THE CITY OF

Waterloo

STAFF REPORT
Recreation & Facility Services

Title: Neighbourhood Strategy - Public engagement summary
Report Number: COM2017-005
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Meeting Type: Council Meeting
Council/Committee Date: February 27, 2017
File: N/A
Attachments: Public Engagement Summary
Ward No.:   City-wide

Recommendations:

   INFORMATION

A.   Executive Summary

June 27, 2016, Council approved the work plan and scope of the Neighbourhood Strategy project and directed staff to begin developing the strategy. The final neighbourhood strategy is intended to clarify the role the City can take to support community members in creating strong and connected neighbourhoods in Waterloo.

Public engagement for Phase 1 of the neighbourhood strategy took place from October 2016 to January 2017. More than 370 community members shared their input through the following means:
   • Focus groups with various target groups (including post-secondary students)
   • Community discussions open to all community members
   • Online community survey on EngageWaterloo
   • Staff team discussions
   • Staff survey
   • Resident Panel and Steering Committee discussions
   • Council workshop January 9th, 2017

The analysis examined the following questions:
   1. Strengths: What is already contributing to strong and connected neighbourhoods in Waterloo?
   2. Challenges: What could be improved?

3. Aspirations: What do we want our neighbourhoods to look like in 10 years, and what role should the city play in getting there?

The attached report is a summary of the input received through Phase 1 public engagement.

Using this information as a foundation, community priorities, a vision for the neighbourhood strategy, and areas for further exploration will be identified. The project staff team, steering committee, and resident panel will explore best practices to address some of the issues identified in Phase 1.

The neighbourhood strategy Phase 2 public engagement will start in Spring and extend into early Fall 2017, and will explore the ideas and issues brought forward in Phase 1 in greater depth. The output of Phase 2, along with other research conducted by staff, will inform the development of recommendations to be included in the draft neighbourhood strategy, to be presented to Council in December 2017.

B.   Financial Implications

There are no financial implications.

C.   Technology Implications

There are no technological implications.

D.   Legal Considerations

Staff did not seek legal advice.

E.   Link to Strategic Plan
(Strategic Priorities: Multi-modal Transportation, Infrastructure Renewal, Strong Community, Environmental Leadership, Corporate Excellence, Economic Development)

Strong Community: developing a strategy to strengthen ties within the community, build social capital at the neighbourhood level and support vibrant neighbourhoods.

F.   Previous Reports on this Topic

COM2016-013 City of Waterloo Neighbourhood Strategy – Proposed approach and scope

COM2017-002 Neighbourhood Strategy Workshop

G.   Approvals

Name	Signature	Date
Author: Janet Norman	*Janet Norman*	February 7, 2017
Author: Beth Rajnovich	*B. Rajnovich*	February 7, 2017
Director: Jim Bowman		
Commissioner: Mark Dykstra		
Finance: N/A		

CAO

Neighbourhood Strategy Development Phase 1:
Public Engagement Summary

Prepared by the Neighbourhood Strategy Project Team
February 2017

#NEIGHBOURLOO

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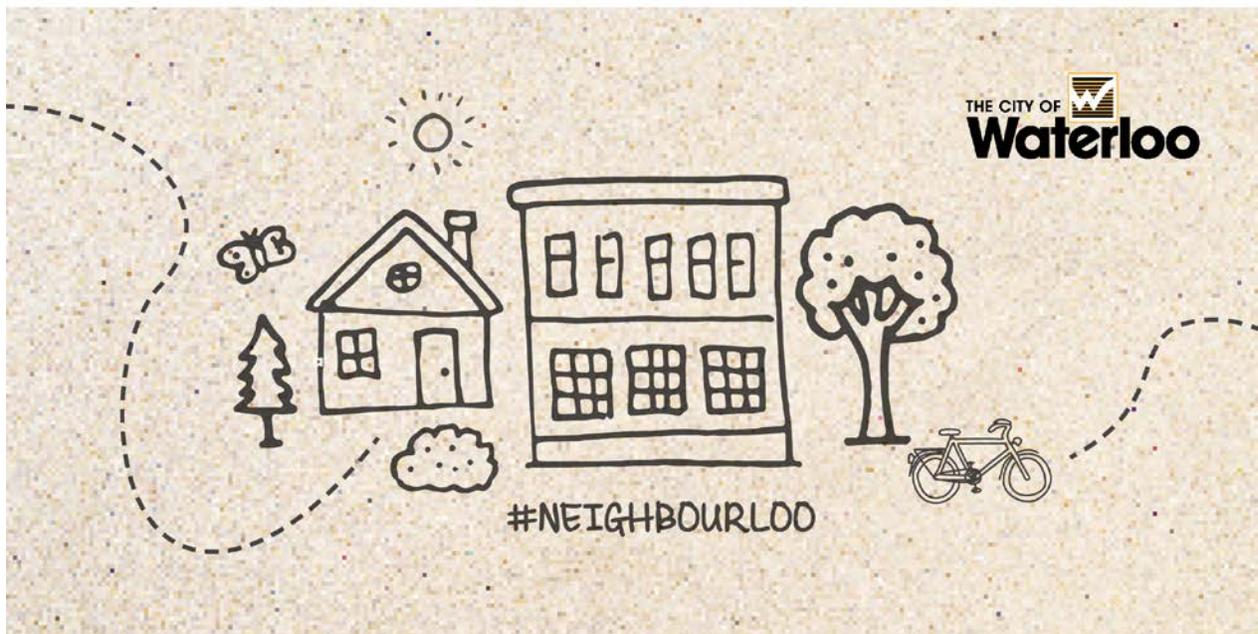
waterloo.ca/NeighbourhoodStrategy

STRONG CONNECTED

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Executive Summary

The City of Waterloo is currently developing a neighbourhood strategy. The draft strategy will be presented to Council in December 2017. It will include recommendations for how the city can help community members create stronger neighbourhoods.

The strategy will focus on areas such including: social connections, neighbourliness, inclusivity, sense of belonging, and placemaking. While it is recognized that the physical environment impacts how neighbours meet and interact, this strategy will mainly focus on the social environment and building neighbourhood-level social capital.

The strategy is being developed in three phases: 1) Examining Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities; 2) Gathering Great Ideas; 3) Developing the Draft Strategy.

Public input from Phase 1 is helping staff:
- Understand strengths and challenges neighbourhoods currently face.
- Understand aspirations for how the city can help the community create stronger neighbourhoods.
- Identify key issues and ideas that should be explored further.

Each neighbourhood has different strengths, challenges, and aspirations. Neighbours within the same neighbourhood also differ in what they appreciate most in their neighbourhood and what they hope for in the future. Statements in this report do not necessarily apply across all Waterloo neighbourhoods or all residents within a neighbourhood.

Strengths

Community members identified what in Waterloo neighbourhoods are already helping build strong and connected neighbourhoods. Existing strengths include:
- Neighbourhood spaces (i.e. parks, trails, schools, playgrounds, outdoor ice rinks, and shops) create opportunities for neighbours to meet and interact.
- Diversity.
- Neighbours are friendly and helpful.
- Neighbourhood associations, homes associations, and other neighbourhood groups and the activities they organize.
- City support.
- Neighbourhood Matching Fund and other grants.
- Partners in Parks and other city support for neighbourhood projects.

Challenges

Community members sometimes face challenges when creating strong and connected neighbourhoods. Challenges included:
- Not all neighbourhoods have an identified gathering space.
- Outdoor spaces are often used for events, but rely on favorable weather.

- Neighbourhood associations or group membership may not be representative of the neighbourhood.
- Volunteer recruitment, training, retention, and leadership capacity building can be challenging for neighbourhood groups.
- Limited awareness of funding and grant opportunities.
- Differing expectations regarding property maintenance can cause tension between neighbours.
- Different lifestyles and interests can make it challenging for neighbours to connect.
- Students engage in neighbourhoods differently from long-term residents, and it can be difficult for these two groups to connect socially.
- There is a sense that the City has a lack of comfort in taking risk which can create barriers for neighbourhood events or activities.
- Within certain neighbourhoods with homes associations, uncertainty around covenant agreement expiry is causing tension between neighbours.

Trends

Changes in the community are altering how community members interact. Examining the trends can highlight opportunities to build community in different ways. Key trends include:

- The population in Waterloo is aging and becoming more culturally diverse.
- Community members have a wide range of lifestyles and work patterns (commuting, working from home, etc.).
- Housing options are changing (more condos, apartment buildings).
- Traffic is increasing throughout the city.
- LRT and enhanced active transportation infrastructure will increase transportation options.

Aspirations and Opportunities

Community members shared their hopes and ideas for stronger and more connected neighbourhoods. A few ideas include:

- More neighbourhood art
- Increased communication between neighbours, between neighbourhoods, and between neighbourhoods and the city
- Ways to welcome new neighbours
- Opportunities for neighbourhoods to use non-municipal facilities (businesses, schools, and other institutions) for indoor gathering space.
- Volunteer recruitment, training, and retention support.
- Event planning and implementation toolkits, as well as materials and activities groups could borrow for neighbourhood events (audio equipment, sports equipment, etc.).

Phase 2 of the project will involve further public consultation over the Spring and Summer 2017 to delve deeper into these ideas and opportunities.

Introduction

The City of Waterloo has great neighbourhoods, where neighbours enjoy getting to know each other while walking their dogs, chatting at the park or local plaza, and meeting at a neighbourhood event, and on other occasions. Each neighbourhood is unique, with different people, interests, amenities, housing types, and neighbourhood activities. Some neighbourhoods have very active groups, such as neighbourhood associations, that organize events and activities for the neighbourhood. In other areas, neighbours may only interact informally, or hold smaller events for their street.

While it is clear from speaking with community members that the City of Waterloo has great neighbourhoods, not all neighbourhoods have the same community feel and not all are as connected as they could be. Additionally, the city and its neighbourhoods are changing in many ways, including increased ethnic diversity, urban intensification, and a growing aging population. Through this, the City of Waterloo's commitment to neighbourhoods is reflected in City's Strategic Plan for 2015-2018, where a strong community is one of six areas of focus. This plan identifies a neighbourhood strategy as a means to "harness social capital to increase neighbourhood vibrancy and resident leadership." The 2016-2018 business plan for the Community Services Department also notes that "a neighbourhood strategy will foster a level of inclusiveness and vibrancy that is built from the grassroots of the community and our neighbourhoods." While recognizing that every neighbourhood has different needs, interests, and priorities, social capital should be fostered within every Waterloo neighbourhood.

The City of Waterloo is developing a neighbourhood strategy to clarify how the City can help neighbours create strong and connected neighbourhoods. It is anticipated that the final strategy will be presented to Council in March 2018, with recommendations to guide the City until 2028.

The strategy's five areas of focus frame discussion with the community and will help identify the final recommendations to strengthen Waterloo neighbourhoods:
1. Social connections: neighbours know each other
2. Neighbourliness: neighbours are kind and considerate
3. Inclusivity: everyone can participate
4. Sense of belonging: everyone feels welcome
5. Placemaking: spaces and events that bring neighbours together

Everyone is a neighbour, and so the whole community has a stake in the City of Waterloo's neighbourhood strategy. To develop the strategy, the project staff team is consulting with the community to gauge the community's vision for Waterloo neighbourhoods, its priorities, and ideas for making Waterloo neighbourhoods great. Consultation includes in-person sessions for the general public, online surveys, and meetings with existing committees and groups. Public engagement will take place during each of the three project phases:

Phase 1: Strengths, Challenges, Aspirations and Opportunities (Fall 2016 and Winter 2017): to determine what is already happening in Waterloo neighbourhoods and

to identify possible opportunities for creating stronger and more connected neighbourhoods.

Phase 2: Great Ideas (Spring thru Fall 2017): based on information collected in the first phase, the project will take a closer look at what the community needs in order to achieve stronger neighbourhoods. This will include gathering input from the community and looking at successes in other cities.

Phase 3: Draft Strategy (Winter 2018): during fall 2017 the project steering committee will use all of the information gathered from the community and other research to draft recommendations to council in December 2017. The community will be asked to give feedback on the draft before the final report goes to council March 2018.

For Phase 1 of the project, the public and city staff was consulted to understand the following topics:
1. Strengths: What is great about Waterloo neighbourhoods?
2. Challenges: What is not going well in Waterloo neighbourhoods?
3. Trends: Our city is changing. What changes are happening now or in the future, and how might these impact Waterloo neighbourhoods?
4. Aspirations and Opportunities: Ten years from now, what would you want Waterloo neighbourhoods to look like? What has successfully improved neighbourhoods in other municipalities?

Over 370 community members were consulted during Phase 1 of the project; consultation included:

1. **Focus Groups:** Small focus groups facilitated by staff were held with the general public and with certain community groups (e.g., post-secondary students and faculty/staff, high school youth, Adult Recreation Centre Thursday Social, etc.).

2. **Online Survey:** An online survey provided the opportunity for anyone from the general public to share their thoughts and ideas.

3. **Resident Panel:** The neighbourhood strategy Resident Panel meets regularly to provide in-depth input into the strategy development. This panel answered the questions above, and then prioritized the most common themes.

4. **City Staff Teams:** The project staff team had interviews and discussions with various other staff teams whose work directly impacts neighbourhoods, including:
   - Trails, bike infrastructure, and active transportation
   - Arts, culture, festivals, and events
   - Programs
   - Community and Neighbourhood Services

- Parks and environmental services
- Municipal enforcement
- Temporary street closures

5. **Council workshop:** Council members provided input at a workshop during a council meeting January 9th.

6. **Other avenues of input:** In addition, the project staff team has had discussions with community members, community leaders, the project steering committee and others, which have provided insight that adds to this analysis.

Below is an analysis of what was heard from the community during the consultation process. A broad range of ideas and issues emerged. The input has been categorized by topic (Strengths, Challenges, Trends, and Aspirations and Opportunities), and then ideas and opinions were categorized by the most common themes. The themes have been placed in alphabetical order by heading.

When community members spoke about their neighbourhoods and what they liked best, conversation sometimes went towards the physical environment and other elements that fall outside the scope of this neighbourhood strategy (ex. building new community centres, expanding the city's mature tree canopy, and the ability to walk to amenities such as a grocery store, etc.). These comments have been included in this report because they offer insight into community priorities and it is important to understand the role the physical environments plays in building community within certain neighbourhoods. The issues however, will not be primary focus of this strategy; rather the strategy will focus on the social environment and building social capital, as well as building on existing assets within neighbourhoods.

Key learnings

Each neighbourhood is in a different place in terms of existing social capital, and has different needs and interests that will shape how the neighbourhood hopes to strengthen and grow in years to come.

Conversation throughout Phase 1 of engagement was guided by the five areas of focus (social connections, neighbourliness, inclusion, sense of belonging, and placemaking).

In addition, community members brought up elements related to the physical environment and land use within neighbourhoods as these elements influence how people interact. As land use and many elements of the physical environment are already addressed within existing City long term-plans and policy, they are largely out of scope of this project. However, community input on these issues has been included the summary, as local infrastructure impacts how neighbours interact, and this strategy can explore alternative approaches to responding to some of these issues.

Each neighbourhood has a different composition of community members, skillsets, amenities, and interests. Elements such as demographic diversity and existing neighbourhood assets are important to understand in order to foster strong neighbourhoods across the city. The needs of one neighbourhood may be very different than another. The final recommendations in the neighbourhood strategy will reflect the variety in interests, needs, and context within the different Waterloo neighbourhoods.

Below are just a few examples of how unique Waterloo neighbourhoods are from each other. Factors like these impact how these neighbourhoods build strong community:

- Outdoor amenities: some neighbourhoods have several small parkettes, whereas others have a couple of larger multi-use park spaces with playground equipment and trails.
- Shared amenities: some neighbourhoods (for example, in the Beechwood area) have pools and tennis courts maintained by the homes associations, whereas similar facilities are not within walking distance for residents in most other neighbourhoods.
- Festivals and events: some neighbourhoods have several annual festivals or events in which many neighbours participate, whereas other neighbourhoods may have never had an organized event for the neighbourhood.
- Diversity in income: while diversity in income can be found within every neighbourhood, certain neighbourhoods tend to have a high average household income and others have low average household income.
- Some have a formal neighbourhood association, some a homes association, some have an informal neighbourhood group, and some have none of above.

As each neighbourhood is unique, it should be noted that things that some community members list as a strength in their neighbourhood are listed as aspirations by

community members from a different neighbourhood (for example, not all neighbourhoods have a newsletter – a neighbourhood newsletter could be a strength in one community, whereas it is an aspiration for a different community).

Differences in needs and ideas are not only seen between neighbourhoods, but also within a neighbourhood. Community members who live on the same street can have vastly different opinions. The neighbourhood strategy will need to consider all of these differences in order to help support strong and connected neighbourhoods.

Topic 1: Strengths

What is great about Waterloo neighbourhoods?

Community members and city staff alike note that there are already many great things happening in neighbourhoods to strengthen social connections, neighbourliness, inclusion, placemaking, and sense of belonging. It is important to identify these successes to understand what is working well and what should be maintained. In certain situations, there might also be possibilities to replicate successes from one neighbourhood in a different neighbourhood.

Diversity
Residents all across the city view diversity as a strength in our community, enriching our neighbourhoods and providing opportunities for neighbours to learn from each other. Diversity was described in terms of income, cultural heritage, ethnicity, language, age, family composition, and interests, among others. In many neighbourhoods, neighbours help each other out depending on their skills and abilities. For example, in some cases community members will help newcomers learn English, or with a household repair for a neighbour who does not know how to. In other cases, neighbours will shovel for a resident, such as an older adult, who is not able to.

Engaged neighbours
Of course every person has a different level of engagement in their neighbourhood, but some neighbourhoods seem to have high levels of engaged residents that can get people involved in neighbourhood activities. Sometimes schools help get neighbours involved in the neighbourhood; parents are often connected to the neighbourhood because the kids are connected.

Socialization is very important, and some community members look for that in their neighbourhood and enjoy becoming friends with their next door neighbours. One resident said that the social engagement of the neighbourhood was a huge selling point in selecting a place of residence. Similarly, another said they would not want to move because of the strong relationships that have been built with the nearby neighbours. Some residents feel that their neighbourhoods are like a village within the city. Working together to problem solve or to help others, such as sponsoring a Syrian immigrant family, draws the neighbourhood together and also gives people a sense that they are part of something bigger.

Friendly and helpful neighbours
Many said that their neighbours are the strength of their neighbourhood, being friendly and looking out for each other. Neighbours chat while on their front porches, walking their dogs, or taking their kids to school. Many neighbours have a sincere concern for others and are willing to help each other out. Several examples were shared during focus groups of how neighbours respond to unanticipated crises. One example is when a woman had surgery her neighbours came over with food and flowers the following

week. Similarly, in the days following an ambulance call, concerned neighbours checked in with the family to see if there was anything they could do to help.

One neighbourhood has organized an email list and meal tree specifically to help neighbours out when a baby is born in the neighbourhood or when other help is needed.

It should be noted however, that while some residents are looking for deeper relationships with their neighbours, others are happy that their neighbours are friendly but not too chummy and respect their privacy.

Housing and properties

Some community members enjoy living in a low density low rise area with large lots. Others enjoy living in a historic neighbourhood. Still others enjoy a modest sized home in a residential area. A few community members indicated that they enjoy a mix of housing in their neighbourhood, as this is seen to bring diversity into the community. Several community members mentioned how much they enjoy living in a quiet area of the city.

Some community members mentioned the pride they take in maintaining their properties and caring for their gardens. They appreciate the care and attention their neighbours also take in maintaining neat and tidy properties. Several community members said how they enjoy getting to know their neighbours when they are out doing yard work.

Municipal grants and funding

Community members and groups can access funds for neighbourhood projects through the Community Cash Grants program and the Neighbourhood Matching Fund. Most affiliated neighbourhood associations can also access funding through affiliation service agreements. These grants have had positive impacts in neighbourhoods where they are accessed. The funded projects are important to community building and quality of life.

The Neighbourhood Matching Fund's strengths include that is a flexible and open to a wide range of neighbourhood projects, it encourages local capacity building through the identification matching resources, and the committee reviewing applications is comprised of strong advocates and promoters of the program in the community.

Nearby amenities

Many community members, especially those residing near Uptown or close to retail plazas, value being able to walk easily through their neighbourhood to access amenities, including grocery stores, restaurants, and local businesses. These spots are also places where neighbours interact.

Residents that live near a library or city-run recreation centre noted these as strengths. Residents of Sunnydale indicated that the community space run out of a townhouse in the neighbourhood is an important asset in that community.

Neighbourhood activities
Many neighbours are building strong community through organizing events and activities that bring neighbourhoods together. Activities vary widely depending on the interests of the neighbourhood and of the volunteers organizing them. Examples include: festivals, movie nights, social evenings, community garage sales, cookie exchanges, dog walking groups, neighbourhood cleanups, plant swaps, etc. They offer opportunities for neighbours to meet and get to know one another and make the neighbourhood an enjoyable place to be. Events and community projects create feelings of belonging and inclusion, and community building is a natural outcome. A community member also mentioned how great studio tours, Jane's Walks and similar initiatives are because they encourage neighbours to walk around and really appreciate what is in the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood and homes associations
Many of the neighbourhood events and initiatives staff knows about are organized by a neighbourhood association, homes association, or other formal neighbourhood group. These groups are comprised of dedicated volunteers that organize events and activities to strengthen social connections across the neighbourhood. Community members living in an area with one of these groups value them as they help create a sense of neighbourhood identity and add energy to the community. Community members who live within neighbourhood association boundaries seem more likely to identify themselves as belonging to that particular neighbourhood (i.e. the "Uptown West neighbourhood"). Residents who do not live in an area with an active neighbourhood group often feel they are "neighbourhoodless" and do not have that same sense of identity. They may describe where they live in terms of nearest major streets, rather than being part of a community area.

Some community organizations and businesses support these associations, sometimes offering free space to meet or funds for events, etc. For example, seniors' residences in Waterloo often generously give space to neighbourhood groups to organize board meetings.

It is seen as a strength that the City strives to allow each association to respond to the unique needs and interests of their neighbourhood, and will work with each association to help them organize activities and events for the neighbourhood. While relying on City support, associations from different neighbourhoods will also mentor each other and help each other out.

Neighbourhood spaces
Neighbours enjoy meeting in green spaces and parks; trails and paths within neighbourhoods and between neighbourhoods are also spaces where neighbours meet while walking their dogs or on the way to school or the park. These are spaces where connections between neighbours are fostered.

Often, community members are within walking distance of a park, whether a passive park or a playground within school grounds. Community members enjoy using parks as

gathering spaces just to hang out or for community events. Within outdoor spaces, a large number of respondents indicated mature trees as a strength in their neighbourhood; one community member explained that large, mature trees not only provide shade and beauty, but also contribute to a sense of security and stability. Local wildlife, forests and other natural spaces are also valued. Playgrounds in particular seem to be outdoor gathering spaces for families.

Schools, including outdoor spaces, are natural meeting places within neighbourhoods for parents with children. Principals and other school leaders who are engaged in the neighbourhood will encourage community groups to use school space, or will encourage participation in local programs held at the schools, such as the recent Healthy Kids Community Challenge.

The community amenities (tennis courts, pools) in the Beechwood area are central neighbourhood spaces that draw neighbours together. Homes associations responsible for these facilities can run programs and activities out of these areas.

Volunteers in the community can work together to create neighbourhood spaces. For example, volunteers from a neighbourhood can work closely with municipal staff to initiate outdoor ice rink setup, coordinate maintenance of the rink, and work together throughout the winter to ensure the community can use the rink. These rinks are valued by the community as a fun, local, winter activity. The volunteers not only build strong relationships together, but also provide a venue through which all neighbourhood residents can meet and socialize while skating.

Earth Day events and Partners in Parks have proven to be very successful municipal programs that help bring community members together locally to care for public spaces. Community members work with the City of Waterloo to organize volunteers to clean up, improve, or enhance a local park or trail.

Relationship between the City and the community
The City supports neighbourhoods through many means, including affiliation service agreements. Neighbourhood associations that hold affiliation service agreements with the City often work closely with the Coordinator of Neighbourhoods to organize neighbourhood events and achieve neighbourhood goals. This support from the city is valued by many groups.

When there is a relationship established between City staff and the community, it is easier to work collaboratively to organize programs and events within neighbourhoods. Annual events allow staff and community members to become comfortable organizing an event together, helping the event run smoothly. Staff and community members alike understand their role in setting up and taking down road closure equipment, for example.

The Coordinator of Neighbourhoods position at the City helps build relationships between neighbourhood groups. The affiliated neighbourhood associations can give the

City a meaningful connection to the neighbourhood and help the City understand the priorities and needs of the area. Other City staff positions and teams also interact with the community and building positive relationships within neighbourhoods. For example, the Arts and Culture team has assisted groups with community art projects such as murals. Additionally, the Municipal Enforcement team engages students through attending university events and providing information to students during orientation week.

Topic 2: Challenges

What is not going well in Waterloo neighbourhoods? What is missing?

There are challenges to building strong and connected neighbourhoods in Waterloo. Some these challenges highlight areas where there is opportunity for the City to better support neighbourhoods.

Communication is lacking within certain neighbourhoods
In some neighbourhoods, especially those with neighbourhood associations, there are formal methods of communication to connect people across the neighbourhood or to share about upcoming events and opportunities. Social media and newsletters are particularly valued in these neighbourhoods. In areas without these avenues of communication, community members struggle to find out what is happening in their neighbourhood.

Even in areas with multiple streams of communication, community members are not all aware of these avenues of information sharing. Language barriers can also make it more difficult for some neighbours to interact and to share information about neighbourhood events, activities, or expectations.

Covenant expiry
Certain neighbourhoods (mostly in the Beechwood area) were built with shared amenities such as pools and tennis courts for the neighbourhood, and homes associations were established as not-for-profit entities to manage these facilities. Covenant agreements were in place to pay for these shared amenities, requiring all households in the neighbourhood to contribute. Recently, the covenant agreements have been expiring, and as a result it has been a challenge for certain homes associations to raise enough funds and volunteer support to keep the facilities well-maintained. Neighbourhoods have mainly chosen between two different options, each with their own challenges and strengths:

1. Membership: each household can choose whether to pay for a membership to use the facilities or not. The challenge is that funds are inconsistent or unpredictable, as the membership numbers can fluctuate. To raise more funds, households outside the neighbourhood can sometimes purchase a membership; however, these members often need to drive to the facilities, creating traffic and parking challenges.

2. Special Service Levy: the neighbourhood votes to have a tax levy put in place where each household is taxed extra and the money is reverted back to the homes association for the maintenance of the facilities. However, some households do not want to pay into the amenities any longer because they do not use it.

Disputes around the approach taken to maintain the shared amenities are leading to tension between neighbours.

When Council approved the neighbourhood strategy scope June 2016, covenant expiry was identified as out of scope for this project. However, an understanding of the key concerns will help clarify how neighbourliness and social connections are impacted by the covenant agreement expiry.

Different expectations around property maintenance
Not every neighbour shares the same ideas about property maintenance. There is a continuum with some residents' expectations exceeding applicable city by-laws at one end and residents who do not comply with city standards at the other. Different expectations can cause tension between neighbours and impact neighbourliness and sense of community. Residents complain about junk left in yards or driveways, lack of yard maintenance, and on-street parking, which can result in conflict between neighbours.

Occasionally, new residents are not aware of neighbourhood expectations; this could be especially true of neighbours who have moved from another country or who are living in a home with a yard for the first time.

When landlords are absent, sometimes properties fall into disrepair or are only maintained enough to meet the minimum standards. This is often mentioned as a concern with student housing properties.

Winter clearance of sidewalks is a concern, as many community members mentioned difficulty in walking children to school or moving around the neighbourhood when neighbours do not clear sidewalks well enough. Laurelwood Neighbourhood Association is currently piloting a program with support from the Municipal Enforcement team to increase awareness of rules and expectations regarding sidewalk clearance.

Diverse lifestyles, families and interests
While community members enjoy living in diverse neighbourhoods, challenges can arise when neighbours have different lifestyles, priorities, family compositions, and interests. For example, many residents indicated that they felt neighbourhood associations were focused on families with young children; they felt it is harder to connect with neighbours when you do not have kids.

Similarly, community members without dogs can find it more difficult to connect to the neighbourhood than dog owners. Dog owners walk their dogs in their neighbourhoods, creating natural opportunities to get to know neighbours as they interact with their dogs. The same kind of connects do not seem to happen when walking without a dog.

Furthermore, some community members do not feel comfortable sharing parks and trails with dogs, and do not feel welcome in those public spaces at times when there are many dogs present.

Grants and funding – awareness and access
The City offers a variety of grants and funding for different types of neighbourhood projects and groups (ex. Neighbourhood Matching Fund, Community Cash Grants, and Foundational Operating Funding). Community members are not always aware of these different funding opportunities. Even if they are aware of the fund they may not understand the eligibility requirements. For example, a resident may assume that only neighbourhood associations can apply for a neighbourhood matching fund grant, which is not the case. This means that residents may not pursue these funding opportunities to enable their good ideas to become a reality.

Additionally some of these funds will only pay for new events or activities. If the event is run a subsequent time, it may not be eligible for funding again. Residents have indicated that this can make it challenging to run successful activities in future years.

It has also been noted that there is no consistent approach to how neighbourhood associations are being funded, and that these groups could benefit from some base funding, particularly in mid and lower income neighbourhoods.

Request timing
Community members have great ideas for activities or initiatives within their neighbourhood. They wish to get neighbours and friends on board and act on that idea while it still has momentum. The challenge is that securing space for an event or getting the appropriate permissions from the City or other organizations can take weeks or months, depending on the project.

For example, road closures on local residential streets require several weeks' notice to ensure there is adequate time to coordinate with the appropriate departments and to make sure there are routes for emergency vehicles. Booking space within schools or municipal facilities may also need to be done well in advance in order to secure space given the demand for these spaces. Community members are sometimes frustrated by the long-term planning required to access space in these facilities.

Leadership capacity
Neighbourhood associations, homes associations, and other neighbourhood groups rely on dedicated volunteer support to organize events and run programs. Volunteers on a neighbourhood association each contribute their own skills and abilities and take on tasks best suited to them. In some cases, a member will be in charge of the same activity or event year after year to ensure consistency and facilitate the process. Turnover in volunteer membership means an event or activity can no longer be run until someone else is found to take on the role.

Some neighbourhoods noted a challenge in recruiting volunteers to help with neighbourhood initiatives. Currently, the City of Waterloo's Volunteer Services does not support affiliated organizations but affiliated neighbourhood associations can access support from the Volunteer Action Centre

Other community members said that sometimes they would like to do something in the neighbourhood but do not know where to start in gaining the support, planning, and securing resources required to implement the idea.

Limited neighbourhood gathering spaces
The City of Kitchener and the City of Waterloo have chosen different models when it comes to municipal facility spaces. The City of Kitchener has chosen to build and maintain over a dozen community centres across the city; whereas Waterloo takes a more centralized approach with fewer but larger municipal recreation facilities.

The City of Waterloo does not provide indoor infrastructure suitable for events or programs within most neighbourhoods. Parks are often used as gathering spaces within neighbourhoods during the warm months. However, weather can make outdoor events unpredictable. Additionally, parks in neighbourhoods often do not have hydro, bathrooms, or potable water. Residents in some areas also noted the lack of library or pool in or near their neighbourhood. The lack of places to meet and feel a physical sense of community is particularly evident in the winter months.

Some neighbourhood associations have been very successful in securing support from local businesses and receiving free meeting space. Some groups will rent space at schools, but this is not always affordable and needs to be booked well in advance. City facilities also have community rooms for rent, although the community often expresses that rental rates are high, and many neighbourhoods in Waterloo do not have a city facility within them. Cafes and other businesses will occasionally lend out space to groups also. Some neighbourhood associations meet in a neighbour's home. Many of the spaces used for meetings will not work for larger neighbourhood events. There may be a lack of awareness of the community spaces available and how to access them.

Neighbourhood associations, homes associations, and other groups
Currently, many neighbourhood events and activities are organized through neighbourhood associations and homes associations; the established structure and regular meetings can facilitate the planning process. Geographically, these groups cover about half the city. In some areas without a neighbourhood association, there are residents who would like to have one, but may need more support in forming, or may not be interested in taking on the leadership role themselves.

As neighbourhood associations are formed by those willing to volunteer, the association board may not be representative of the diversity of neighbourhood; it cannot be assumed that associations know and understand the needs and aspirations of the broader neighbourhood.

Volunteer support is another concern amongst neighbourhood associations. Expectations around volunteering for a neighbourhood association board are sometimes unclear, making it difficult to recruit new volunteers. Additionally, volunteers may experience burnout. When a volunteer ends their involvement in a neighbourhood association it can mean not only a loss of human resources, but also of skills, leadership capacity and expertise that can impact the sustainability of that neighbourhood association.

The lack of neighbourhood associations in more than half of the city was also seen as a challenge. These areas tend to have fewer events, social gatherings and activities, and a weaker sense of neighbourhood identity. City staff work with residents interested in starting a neighbourhood association, but given limits of staff resources they cannot currently offer as much support as residents might desire or need to establish a new successful neighbourhood association.

For neighbourhoods that are on the boundary of the City of Kitchener, there is some concern expressed about the ability to work together given the difference in the two cities' approaches to supporting neighbourhoods.

Parks should meet changing community needs
Parks play an important role in building strong community, as they are gathering spaces within neighbourhoods. Many parks have open spaces for sports and/or playground equipment for young children. Community members sometimes misuse park space and equipment, un-anchoring soccer nets and moving them around. The nets can break, making the park spaces unsafe for others.

Another challenge is that residents whose property backs on to a park will sometimes place gardens, grass clippings, or bird feeders on park land. This is encroachment on to public lands and it is addressed by contacting the individuals to seek remediation and to educate on encroachments. Through building awareness of the Partners in Parks program, community members may choose to engage in stewardship projects that are permissible instead of encroaching on public land and infringing on neighbours' enjoyment of the space.

Currently, most new parks are built by developers to City standards and accepted by the City before residents move in to the area. As a result, residents do not have an opportunity to provide input into the design and features of the park. Additionally, there is not currently a plan in place for upgrades to that space in the future as replacements are needed and as neighbourhood needs change. Rather, parks tend to be upgraded on an as-needed basis, for example to meet new safety standards. Residents have indicated that in many parks the playground equipment no longer meets the needs of the children in the community. Some equipment needs to be replaced, while other areas indicate there is no playground equipment available within a walkable distance to their home. Others have noted that parks seem to be geared toward families with young children. Adults without children and teenagers are looking for opportunities to use

parks. Suggestions include adult playground/exercise equipment and picnic areas for use by all.

In addition, the lack of off-leash dog parks is seen as challenge. Residents would like to have access to off-leash areas within walking distance from home, and see these areas as important community building spaces. Interest in off-leash spaces grows as more and more residents are living in houses with no backyard or a small backyard.

The Parks Strategy being planned by the City will be exploring many of these issues in greater depth.

Post-secondary community
Students who attend the post-secondary institutions in Waterloo often are not engaged in their neighbourhood in the same way as long-term residents. Reasons include: students do not expect to stay in Waterloo after graduation, and so invest more time in their studies than in the community; the university campuses provide a wide array of activities and clubs for students to be a part of, creating a sense of community which could replace the need for a neighbourhood community; properties where students live are not always maintained to as high a standard as adjacent properties, causing tension between the long-term residents and the students; and a perception that students are noisy and disrespectful, which for many students are stereotypes, causing tension between neighbours particularly in areas near the post-secondary campuses. While groups such as the Town and Gown Advisory Committee and certain neighbourhood associations, as well as initiatives such as the Welcome Students activities run by the City of Waterloo, have taken steps to make students feel more welcome in the community, this concern is still listed as a challenge in building strong neighbourhoods.

Post-secondary students that were consulted as part of this process have expressed an interest in being more involve in their neighbourhood and appreciate the work neighbourhood associations have done to include them in neighbourhood events. For students who live in university residences, these environments can provide strong neighbourhood groups.

Risk aversion and insurance
Neighbourhood associations have indicated that insurance requirements of the City are challenging. They feel that insurance and other requirements are sometimes prohibitive, as street closures, for example, require expensive insurance and bouncy castles have staff requirements. On the other hand, some neighbourhood associations have expressed concerns about not having insurance to cover board members.

Currently, affiliated neighbourhood associations can access some insurance coverage under the City's insurance as part of their affiliation service agreements. Restrictions and exclusions that apply to this insurance plan limit the activities a neighbourhood association can organize for the neighbourhood. City staff work closely with the associations to ensure their events, volunteers, and the public attending will be safe and have fun but also will be covered by the insurance plan should an incident occur.

Occasionally, this involves modifying an idea or plan to find a compromise that will mitigate risk while achieving neighbourhood goals. This can be frustrating for the neighbourhood association when they feel they have a good idea they want to make happen.

Residents also indicate that there are times when they have brought forward ideas to various departments at the City and staff has responded that the event is logistically impossible, or too unsafe or too high risk. This is frustrating for the community members. Staff commonly wishes they could say yes, but have an obligation to protect the community and public spaces. Residents would like to see staff be willing to discuss the idea further to find an alternative that would be feasible and would still achieve the neighbourhood's goals.

Space for youth in neighbourhoods
Community members appreciate the skate park at Waterloo Park as well as programs available for youth, but express a desire to see more spaces for youth (teenagers in particular) within neighbourhoods. Residents have indicated that public spaces in neighbourhoods seem to be focused on children, with little activity to offer for teenagers, particularly in the evenings.

Safety and crime
Generally residents feel safe in their neighbourhoods. Some people have a sense that there is an increase in petty crime, such as: graffiti, particularly on light posts and electrical boxes; bike thefts; and car break-ins. This impacts neighbours' trust in each other and in the broader community.

Use of streets
Residents have indicated that they would like to see children playing on neighbourhood streets. They would also like streets to be used for neighbourhood street parties that can bring together one or more streets to get to know each other. They find currently, however, that getting a street closure is challenging, and not only because of the high insurance costs and limitations. City staff faces challenges when aiming to support street parties, as road closures elicit complaints from residents about lack of access. Additionally, the process is complicated as there are many considerations related to community safety such as coordinating alternate emergency vehicle routes. Staffing resources to respond to street closer requests are also limited.

Walkability
Walkability in the neighbourhood context can be defined in two different ways: 1) the ability to walk through the neighbourhood with ease (pedestrian friendly infrastructure, etc.); 2) amenities to meet basic and/or recreational needs are within walking distance of home. Community members value walkability; some mentioning that it is a challenge to live so far from a splash pad, pool, shop, restaurant, or grocery store. Uptown neighbourhoods reported that their neighbourhoods are very walkable and that this contributes to the strong sense of community in those areas as neighbours are out and about. Residents in newer areas of the city indicated that walkability is a challenge not

only because of lack of amenities - things to draw them out of their homes and into their neighbourhoods - within walking distance, but also because of traffic levels and lack of connecting trails between streets.

Working with the City
Residents have noted that municipal procedures and policies can be complex and difficult to understand. They would like them to be kept simple, and would like staff to help with the necessary forms and permissions to enable neighbourhood projects to occur.

There have also been concerns raised about existing bylaws, in particular the sign bylaw. Neighbourhood groups want to put up signs to promote their events, or to identify their neighbourhood, but the sign bylaw does not allow for this, and it is challenging for residents to understand what options they do have.

While the City does offer support directly to neighbourhood groups through the Coordinator of Neighbourhoods position, this is only one staff position and mainly supports the affiliated neighbourhood associations. Other staff teams are contacted to play a role in supporting neighbourhood groups organize events, activities, and projects. Staff response to community requests is sometimes inconsistent, depending on staff team capacity. In some cases, staff teams can adjust their work plans in order to assist community members, other times they cannot. There is need for more clarity around which staff team should provide community support in different circumstances, and resourcing for staff to be able to work with the community, so that the most appropriate staff liaison can be allocated for support.

Topic 3: Trends

Our city is changing. What changes do you see happening now or in the future, and how might these impact Waterloo neighbourhoods?

The City of Waterloo is changing in many ways, through intensification, cultural diversity, variety of transportation options, and a growing older adult demographic, among others. It is important to understand these trends in order to anticipate the future needs and expectations in the community. These trends can also highlight opportunities to build strong neighbourhoods.

Aging population
As outlined in the City of Waterloo's Older Adult Recreation Strategy, the number of older adults is increasing and older adults are being encouraged to age in place. This could change neighbourhoods, including the types of amenities that need to be available. For example, there may be requests for more multi-generational programming. It is also means that more older adults will be looking for help with shoveling, a visiting friend, or help with yard work. Greater consideration to making neighbourhood spaces accessible for older adults with mobility challenges and other with disabilities is needed to support inclusion. Benches, not only along trails, but also along sidewalks would allow many older adults to get out and walk around their neighbourhood.

Different work patterns and lifestyles
Lifestyles shape what people look for from their city. Many people are commuting outside of the city and region, and may feel less connected to their neighbourhood or the broader city because they spend less time at home, and more time within their work community. Conversely, many others are working from home and are therefore in their neighbourhood for a long time every day.

There are more and more residents who are very busy and have heavily scheduled lives, and may not want or feel they have the time to invest in building social connections with neighbours. However, because of the numerous benefits to knowing neighbours (establish trust, increase sense of safety, someone close by to help, etc.), there is value in encouraging neighbours to meet and to support each other in meaningful ways. Also, while our community is changing, there are still many households that are looking for fun activities within the neighbourhood.

Additionally there is a sense that people tend to move around more often. While this is well known amongst the post-secondary student population, making community buildings in these areas more challenging, residents feel that this trend is expanding beyond students.

Diversity is celebrated across the city
The City of Waterloo is very diverse, in terms of age, socioeconomic status, occupation, culture, ethnicity, family composition, interests, languages, and education, among others.

Community members are generally pleased with the diversity in the city, as it brings vibrancy and the opportunity for neighbours to learn from each other. However, some community members feel more comfortable spending time with others of a similar culture as them, or do not know how to go about building relationships with those seen as different from themselves. They do not know how to be truly inclusive and to support cultural and language differences. There were suggestions for programs for newcomers to meet people in the neighbourhood.

Housing options are changing
In recent years, Waterloo has seen an increase in student housing. This is changing the look and feel of the city. While a few residents indicated that the number of family homes being turned into student houses seems to have leveled off, other residents still see this as a trend that will continue over the next several years.

There have been an increasing number of condominiums, apartment buildings, and high rises that have been developed as part of intensification. These change the street scape and influence how neighbours meet and interact. For example, a couple of community members noted that when they moved to a condo or a rental property, they were no longer responsible for their yard maintenance. This reduced their opportunities to meet with neighbours. They needed to find other ways to engage in the neighbourhood. Another example is that neighbours sometimes find it difficult to reach out to and include community members who reside in closed-access apartment buildings in broader neighbourhood activities. Methods of informing about neighbourhood events needs to change, as door-to-door and mailbox delivery is not easily possible in these situations.

A number of condominiums and apartment buildings have their own social gatherings and clubs for residents. Sometimes referred to as a vertical neighbourhood, the complex becomes a mini community. There is a sense that needs of vertical neighbourhoods may be different from our longer standing horizontal neighbourhoods. Similarly, there is a need find ways to make neighbourhood connections across the two.

Some residents also noted that increasing property values and housing prices is limiting who can purchase a home in Waterloo and limiting the socio-economic diversity of some neighbourhoods. There is also a sense that development of new affordable housing is lacking in Waterloo.

Neighbourhood participation
City staff working in the community comments that there is not as much dialogue between neighbours as there was in the past. Many residents expressed that they may know their neighbours in the house or two next door, but not further than that. Some neighbours will say hi but nothing beyond that. While some are interested in getting to

know their neighbourhood more, they feel they need a reason to connect with neighbours first. Other neighbours are not engaged in the community for a variety of reasons, including commuting or lack of interest. Some residents want to maintain very private lives, while others actively seek out friendships with neighbours.

Technology and social media
The use of technology and social media is playing an ever-increasing role in residents' social relationships. While some may invest in online community, residents have clearly identified that neighbourhood relationships are still important to them and still important to healthy communities.

Many neighbourhood associations are using social media and other forms of digital communication to interact between neighbourhood events and spread awareness of neighbourhood initiatives and share information. There may be other opportunities to leverage technology and social media to encourage neighbourliness and neighbourhood engagement. It is acknowledged by many community members that electronic methods of communication are not suitable for every individual. There are residents who do not have access to Internet or who do not subscribe to social media channels. Many still appreciate receiving paper newsletters and will cut out upcoming events and pin them on a bulletin board or on the fridge in their homes to keep track of what is happening in the neighbourhood.

Traffic and transportation
Community members perceive traffic to be increasing in many areas of the city. This impacts pedestrian sense of safety, particularly around school zones when children are being picked up and dropped off. Traffic noise is also a concern in historically quiet areas of the city.

Community members appreciate the various transportation options across the city, with the active transportation trails seeing a recent increase in traffic. The City has made active transportation a priority in order to accommodate more cyclists and other forms of active transportation. A priority trail network has been planned and will be invested in over the coming few years to facilitate travel from one end of the City to another. Smaller neighbourhood trails will be maintained to encourage residents to travel through their own neighbourhood without the use of a vehicle.

More Community Bike Share locations and bicycle infrastructure enhancements are also being planned. Residents are looking for more bike parking and bike repair kiosks.

Public transportation will also likely improve with the introduction of the LRT, again facilitating access to different spaces within the City quickly and efficiently. While many view the LRT in a positive light, some are concerned about train noise.

Improved transportation options will allow community members to easily access a variety of community spaces. While this might make is easier for people to travel outside of the neighbourhood and invest in non-geographical communities, active

transportation provides community members the opportunity to interact with neighbours as they travel to their destinations. Using public transportation also allows opportunities to meet neighbours at bus stops, for example, interacting daily on the way to and from work or school.

Topic 4: Aspirations and Opportunities

Ten years from now, what would you want Waterloo neighbourhoods to look like? What has successfully improved neighbourhoods in Waterloo or in other municipalities?

Community members, including City staff and council, identified different opportunities to build stronger neighbourhoods. These ideas come from personal opinions, what has worked in other municipalities, and what is already happening in Waterloo.

Art
Some community members would like more art in neighbourhoods. Residents noted that there are many skilled artists in our city, both professional and amateur, whose skills and expertise could be tapped into. Art could be created by local artists and installed in neighbourhoods. Creative art on sidewalks could encourage children to walk to school, as this has been successful in certain neighbourhoods already. Murals have been known to decrease incidents of graffiti and can also be an opportunity to celebrate the culture or identity of a neighbourhood. Street painting can be used for traffic calming.

Municipal Standards
Community members would like homes to be well-kept, and the unique features of historic homes maintained. Education around property maintenance standards and other by-laws could help improve compliance and therefore reduce tension between neighbours. This information could be delivered in a welcome package to new neighbours.

Staff from the municipal enforcement team feels that increasingly it is common for a neighbour to contact the City when there is a by-law issue before trying to address it directly with their neighbour first. There may be value in encouraging neighbours to talk and work together to resolve differences as a first step, recognizing that the City's Municipal Enforcement team can help neighbours access free mediation services to resolve conflicts if needed.

Impact of the pilot program being implemented by the Laurelwood Neighbourhood Association around clearance of snow from sidewalks should be explored.

Celebrating successes
Many neighbours are already building strong community within their neighbourhoods. These stories could be shared with the rest of the community. This would give other residents ideas for how they can strengthen their own neighbourhood and would encourage the efforts of others.

Neighbourhood association and homes association board members, as well as other residents that organize events and projects in their neighbourhoods, devote a tremendous amount of time and energy into building strong and connected

neighbourhoods. While the Community Builders' Awards program recognizes volunteers that provide ongoing service with the City of Waterloo's direct or affiliated programs, there should be other mechanisms through which appreciation for the hard work of neighbourhood groups can be formally acknowledged.

Communication

Certain neighbourhoods already have excellent channels of communication, whereas other neighbourhoods would like more formal avenues of communication.

One type of communication residents would like to see more of is communication between neighbours through means such as social media (ex. Facebook), e-mail lists, a neighbourhood website, and/or a neighbourhood newsletter. A combination of different communication methods allows neighbourhood associations to share details about upcoming events and activities and allows neighbours to share information such as a lost cat that has been found or free furniture they would like to give away. Residents thought the city could help by access to webpages for neighbourhood associations, training on use of social media, and sharing information about what is happening in neighbourhoods in city newsletters and other marketing materials.

Another desired form of communication is between neighbourhoods. Some neighbourhoods organize fun activities and festivals (such as yoga, Amazing Race, or skating events), and could help other neighbourhood groups do the same. A few community members recalled the former Waterloo Community Council, and several mentioned how beneficial it would be to have a formal structure (such as a neighbourhood summit) through which neighbourhood groups could share ideas, lessons learned, and skills.

Enhanced communication between neighbourhoods and the City was also highlighted as an aspiration by some community members. Some neighbourhood groups, especially the affiliated groups, communicate with the City through the Coordinator of Neighbourhoods staff position. These groups are sometimes asked to disseminate information to their membership regarding City initiatives and opportunities (such as relevant surveys available, grant applications, advisory committee recruitment, etc.). These groups also share information with the City about the neighbourhood and the needs and priorities in the neighbourhood. The groups can work with the Coordinator of Neighbourhoods to organize events for the neighbourhood. Some neighbourhood groups, however, would like increased dialogue with other municipal teams, such as municipal enforcement and transportation services.

Many residents do not know what amenities are nearby, the events and activities that are being organized locally, or how to get involved. Residents would appreciate a website containing factsheets about Waterloo neighbourhoods and other good-to-know information.

Welcome kits were suggested as great opportunities to share information about the amenities within the neighbourhood, applicable by-laws, and information about the

neighbourhood association, if applicable, along with upcoming neighbourhood events and activities.

Community spaces to gather
Community members spoke of the importance of having a place of focus within the neighbourhood for the neighbours to call their own, whether these are new spaces or better use of existing spaces. These kinds of spaces are of value because they allow people to organically meet other neighbours.

A community centre model found in neighbouring Kitchener and Cambridge was seen as successful by residents because it provides a gathering point in communities, and access to lower cost activities which supports inclusion. Community centres are seen as a point of pride and identity-building for Kitchener neighbourhoods. In the absence of dedicated community centres in Waterloo, some residents suggest that schools could function as community hubs in the evening. Schools and other spaces could be used to provide gathering spaces, rather than relying on City facilities.

It was suggested that enhanced partnerships with the school board could help secure space for community use outside school hours. Other existing spaces were also mentioned as opportunities for communities to use, including churches, businesses, and vacant offices or other similar spaces. However, not all community members would feel comfortable meeting in churches or other spaces of worship. Community gardens were also mentioned by several people as successful projects that build stronger community.

More small businesses, such as coffee shops, bakeries and pubs, are desired within neighbourhoods to allow walkable spaces where neighbours will bump into each other. Retail areas, such as Belmont Village, also draw the community out. Oakville and Toronto were identified as two municipalities that have integrated retail into the neighbourhoods.

Similarly, partnerships with local business could result in space being allocated for occasional community use. Already, some businesses have very generously offered meeting space, supplies, and/or funds to support neighbourhood groups. There are other creative ways that local businesses can support community building; for example, Bauer Kitchen Café has encouraged a local dog walking group. Similar ideas could be shared with all local businesses to foster a greater sense of community.

Existing municipal facilities could be more programmed for the neighbourhood. For example, if there is enough committed interest from the community, there could be more programs at Moses Springer Community Centre. This would give neighbours more of an opportunity to meet in these spaces.

In addition to the existing community spaces, there are examples of new spaces that could have a positive impact. Multi-use spaces within communities are efficient and effective ways to enable many activities to take place, appealing to a variety of residents

(for example, outdoor black top surfaces that would accommodate tennis, basketball, and pickleball part of the year, but could be flooded in the winter for ice activities).

Encourage neighbourliness

Through discussion with the community, there was an appreciation for how neighbourly many community members already are. There is interest in having the City play a role in encouraging neighbourliness and celebrating the good that is already happening. For example, the City of Calgary's 3 Things for Calgary was an initiative that encouraged community members to do three things to make Calgary a better city, and then post these things on a website. The Mayor then shared some of the stories through social media. Similar opportunities could be considered for Waterloo.

Municipal support

Residents see the City as an important contributor to neighbourhoods and identified opportunities such as event equipment, staff support, and volunteer support as areas for future growth. Additional staff support is needed to help new neighbourhood associations get started and to support their ongoing activities. The existing staff resources for these efforts do not align with community demand, meaning that staff cannot meet all requests. Neighbourhood associations desire to have City staff attend their meetings in person to offer support, rather than interacting via email or phone. While staff support is needed, neighbourhood associations also appreciate the ability to be self-directed, recognizing that each neighbourhood has different interests and needs.

Having a trailer of event equipment (such as projector, stereo speakers, games, etc.) to lend to community members could make planning events cheaper and easier. Better coordination between City divisions could help community members to access staff support to navigate municipal processes. Support in recruiting and training volunteers, information around how to organize a successful event, and best practice around the types of neighbourhood activities that are successful in bringing the community together could also assist neighbourhood groups organize neighbourhood projects.

Increased funding for neighbourhood associations and neighbourhood projects was also desired. In particular, base funding for neighbourhood associations is desired along with funding to support small neighbourhood projects beyond the Neighbourhood Matching Fund. More staff support for neighbourhood projects and affiliated groups was also desired.

The City of Brantford collaborated with Wilfrid Laurier University to offer the university's Neighbourhood Changemakers Program to residents of Brantford. The goal of the program was to take residents with passion to see change in their neighbourhoods and help them acquire the tools and skills necessary to put their great ideas into action. Participants learned about community development and community leadership; they learn about developing their idea and creating a budget, and developing an evaluation plan, among other topics.

Neighbourhood association, homes associations, and neighbourhood groups
Typically, the City of Waterloo will help neighbours build strong neighbourhood associations, but will not initiate the process. A resident(s) must come forward with an interest in starting an association. However, some areas of the City residents would appreciate greater support in getting started. In certain locations, (ex. Northdale), it may be worth the City's efforts to actively seek out community leaders and develop a neighbourhood association or even an informal group of engaged residents who want to do something great for their neighbourhood.

Some neighbourhoods that do not have an association would like to see one initiated. Some wish to see more support for starting a neighbourhood association, and others would like more municipal funding available for homes and neighbourhood associations to organize events and activities.

There are examples of situations where neighbours gather together to address a zoning or planning concern or to advocate for political action. Throughout the process, relationships are built and the group becomes organized. Once the concern is addressed, these groups do not always stay together. There is opportunity for neighbourhood associations or groups to be fostered out of these situations.

Neighbourhood events and activities
Where they exist, community members appreciate neighbourhood events (i.e. Grand Porch Party, litter cleanups, skating, neighbourhood festivals, neighbourhood garage sales, etc.). However, not all neighbourhoods have such events. Community members would like to see more neighbourhood events and activities across the city, and would like to see a broader range of events that appeal to the diversity within the neighbourhood (such family composition, lifestyle, age, culture, etc.).

Projects that have successfully contributed to strong neighbourhoods should be celebrated, and information on how other neighbourhoods could do similar projects should be shared. Leadership and project planning training are other mechanisms in which community members can gain the skills and knowledge required to organize a neighbourhood event or activity. Resources for events, even just a small fund for a street gathering, would be appreciated to encourage neighbours to organize more events. Toolkits for how to organize different kinds of events would also be helpful.

It is important for neighbourhood groups to learn directly from each other how to build strong neighbourhoods. The City could play a role in providing opportunities for all groups to meet and discuss lessons learned and success stories, and also coordinate mentorship between groups as well as opportunities to share resources.

Neighbourhood action plans, such as the ones developed in certain Hamilton neighbourhoods, have proven successful in bringing the neighbourhood together to identify and achieve neighbourhood goals. The City of Kitchener also plans to develop similar action plans in a few neighbourhoods as they implement their new strategy.

Neighbourhood identity

Many areas of the city do not have a distinct sense of place or identity. Establishing neighbourhood boundaries, naming each neighbourhood, neighbourhood signage like in the Westvale or MacGregor Albert neighbourhoods, and discovering what makes that neighbourhood unique could help built cohesion and identity within the neighbourhood. In turn this can build pride and a sense of ownership and personal responsibility for the neighbourhood.

There was also desire to see the character of existing neighbourhoods be retained, particularly neighbourhoods that are seeing the impacts of intensification. Many residents felt there was too much change happening and that this was impacting the neighbourhoods' character, identity and sense of community, particularly when new development does not seem in character with the existing neighbourhood.

Neighbourhoods supporting environmental initiatives

Neighbourhood associations and homes associations are often able to disseminate information to residents within the neighbourhood through their communication channels. Representatives from local environmental organizations have expressed a desire to see these groups share information about environmental initiatives, or even initiate neighbourhood-wide initiatives to encourage reduced consumption of energy or respond to other environmental issues. For example, there could be friendly competition between neighbourhoods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Parks and environmental stewardship

While many praise the City for the lovely parks and green spaces that currently exist, others hope to see more, bigger, and enhanced parks and natural spaces 10 years from now.

Playground upgrades were mentioned by a few community members, including accessible equipment, natural play elements, and splash pads. Parks in Oakville and Tudhope Park in Orillia were cited as good examples. Opportunities to build more skate parks would increase the spaces for youth within neighbourhoods.

Parks could provide educational opportunities by having an arboretum or naturalized area. Neighbours could come together to fundraise for such park enhancements, building relationships as they rally around a common interest.

An increased awareness of stewardship projects through the Partners in Parks program could increase community involvement in parks, increase sense of place, and bring neighbours together. Within other municipalities, "adopt-a-park" and "Friends of" initiatives have successfully garnered community participation in park maintenance and upgrades.

More passive use of neighbourhood parks, such as throwing a Frisbee or walking a dog, could increase social interactions between neighbours and decrease mischief. Amenities such as outdoor exercise equipment, washrooms, drinking fountains, and

benches could also encourage more residents to use park spaces. Sheltered picnic areas can make a space more multi-purpose.

Small neighbourhood dog parks would give neighbours the opportunity to walk to the parks and develop social connections while their dogs play. Dog parks may be especially important as more and more people live in condos and apartments that may not have much green space.

Residents were also aware of the loss of mature tree canopy due to the emerald ash borer and development in the city and aspire to see this restored and thriving.

Placemaking
Placemaking turns everyday places into destinations and gathering spaces, at a range of scales. On the long-term permanent end of the scale is infrastructure development of streetscapes, public parks, squares, and trails – ensuring that these create a sense of place and are conducive to vibrant community activity. Placemaking can also be small scale, temporary and just as impactful. Small scale projects can also help inform plans for infrastructure, and help cities develop processes to support community-led placemaking projects.

By helping community members navigate municipal processes and procedures and by clarifying which staff should take on what role, placemaking could be much easier and more fun for community members to engage in. For example, Halifax has a placemaking program where community members apply for a small grant, receive training, and work closely with staff to implement the project.

Traffic and transportation
Some community members would like to see more traffic calming measures put in place, in collaboration with their neighbourhood, to keep residential areas safer. Lighting of trails and more signage improvements was also desired. Pedestrian-only streets were mentioned as great opportunities to get people within the neighbourhood to meet.

Conclusion

The City of Waterloo is developing a neighbourhood strategy to clarify how the City can support community members in creating strong and connected neighbourhoods. As a key first step, the project team sought input from the community to understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities community members see within their neighbourhoods.

The City of Waterloo is a vibrant community with many unique neighbourhoods. The City is already supporting neighbourhoods through a variety of means, including parks and trails, staff support for neighbourhood projects, and grants, among others. However, there are still many challenges the community faces in building stronger neighbourhoods across the city.

Through this analysis, many opportunities have been identified to strengthen Waterloo neighbourhoods. Not all ideas and concerns identified can be addressed by the neighbourhood strategy; some opportunities do not fall directly under the City of Waterloo's direct purview (for example, use of schools outside school hours). Still other ideas are directed by the Official Plan and other overarching mandates and policy already in place (for example, building community centres, determining where businesses are established, intensification requirements in the Uptown Core, etc.). However, these aspirations still express community priorities, and the strategy will consider creative possibilities to respond to these priorities and build strong community.

Building on this report, Phase 2 of public engagement will occur over the spring and summer of 2017. These consultations will delve deeper into the issues and ideas raised in phase one to clarify how the City of Waterloo can best support community members in creating strong and connected neighbourhoods across the city.

To learn more about the project and how to be involved in Phase 2, visit the City of Waterloo website or contact Beth and Janet by Email or by phone at 519-884-5363 x17225.

Definitions

City: The Corporation of the City of Waterloo refers to the governing body and is abbreviated to the City. When the geographical area is being referred to, city will appear with a lower-case "c."

Foundational operating funding: Funding pre-determined through affiliation service agreements, to contribute towards operating expenses. Non-affiliated groups may also apply for operating funding through the cash grants program.

Homes association: neighbourhood group established by the land developer to maintain shared assets in the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood: "A district where people live" (Collins English Dictionary). Please note: this document will not focus on defining physical boundaries, but instead acknowledges that neighbourhood boundaries can be flexible and can be defined differently depending on each individual.

Neighbourhood association: A neighbourhood group that is either affiliated by the City or non-affiliated; sometimes also termed "community association."

Placemaking: Temporary or long-term projects that turn everyday places into destinations and gathering spaces (examples: little libraries, murals, public art, and park and trail improvements). Events such as a Jane's Walk can also help residents appreciate their neighbourhood in a new way and encourage increased use of existing gathering spaces.

Social capital: "the features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putman, 2000, as quoted by Meager, 2008, p. 19).