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BURNABY BEACON

THURSDAY, JUNE 17

Good morning, Burnaby!

We received a reader email asking if are any 'free little libraries' in Burnaby, which made me realize I haven't actually seen any around the city.

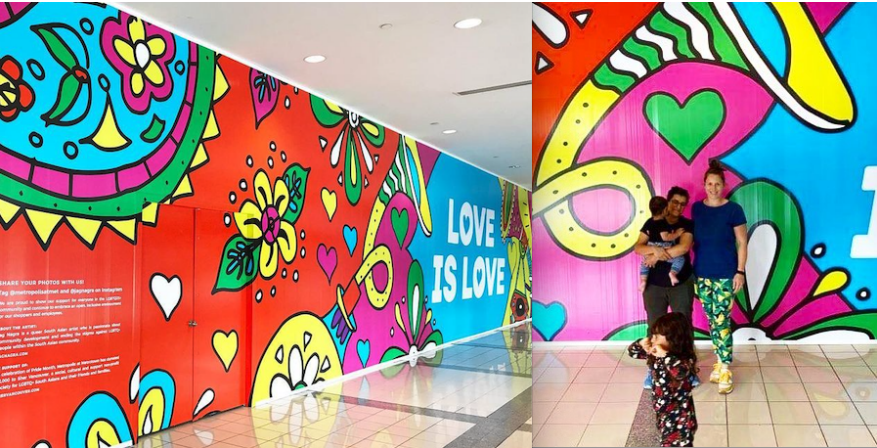
These makeshift libraries usually pop up in the form of a stand or shelf on random streets where folks can take a free book and leave as many they like behind for other residents to discover and enjoy. Do you know of any free little library stands in the city? If so, [let us know](#).

Side note: A big thanks to all the readers who shared their dog park and trail suggestions. I also loved receiving pictures of some special Burnaby pups in my inbox earlier this week!

— Simran Singh, managing editor

HAVE A STORY BURNABY NEEDS TO DIG IN TO?
TIPS@BURNABYBEACON.COM

TODAY'S EDITION:	METROTOWN PRIDE MURAL	BURNABY MAIL-IN VOTING	BYELECTION BUZZ
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The 76-ft-long Metrotown Pride mural created by artist Jag Nagra (seen standing on the left) with her family. 📷 Jag Nagra / Supplied

Metrotown Pride mural celebrates visibility and inclusivity

"I want to be what and who I needed when I was struggling to come out when I was younger," says artist Jag Nagra

A new mural at Metropolis at Metrotown is much more than just a colourful addition to the mall in honour of Pride Month.

According to Jag Nagra, the artist behind the piece, the artwork represents her voice and identity as a queer South Asian artist.

“The mural in Metrotown features South Asian motifs paired with the wording ‘Love is Love.’ Oftentimes in queer culture and history, South Asian voices and stories aren’t represented. Growing up, I never saw people who looked like me in mainstream queer spaces,” she tells Burnaby Beacon.

“If I can be visible, and if I can create inclusive art that connects with folks who might be struggling to come out or to feel comfortable in their intersectional identities, that’s so important to me. In many ways, I want to be what and who I needed when I was struggling to come out when I was younger.”

The 76-ft-long mural at Metrotown is not the only piece created by Nagra for Pride month. She also drew the mural at Guildford Town Centre in Surrey which features “a gender-fluid character, who I’ve named Satya, who has long, luscious locks, a beard, and is adorned with gold jewelry,” she says.

The murals weren’t painted by hand. Rather, Nagra’s designs were printed on vinyl, and they went up on hoarding, covering the storefronts of unleased units in the malls.

Aside from allowing space for the murals, Nagra notes that both malls also donated \$2,000 each to Sher Vancouver, a local non-profit organization that supports queer South Asians, which she says will make “a lot of difference” for folks in that community.

Nagra hopes those who walk by her pieces in Burnaby and Surrey understand that she wants to showcase “diverse stories in the queer realm.”

“I hope it brings joy and I hope people see the beauty in the colours and artwork,” she notes.

Nagra’s mural at Metropolis at Metrotown is located at the SkyTrain entrance on the Upper Level, near the Metrotower office complex for at least all of June and will remain until the unit in the mall is leased.

Nagra says the murals mean “so much” to her.

“The last few years, I’ve really started to feel comfortable in my skin for the

first time in my life. I'm finally at a place where I'm proud of the intersections of my identity, and to be able to represent that on such a large scale and beyond words. I'm so grateful," she says.

"And honestly, being able to bring my wife and kids to see the mural with me was a highlight. I love creating art that exists outside of my desk and my computer screen. When it exists in the public realm, it kind of takes on a new meaning and allows each viewer to interpret it differently than any other person. I love that."

—By Simran Singh



FEATURE STORY



Burnaby is not offering mail-in voting in the upcoming byelection, and Disability Alliance BC says that excludes some people with disabilities from voting.  Shutterstock

No mail-in voting means no voting for some people with disabilities, says advocacy group

Disability Alliance BC says the curbside voting system excludes people

who don't have cars

Advocacy group Disability Alliance BC has written to the City of Burnaby over concerns around voting accessibility in the upcoming byelection, scheduled for June 26.

Burnaby has decided not to offer mail-in voting in the byelection, after a [report to council](#) in February that recommended postponing the implementation of mail-in ballots until 2022 at the earliest.

The report pointed out that Victoria, which held a byelection late last year, had only an 18% voter turnout with about 16% of those votes being mailed in, and said implementing mail-in voting would cost about \$124,000.

The city is offering “curbside” voting for people with disabilities, allowing them to vote from their cars in an accessible parking space.

But DABC said in its letter to the city that that excludes anyone who doesn’t have access to a vehicle—leaving those people without any means of voting.

“This failure to accommodate is further exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, in which some individuals with immune-compromising conditions will be discouraged from voting if their only option is in-person,” the group said.

DABC also noted care homes would not be facilitating special voting opportunities for residents due to concerns about COVID.

Mayor Mike Hurley said the situation was an unfortunate result of the pandemic.

“Care homes are usually where the special voting opportunities take place, basically for people with disabilities. But due to the pandemic, many of the care homes didn't feel good about those opportunities,” Hurley said.

“And our staff made the decision not to do that this time around because of the pandemic.”

Hurley also recognized that the lack of mail-in ballots would present a barrier to voting for people with disabilities who don't have access to a vehicle, so that they can cast their ballots outside voting locations.

But he suggested those people may simply not be able to vote at all in the byelection.

"Unfortunately, some people will get missed this year. That's a very unfortunate circumstance, but that's due to the health concerns with the pandemic."

Burnaby resident Alli Kelba, who uses a mobility scooter, said the lack of accessibility likely would deter her from voting. Kelba relies on public transportation to get around, so the first thing she looks at is transit routes and whether the bus stops are accessible to her.

She told Burnaby Beacon that she wouldn't be able to go to the voting location closest to her because the bus stop she would need isn't accessible.

The next closest location would take a bus, a train, and another bus for her to reach it.

Finally, the third closest location to Kelba, while very far away, would be fine for her to get there on her scooter—but impossible for a person with a disability walking or using another device.

"For people with mobility needs who rely on public transport, what I see of my routes certainly doesn't give me any interest in wanting to go vote. For me personally, the hassle getting there isn't worth it," she said.

"And I'm willing to bet there's maybe some others who think the same."

Kelba emphasized that everyone's accessibility needs are different, and that she was simply speaking from her experience.

When asked if the city valued access to voting and democratic participation, Hurley said it's an extremely important tenet of democracy.

“But this time, it doesn't outweigh the health emergency that was, and still is, especially when we were organizing. This election, staff really had to take many, many precautions to ensure that we could do this safely,” he said.

DABC executive director Helaine Boyd said what it really comes down to is a matter of resource allocation.

“In terms of any level of government's response to accessibility issues—verbally, they will give lip service to the importance of accessibility and promoting accessibility,” she said.

“But then when it comes down to the budget, and how much it costs to ensure that people with disabilities are included and can participate, ... they won't put money towards actually reducing barriers for people with disabilities. Because they don't consider it an important enough issue to pay for it.”

Hurley recommended that people with disabilities who are concerned about not being able to access curbside voting call the local elections officer with the City of Burnaby to “perhaps” make special arrangements, but as a politician and not a staff member, he couldn't say what those arrangements might be.

The City of Burnaby told the Beacon that any special arrangements would have to be made consistently, so that everyone had equal access, and said the city would be reviewing all feedback on the byelection after the fact and prior to next year's municipal elections.

Elections BC provides assisted telephone voting for people who are unable to vote in provincial elections in person, as long as they have vision loss, another disability or health condition that prevents them from voting independently, or need to self-isolate and are unable to vote by mail. However, the organization is not involved with local or municipal elections.

“It's disappointing that some people's needs aren't being met this time. It really is disappointing for all of us. But, you know, we will definitely ensure that that all gets covered off for the next election,” Hurley said.

DABC said it recognizes that, logistically, it's too late to implement mail-in voting for the June 26 byelection. But Boyd said this is an issue that goes beyond Burnaby.

"At the provincial and federal level mail-in voting is mandated by law, but at the municipal level, that's not the case yet. Burnaby isn't the only city that doesn't do mail-in voting at the moment," she said.

"And so our organisation really wants to focus on making sure that all municipalities, not just Burnaby, provide this option for people with disabilities."

—By Srushti Gangdev

BURNABY BULLETIN



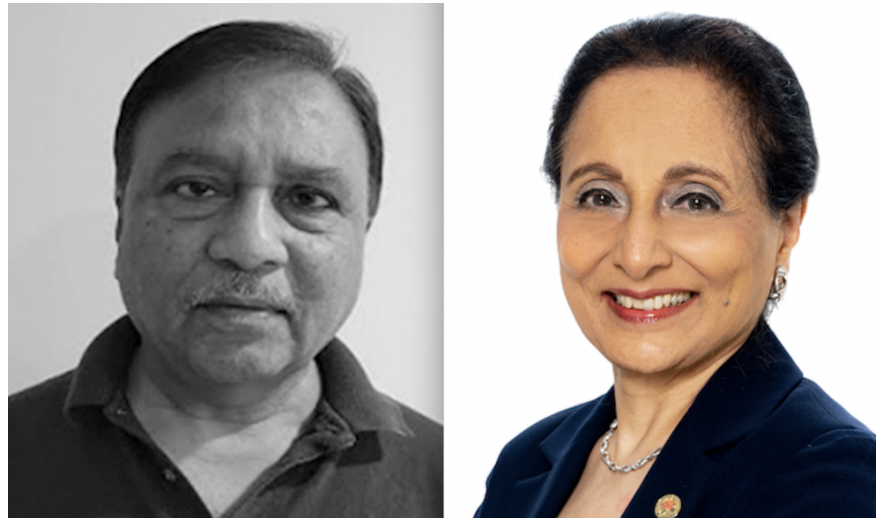
Burnaby ranks 3rd most expensive Canadian city for rent in

May: That's according to a new report from PadMapper. Burnaby climbed 2 spots in the ranking to place 3rd with 1-bedroom monthly rents averaging at \$1,700 and 2-bedroom rents priced at \$2,270. [Read more.](#)



BC plans to redevelop Burnaby seniors facility: The province said it's "exploring opportunities" to replace the seniors housing facility at Stratford Gardens on Pandora Ave with new affordable housing. The BC-Housing owned facility, built in 1971, is aging and needs substantial renovations. The province said it's still in the planning phase, and if redevelopment goes ahead tenants will be supported to stay in their units as long as possible, and will get first pick of the new units with no increase to their rents.

➡ **Calls for changes to solitary confinement for youths:** BC's ombudsperson made a call for "sweeping changes" to solitary confinement in youth custody following a 3-year investigation, which found the practice is "unjust, unsafe, and disproportionately impacts Indigenous youth." [Read more here.](#)



Byelection candidates Gulam Firdos and Baljinder Narang. 🗳️ City of Burnaby/ Supplied


Byelection Buzz - Gulam Firdos and Baljinder Narang


The [Burnaby byelection race](#) is underway with advanced continuing until June 19. General voting day is on Saturday, June 26. There are 14 candidates running in this byelection and there are 2 seats to be filled. In order for readers to get to know them and their platforms better, we sent out a questionnaire for candidates to fill out. We'll be featuring the responses in our daily newsletters and on social media leading up to the election.

Today, we're featuring Burnaby Citizens Association candidate Baljinder Narang and Independent candidate Gulam Firdos.


Note: These Q&As are shortened previews of the full versions which you can find on our Facebook page. Find Narang's full Q&A [here](#) and Firdos' [here](#).

What motivated you to run in this byelection?

 **Firdos:** As a Board member of Burnaby city council and a professional city planner I have been closely connected with the council and their policies. A planner plays an important role in advisory role when city council decisions are made. In this respect, I believe that a professional planner with city council roots can provide more informed decisions while serving as a councillor. After the death of two councillors, there was a vacuum in the policy planning, so I have decided to run as a councillor, with a promise to serve the people. I have come from a professional background that will help the council in making informed decisions.

 **Narang:** I have deep connections to our city, which has been home to my family since 1995. Burnaby is where my children went to school, graduated from university, became professionals in their chosen fields, and continue to live and call home. It is my sincere desire to give back to a wonderful community that has given so much to me and my family. I have direct experience in governance as an elected BCA School Trustee for 10 years. I took on leadership roles, including board chair and vice-chair, while serving on many committees both locally, and provincially. What has motivated me most to run for this by-election, at this moment, is a desire to see our diverse community truly represented and reflected at city hall. I will be a champion for equity and anti-racism and work to ensure everyone in our community is included in city governance.

Are you supportive of the SFU gondola? Why or why not?

 **Firdos:** Initially, I was not supportive of the Gondola Project as this project would be a burden for the taxpayers at the end. But later this concept has changed as the Gondola Project will ultimately enhance travel of a higher

number of visitors and will ultimately help boost Burnaby's economy.

➡ **Narang:** I would be supportive of the SFU Gondola if the concerns of the Forest Grove Residents are addressed adequately. I do not believe that this is currently the case. Translink is duty-bound to consult with them in good faith including offering acceptable solutions to their concern. Route 1 seems to be the least damaging of the options presented. The other 2 routes are much longer and both of them would need a stop and hop on a separate line because of the change of direction. Route 2 also has the new housing projects at SFU that would interfere with the project. Route 3 would be too close to the tank farm as well. For these reasons, while I am a supporter of sustainable, electric transit, I cannot say I am a supporter of the project until resident concerns are addressed.

Burnaby city council approved a property tax increase despite seeing a surplus of nearly \$140 million. How would you hold council accountable for this spending and how would you work to platform affordability for Burnaby residents?

➡ **Firdos:** I think this has been due to the rubber stamp Council decision as more balanced steps could have been taken to minimize the taxation.

➡ **Narang:** My understanding is that the \$140M surplus does not come from property taxes but from re-valuing assets. Last year the property was 2.95% which is amongst the lowest in Metro Vancouver. There was no increase in utility bills. The city is debt-free an envy of many. The reserves are targeted for specific purposes and allow the city to benefit from borrowing from them. I would hold council accountable by examining each expenditure and new proposals to ensure they benefit Burnaby residents.

➡ **Find full candidate Q&As on our [Facebook page](#).**

These interviews have been lightly edited for clarity.

COVID-19 UPDATE (WEDS, JUNE 16)

- 113 new cases. Total 146,674
- 4 new deaths. Total 1,738
- 1,454 active cases (-42). 134 people in hospital (-5), 41 in ICU (+2)
- Rolling 7-day average of new cases is down to 118.
- 76.3% of people 18+/74.6% of people 12+ have received their 1st vaccine dose.
- 51 new cases in Fraser Health (45% of BC).

- **Burnaby inching closer to 80% vaccination rate:** Data from the BCCDC shows that the northwest quadrant of the city has already hit 80% for people over 12, while both southern quadrants are at 75%. Meanwhile, case rates were extremely low across the city at just 1 case per 100k people in Burnaby North, 2 in the SW quadrant, and 4 in the SE. Great job, Burnaby! 🏆
- **BC to share back-to-school plan this morning:** Education minister Jennifer Whiteside and provincial health officer Dr Bonnie Henry will announce details of the province's planning for a return to school in September today at 9:30am. The press conference will be livestreamed, but we will have the details for you in tomorrow's newsletter as well.
- **Step 1 reopening didn't impact rate of case decline:** A new report from the BC COVID-19 Modelling Group shows the move into Step 1 of the reopening plan on May 25, when indoor dining and some group fitness classes were allowed to resume, didn't slow down the rate of the decline of COVID cases in BC. Meanwhile, the BCCDC says case rates are now the lowest they've been provincially since last October.



👉 **Resilient students** - 9 Burnaby grade 12 students have been awarded \$40,000 each in scholarships for their resiliency and determination. The awards are distributed by the Beedie Luminaries scholarship program, which "seeks out students who have not only demonstrated strong academic readiness but who are also engaged in the world around them and have taken on life challenges and adversity with determination and optimism." Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

🍷 **Community market fun**- Another weekend, another artisan market to check out. Head to Shop the Block presented by Grosvenor. The market brings together local vendors, makers, and food trucks for community popups throughout the summer. This week, a pop-up is taking place on Friday, June 18 (4-10pm) and Saturday, June 19 (11am-5pm). The market is located at 2150 Alpha Ave. Find out more info about the vendors and the market [here](#).

🎾 **Time for tennis** - With the weather warming up, we're thinking about the outdoor activities we can get up to. If you're a fan of tennis, there's plenty of courts to play on across the city. Grab your rackets and balls and find a court closest to you [here](#).



Dreamy strolls near Baret Marine Park. 📷 @pomophotos/ Instagram

SUBMIT PHOTOS OR NOMINATE A RESIDENT:
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