

NEWS RELEASE

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“Nanaimo is seeing itself different”: creative contributions enrich dialogue

Poem, illustration and song commissioned as part of REIMAGINE NANAIMO

As part of REIMAGINE NANAIMO, the City's public engagement campaign to create a vision for the next twenty years, the City of Nanaimo's Culture & Events team recently commissioned three new works of art: a poem by Youth Poet Laureate Valina Zanetti, a graphic illustration by Sebastian Abboud, and a song by Sonnet L'Abbé. All three of these new works are now highlighted online and attached to this press release.

Valina Zanetti, whose term as Nanaimo's Youth Poet Laureate concludes at the end of 2020, wrote a poem called "The Change I Want to See." Zanetti is a recent high school graduate and is now in her first year of University. She imagines a future in Nanaimo for her children that includes a healthy environment with reduced emissions, an end to homelessness, and the elimination of racism and discrimination. She read her poem in person at a Governance and Priorities Committee of Council in early October.

Sebastian Abboud is a designer and illustrator based in Nanaimo who works on projects with clients internationally, is involved with the community locally, and inspires next generations of designers as an instructor at Vancouver Island University. In his signature graphic style, Abboud created a playful illustration called "Looking Forward." Of his design, Abboud says, "I chose to illustrate topics that I think the City should prioritize... including affordable housing, active transportation, education, arts and culture, and building strong and safe communities."

"Nazaneen: A Song for Nanaimo" was written by Sonnet L'Abbé. L'Abbé is a renowned poet who teaches creative writing at Vancouver Island University, so she could have written a poem, but, as she says, "the City initiative gave me the incentive to try songwriting, and to express how much the local music scene has meant to me." L'Abbé was also the organizer of a Black Lives Matter rally in Nanaimo in June, and this, as well as lived experience as a mixed-race Black woman in Nanaimo, informs her song, and the perspective that she wanted to share with the broader community. The song is penned as a letter to her friend, Nazaneen, a black woman considering moving to Nanaimo with her sons for a job. L'Abbé provides an unvarnished viewpoint, truthfully highlighting the challenges, while also praising this place, and conveying the hopefulness she feels for the future, singing "Nanaimo is seeing itself different." L'Abbé sung at the same early October meeting of Mayor and Council where Zanetti read her poem, and subsequently, performed it on stage at The Port Theatre for video-recording. The video, with closed captioning, is now available online.

After L'Abbé's performance the Governance and Priorities Committee meeting, Councillor Don Bonner said, "I think that was a first." "We should have more," he added. "It takes a true artist to really see what a community is like and to be able to describe it to us."

The commissions by Zanetti, Abboud and L'Abbé demonstrate how the City of Nanaimo is inviting insights and input from a range of diverse leaders who contribute to the cultural eco-system of the city.

Julie Bevan, Manager of Culture & Events, who initiated this component of the City-wide engagement said, "We're grateful to Valina, Sebastian and Sonnet for taking up our invitation to reflect on the themes around REIMAGINE NANAIMO and boldly share their perspective; these three works are thoughtful, provocative, and ultimately hope-filled visions about the kind of place they see Nanaimo becoming through planning and action."

On the project, Mayor Leonard Krog said "REIMAGINE NANAIMO is creating such a rich discussion in our community about how people experience the city, and about their priorities for the future here. These creative contributions demonstrate engagement and passion with the issues of our time, and they are a testament to how the City of Nanaimo is creating opportunities for people to participate and share their perspective in different ways."

Continued... "Nanaimo is seeing itself different": creative contributions enrich dialogue

Online surveys as part of REIMAGINE NANAIMO run until November 30th, 2020. The City is also accepting entries into its Creative Community contest until November 30th and inviting residents to send in a collage, drawing, photo, or creative work in any medium about their vision for the future. Find details online at www.getinvolvednanaimo.ca.

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