant to be removed once the pandemic and related restrictions are no longer considered a priority.¹ However, the city of Vancouver is currently asking for feedback regarding pop-up plazas and has indicated it will be considered when deciding whether or not to extend the pop-up plaza initiative beyond COVID-19.¹

Mission

The purpose of this communication plan is to convince Vancouver policy makers that the pop-up plazas should be kept beyond COVID-19.

Rationale:

Pop-up plazas are a benefit to the neighbourhoods in which they are situated, and can allow people to foster a sense of connection to their community, support local businesses, reduce crime and improve health. While their presence is particularly vital during the pandemic, their benefits are important all the time, not only during a major health crisis. The pop-up plaza initiative is also in line with other city goals and priorities; the Healthy City Strategy outlines several key areas of priority including increasing sense of belonging, improving engagement and connection to the city, improving access to outdoor spaces, and creating vibrant and thriving environments.¹¹ The 2020 municipal budget pronounced the increase in the square footage of urban public space over the last few years a success and stated that they wished to see this upward trend continue.¹²

Pop-up plazas are not particularly expensive initiatives¹², and the costs to construct them have already been born. In addition, their ability to improve health, support local businesses and reduce crime mean they have the potential to be highly cost-efficient. The fact that the pop-up plaza initiative can lead to a number of positive health and societal outcomes, that it is in line with existing city priorities and that it may be cost-efficient make its extension beyond COVID-19 logical and practical.

Barriers and Opportunities:

Pop-up plazas are not a particularly controversial topic, and do not involve limiting people's freedom or requiring them to alter their behaviour in any substantial way. They are not expensive initiatives, but some may feel that the city of Vancouver should prioritize its spending on areas of perceived greater need (such as hospital costs, bridges, emergency services, etc.) which may act as a barrier during the communication plan.

Pop-up plazas can be such a positive initiative owing partly to their ability to foster civic engagement, and to get people involved in their community. This communication plan involves encouraging people to play a role in shaping their environment by becoming involved in civic decisions. Therefore, the implementation of this plan, and even the barriers that some might think funding should be allocated elsewhere, are conducive to the very civic engagement that pop-up plazas seek to create, and is one of the greatest opportunities this plan seeks to build upon.

Target Audience:

This communication plan has two target audiences, the first of which are the Vancouver city councillors. 10 city councillors are elected for 4-year terms and are responsible for a number of city issues.¹³ While city councillors make decisions regarding a range of matters, they each have their own areas of experience and interest. Councillors Sarah Kirby-Yung and Adriane Carr have expertise and interests in urban public spaces and are therefore one of the main target audiences.^{14, 15}

As councillors are elected officials, they have a responsibility to their constituents. The city of Vancouver has asked for feedback on the pop-up plazas, and councillors are more likely to take an issue seriously if their voters present an interest. As a result, this communication plan also aims to target Vancouver city residents. The residents who are most likely to give feedback on pop-up plazas are those who use them, and are thus those who live or work near them. Therefore, the second target audience are those who live or work near pop-up plazas.

Separate arms of the communication plan will work to address councillors Adriane Carr and Sarah Kirby-Yung, and those living and working near pop-up plazas. For a diagram of how both arms of the plan fit together, see Appendix 1.

Arm #1: Addressing those who live or work near Pop-Up Plazas

Sub-Mission

The main goal for this section of the communication plan is to get those living and working near pop-up plazas to contact the city and share their thoughts on plazas. For more specific process and outcome goals, see the evaluation section.

Message

Content

Pop-up plazas are capable of many things: they can reduce crime, increase community engagement, raise social capital and improve the overall social good. However, the most obvious and immediate effects of a pop-up plaza are its abilities to lend vibrancy to a neighbourhood, to be aesthetically pleasing, and to be fun. The people who use pop-up plazas do so as a way to

appreciate the weather, listen to outdoor concerts and enjoy the food and drinks that are served by nearby establishments. Messaging for this audience aims to focus on the benefits and experiences of which they are most immediately aware, and which may be of the greatest importance to them. Rather than try to impress upon them the need to keep pop-up plazas in order to build social capital and have long-term positive impacts on health at a population level, messaging will focus on the ways pop-up plazas make everyday life more enjoyable, vibrant and fun.

Another part of the message content will be focused on the aspect of control. Messaging will stress that this is an opportunity for residents to shape their community, and ensure that the neighbourhood in which they live and work is one that serves them. Related to this is the notion that they need to act lest they run the risk of losing something. Research has shown that people are more likely to act in order to prevent the loss of something they already have, rather than to gain something they would like to possess.¹⁶ Thus the message will be focused on saying that pop-up plazas are here, that they are fun, and that only with your action will they stay. This overall message content will be used in slightly different ways depending on the mediums employed.

The main slogan that will be used to catch attention is:

“Not everything fun has to be cancelled.”

This short statement does several things. The first is that it plays on the current pandemic situation, and the public rhetoric that “2020 has been cancelled”. Second, it highlights that the pop-up plazas are fun, and third, its call that not everything “has to be cancelled” indicates that a) the pop-up plaza is in danger of disappearing and b) you can do something about it.

For mediums where slightly longer communications are allowed, an ABT framework can be employed. When targeting those living near pop-up plazas, the ABT can take this format:

“Vancouver’s pop-up plazas are building community connection, engagement and vibrancy AND the City of Vancouver has introduced more of them during COVID-19 times BUT the plazas are meant to be temporary THEREFORE we need your help to keep them around — please email the City of Vancouver at pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca and tell them your thoughts.”

When contacting those who work in the area, the ABT could be adapted as follows:

“Vancouver’s pop-up plazas help increase foot traffic to local businesses and raise profits AND the City of Vancouver has introduced more of them during COVID-19 times BUT the plazas are meant to be temporary THEREFORE we need your help to keep them around — please email the City of Vancouver at pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca and tell them your thoughts.”

Tone and style

The pop-ups are meant to be fun, inclusive and light, and the message tone and style will follow this principle. The words used should evoke positive feelings and place agency in the

hands of people. Rather than using gloomy language to forecast the decline of a neighbourhood after the removal of a pop-up plaza, the tone should be one of positive possibilities and the agency people have in shaping their own future. Exclamation points, bright colours and words with positive connotations should be used.

Medium

In order to reach those living and working near pop-up plazas, a number of different mediums will be employed.

1. The first medium that will be employed is to collaborate with Block Watches and work with them to send an email around the neighbourhood. Block Watches are pre-existing community groups that are led by a captain and liaise with the Vancouver Police Department. While their main role is to watch out for crime and build trust within the community, these groups are excellent vehicles for all sorts of collective action. The Block Watch Captain serves as leader for the group and often sends around emails letting their neighbours know about community information. A benefit of working with Block Watch leaders is that rather than a stranger reaching out to people and asking them to contact the city, a trusted community leader will be presenting information on a community issue and advocating for community action.

Get in contact with Block Watch Captains who live near a pop-up plaza by sending them email material about the pop-up plazas and the need for people to give feedback in order to keep them. Provide the Block Watch captain with an email they can forward on to their neighbours that features bright graphics, a breakdown of the current situation, how neighbours can take action, and links to government websites should they wish to know more. The email is an excellent place to use the ABT framework to clearly outline the situation, why it is relevant to those being contacted and what they can do about it.

The email should include a link that people can click on which will take them to an email form with the pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca address already inputted, as well as an appropriate subject line, and prompts in the body of the text asking people to write about their thoughts on pop-up plazas and whether they feel they should be continued. An email account specifically built for this communication plan should also be cc'd so that information can be collected for future program activities and evaluations. Recipients of this email should be made aware that this email address has been inputted, the reason for this imputation, assurances that their information will be kept confidential and real names will never be used, and that they can remove this cc'd address from their own outgoing email if they would prefer to send their comment only to the city and not to the communication plan team.

2. While contacting Block Watches are a good way to reach out to those living near pop-up plazas they are likely to miss those working near pop-up plazas. Businesses near pop-up plazas are among those most likely to benefit from this initiative; as plazas increase foot traffic and allow for people to purchase food/drink items and then spill out onto the street, they are likely to see increased profits from the presence of a pop-up plaza. Vancouver Business Improvement Associations are organizations within which businesses can connect, collaborate and take collective action. As with the Block Watches, it may be more beneficial to have a trusted leader contact members than it would be to have a stranger pass information along.

Get in contact with the heads of local Vancouver Business Improvement Associations. Provide the leaders with an email they can forward on to their associates that features information relevant to businesses, a clear explanation of the current situation, how businesses can take action, and links to government websites should they wish to know more. This is the place where the business-specific ABT framework can be used to structure the overall email. As with the Block Watch emails, a link to a pre-filled email form should be included for ease of participation.

3. The third medium employed will be to use the pop-up plazas themselves as a base to encourage people to get in contact with the city. Posters will be affixed in the pop-up plaza area that make clear the plazas will disappear unless people take it upon themselves to contact the city. As well as a simple message, the posters will provide both an email address people can use to contact the city, as well as a QR code. A QR code can be scanned by someone in the plaza using their smartphone and it will automatically generate an email form with appropriate information already filled in, similar to the email forms sent to Block Watches and Business Improvement Associations, so that people can participate in sending feedback more easily.

Selfie frames will also be constructed at the plaza as a way to encourage people to take part of our social media campaign. The frames will have a reminder on the side to tag @Vanpop-ups and @cityofvancouver and to use the hashtag #Keepthepop-up. Selfie frames should be constructed in a way so that only one person may use the frame at a time so as to ensure that the social distancing promoted by pop-up plazas is maintained.

4. The final way that those living and working near plazas will be reached is through Instagram. An Instagram campaign will be undertaken in three steps.

a) The account @Vanpop-ups will be created to showcase the pop-up plazas. Beautiful images of the plazas will be posted and captions will remind people to contact the city should they want to keep them. The Link in Bio will include an email form similar to that from the QR code where the city's pop-up plaza email address will already be filled in, and there will be prompts in the body message to state what you think of pop-up plazas and whether you believe they should be kept past COVID-19. The posts will use bright imagery and positive wording, as outlined in the tone and style section. Instagram can also be used to conduct live polls to engage followers, and use stories to get supplemental information out that would not be suited to a long caption. See Appendix 2 for an example of Instagram posts.

b) Collaborations will be created with other Instagram accounts that showcase Vancouver and have a large number of followers. Such accounts could include @curiosityvancouver (286k followers), @inside_vancouver (237k followers) and @dailyhivevancouver (322k followers). It would be beneficial if these accounts could post about the pop-up plazas, encourage their followers to visit them and provide the email form in their Link in Bio.

c) The third arm of the Instagram plan will be to encourage people to post their own photos of the pop-up plazas and tag both @Vanpop-ups as well as @cityofvancouver, so that both we and the city can become aware of the level of interest surrounding the pop-ups. People will be encouraged to post their own photos from the selfie frames at plazas, and from our own @Vanpop-ups account. They will also be encouraged to use the hashtag #Keepthepop-up, which

will be featured heavily on all communication material sent out to Block Watches, Business Improvement Associations, on posters, on selfie frames and on our own Instagram account.

Evaluation

1. **Outcome Goal:** People contact the city of Vancouver about pop-up plazas.

Success: At least 100 people contact the city of Vancouver about pop-up plazas, either by emailing them at pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or by tagging them in their Instagram photos. I will be able to ascertain this information by counting the emails that have been cc'd to the team email account, and by searching through Instagram for what the @cityofvancouver account has been tagged in.

1.1. **Process Goal:** The message is disseminated through the Block Watch networks.

Success: 5 Block Watch Captains forward my message along to their neighbours. I will be able to ascertain this if I receive confirmation from 5 Block Watch Captains that they have forwarded my message on to their neighbours.

1.2. **Process Goal:** Information is disseminated at the pop-up plaza itself.

Success: At least one poster is put up at every pop-up plaza in Vancouver.

1.3. **Process Goal:** The message is disseminated through our Instagram account.

Success: At least 20 posts are made on the @Vanpop-ups account.

1.4. **Process Goal:** We collaborate with well-followed Vancouver Instagram accounts.

Success: At least one account that showcases Vancouver and has over 100k followers shares a post about pop-up plazas.

1.5. **Process Goal:** We encourage people to take part of our social media campaign.

Success: At least 30 people post a photo with #Keepthepop-up. I will be able to ascertain whether this has occurred by searching through Instagram for #Keepthepop-up.

Arm #2: Addressing city councillors Adriane Carr and Sarah Kirby-Yung

Sub-Mission: The main goal for this section is to convince Adriane Carr and Sarah Kirby-Yung that pop-up plazas should be kept beyond COVID-19. For more specific process and outcome goals, see the evaluation section.

Message

Content

Rather than focusing on immediate and obvious benefits like the first arm of the plan does, the message for city councillors will be focused on the long term positive impacts pop-up plazas can have for communities. Attention will be paid not only to the improvements that can be made to community vibrancy and engagement, but also the ways in which pop-up plazas can

improve health, support businesses, raise social capital and decrease crime, as these are aspects in which city councillors are most interested. Efforts should be made to point out that these positive impacts could have potential cost savings for the city. Councillors should be reminded that the cost of constructing the plazas has already been born, and that it would be unfortunate for the taxpayers to have already funded a community initiative that could continue to benefit them, but to then have it removed.

The message will also focus on framing the city councillors as heroes, and in painting their actions as positive and constructive. As elected officials they often face plenty of criticism and demands for them to impact change (ie. Implement new programs, improve conditions, etc.). However, the aim of this communication plan is to point out that the councillors have already helped their city by constructing the pop-up plazas and that it aligns with pre-existing Vancouver city priorities to keep them.

The main slogan that will be used and expanded upon is:

“Supporting communities is always a good idea.”

The purpose of this slogan is to remind councillors that the pop-up plazas are a positive thing, that they’ve already done the good work of setting them up, and that this good work should be continued into the future, not removed once the current crisis is over.

Style and Tone

The overall tone of this messaging will be positive, and focus on the good work that has already been done. It will convey that it would be both logical and heroic to continue this good work into the future. As we are communicating with people in their professional capacity as public servants, the style of communication should be professional and never give the impression that we are trivializing a matter that ultimately is an aspect of municipal policy, requires municipal funding and has real ramifications on the lives of those living in Vancouver.

Medium

As it is only necessary to contact two people, it would be feasible to meet with city councillors Sarah Kirby-Yung and Adriane Carr face to face. Face-to-face meetings can also be a particularly good way to build trust with people, and convey plenty of information with tone of voice, facial expressions and hand gestures. City councillors are required to hold regular, public, city council meetings where people can sign up to speak. A particular type of council meetings called the Policy and Strategic Priorities Standing Committee Meeting is chaired by Sarah Kirby-Yung and Adriane Carr.¹⁷ This means that they must attend these meetings whenever they are scheduled (about every two weeks) and this provides a guaranteed opportunity to speak with them and present information about the need to keep pop-up plazas.

When somebody presents at the Policy and Strategic Priorities Standing Committee Meeting they may take 15 minutes and provide audio-visual material in addition to their speech. This will be an opportunity to present information on the long-term benefits of pop-up plazas in a scientific and neutral manner so as to convince councillors of the objective benefits of the plazas. Presentations should include clear written information and bold images. This is also an opportunity to provide a summary of the interest in pop-up plazas as ascertained by the first arm of the communication plan. Clear, bold graphs can be used to show statistics about the number of people who used the #Keepthepop-up hashtag, the number of people who followed our

Instagram account, the number of people who sent an email to the pop-up plaza email address, the number of people who commented on pop-up plaza posts, etc. This can also be a place to use the power of narratives. If the first arm of the plan has been successful and people have emailed and commented their thoughts on the plaza then we may have narrative material that can be used to help convince the councillors that pop-up plazas are important to the people of Vancouver. The presentation will therefore be an opportunity to use a number of different techniques in one place.

As well as an audio-visual presentation, city councillors should be handed a written communication with all key information they may keep and consult after the presentation is finished. The paper should include information regarding the researched benefits of initiatives such as pop-up plazas, clear graphs and a few relevant statistics regarding the interest in Vancouver pop-up plazas, as well as poignant narratives. This information should however be kept brief so that busy city councillors are able to glean everything in a small amount of time.

Evaluation

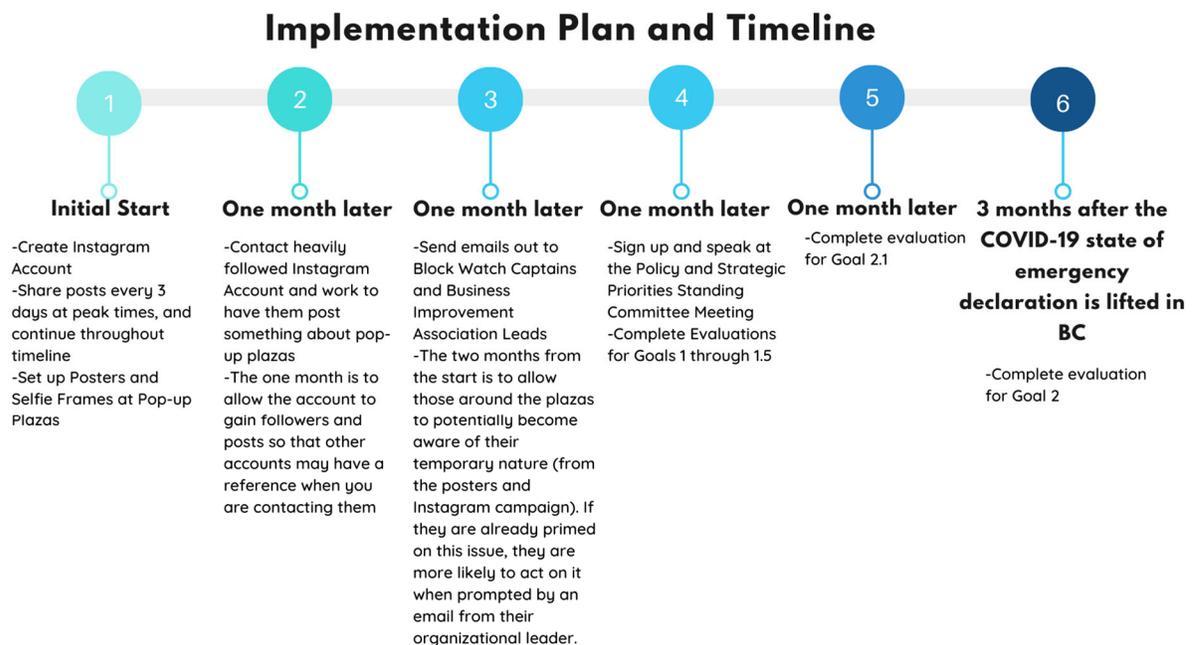
2. Outcome Goal: Pop-up plazas are kept beyond COVID-19.

Success: At least 5 pop-up plazas that are currently meant to be temporary are transitioned into permanent city fixtures. I will be able to tell by looking at their designation online.

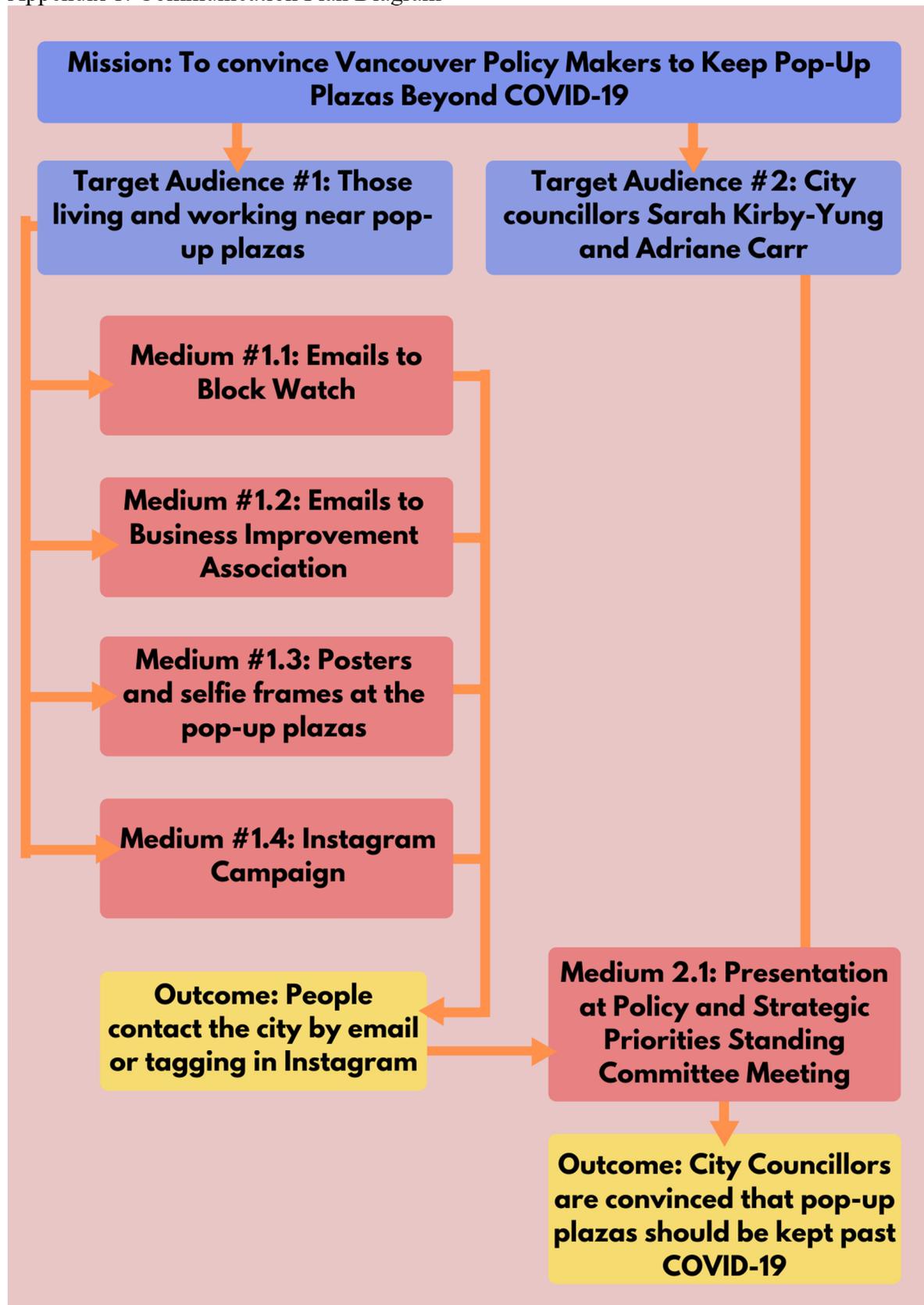
2.1 Process Goal: I speak face-to-face with Adriane Carr and Sarah Kirby-Yung about pop-up plazas.

Success: I present about pop-up plazas at one or more Policy and Strategic Priorities Standing Committee Meetings.

Implementation Plan



Appendix 1: Communication Plan Diagram



Appendix 2: Instagram Example Posts

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Bute St and Alberni, Vancouver

Not Everything Fun has to be Cancelled.

Liked by Myjam and 16 others
Vanpop-ups Pop-up plazas are supposed to be temporary but they don't have to be. Let the city know you want them to stay by emailing pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag @cityofvancouver in your own post! Link in bio for more info 🌻
#Keepthepop-up
 View all 2 comments
 9 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Granville and 14th, Vancouver

Keep the Good Times Rolling

#Keepthepop-up

Liked by Samson_L and 29 others
Vanpop-ups These good boys are fans of pop-up plazas. Are you? To help keep the plazas around let the city know by emailing pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag @cityofvancouver in your own post! Link in bio for more info 🐾
#Keepthepop-up
 View all 5 comments
 12 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
27th and Fraser, Vancouver

Good Vibes Ahead!

If you want them

Liked by AloofGoose and 21 others
Vanpop-ups The tide is high but pop-up plazas are helping us hold on. You can keep them around by emailing pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or by tagging @cityofvancouver in your own post! Link in bio for more info 🌻 **#Keepthepop-up**
 View all 6 comments
 15 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Carrall St, Vancouver

No fun city?

Not on our watch!

Liked by PeaceandLove and 29 others
Vanpop-ups When we've got fun things, we need to keep them. Email pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag @cityofvancouver in your own post to let them know that pop-up plazas should be here to stay! Link in bio for more info 🌻 **#Keepthepop-up**
 View all 7 comments
 15 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Cambie and 18th, Vancouver

Your City. Your Voice.



Your Pop-Up Plaza.



Liked by Woohoo! and 33 others
Vanpop-ups The future is bright in your hands! If you don't think pop-up plazas should be removed make sure to email pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag [@cityofvancouver](https://www.instagram.com/cityofvancouver) in your own post to help shape your city. Link in bio for more info 🌟 #Keepthepop-up

View all 6 comments
18 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Fraser and 27th, Vancouver

Save a Memory



Save a Pop-Up Plaza



Liked by bamboozled and 37 others
Vanpop-ups We want to see your photos of pop-up plazas! Snap a picture, and tag [@cityofvancouver](https://www.instagram.com/cityofvancouver) if you think pop-up plazas should be kept in Vancouver. Link in bio for more info 📸 #Keepthepop-up

View all 8 comments
21 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Cambie and 17th, Vancouver



Liked by Wowzapolloza and 42 others
Vanpop-ups Be cool and help shape your city! Pop-up plazas are supposed to be temporary, but with your help, they don't have to be. Email the city at pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag [@cityofvancouver](https://www.instagram.com/cityofvancouver) in your own post to let them know your thoughts. Link in bio for more info 🤙 #Keepthepop-up

View all 9 comments
24 January

Vanpop-ups · Follow
Granville and 13th, Vancouver



Liked by SoTotally and 47 others
Vanpop-ups Thus logic would demand we keep them, right? Share your philosophy on why pop-up plazas should be kept by emailing the city at pop-upplazas@vancouver.ca or tag [@cityofvancouver](https://www.instagram.com/cityofvancouver) in your own post! Link in bio for more info 🍷 #Keepthepop-up

References

1. City of Vancouver. Pop-up plazas [Internet]. temporary pop-up plazas | City of Vancouver. [cited 2020Oct31]. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/streets-transportation/pop-up-plazas.aspx>
2. Cattell V, Dines N, Gesler W, Curtis S. Mingling, observing, and lingering: Everyday public spaces and their implications for well-being and social relations. *Health & Place*. 2008;14(3):544–61.
3. Massam BH, Everitt JR. The plaza as a public good: civic spaces in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. *Prairie Perspectives: Geographical Essays*. 2004;7:96-113.
4. Marc A Zimmerman Professor. Want to fight crime? Plant some flowers with your neighbor [Internet]. *The Conversation*. 2020 [cited 2020Oct31]. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/want-to-fight-crime-plant-some-flowers-with-your-neighbor-91804>
5. Foster S, Hooper P, Knuiman M, Bull F, Giles-Corti B. Are liveable neighbourhoods safer neighbourhoods? Testing the rhetoric on new urbanism and safety from crime in Perth, Western Australia. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2016;164:150–7.
6. Egolf B, Lasker J, Wolf S, Potvin L. The Roseto effect: a 50-year comparison of mortality rates. *American Journal of Public Health*. 1992;82(8):1089–92.
7. Hu F, Hu B, Chen R, Ma Y, Niu L, Qin X, et al. A systematic review of social capital and chronic non-communicable diseases. *BioScience Trends*. 2014;8(6):290–6.
8. Ehsan AM, Silva MJD. Social capital and common mental disorder: a systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2015;69(10):1021–8.

9. Kawachi I, Kennedy BP, Glass R. Social capital and self-rated health: a contextual analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*. 1999;89(8):1187–93.
10. Pop-up plazas [Internet]. Shape Your City Vancouver. [cited 2020Oct31]. Available from: <https://shapeyourcity.ca/pop-up-plazas>
11. City of Vancouver. Healthy City Strategy: our goals [Internet]. [cited 2020Nov24]. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/healthy-city-strategy.aspx>
12. City of Vancouver. Vancouver Budget 2020 And Five-Year Financial Plan [Internet]. 2019. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2020-budget-book.PDF>
13. City of Vancouver. City Councillors [Internet]. Vancouver City Councillors | City of Vancouver. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/your-government/city-councillors.aspx>
14. City of Vancouver. Councillor Adriane Carr [Internet]. City of Vancouver. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/your-government/adriane-carr.aspx>
15. City of Vancouver. Councillor Sarah Kirby-Yung [Internet]. City of Vancouver. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/your-government/sarah-kirby-yung.aspx>
16. Stone DA. Policy paradox: the art of political decision making. 3rd ed. New York: Norton; 2012.
17. City of Vancouver. Types of City Council meetings [Internet]. City of Vancouver. Available from: <https://vancouver.ca/your-government/types-of-city-council-meetings.aspx>