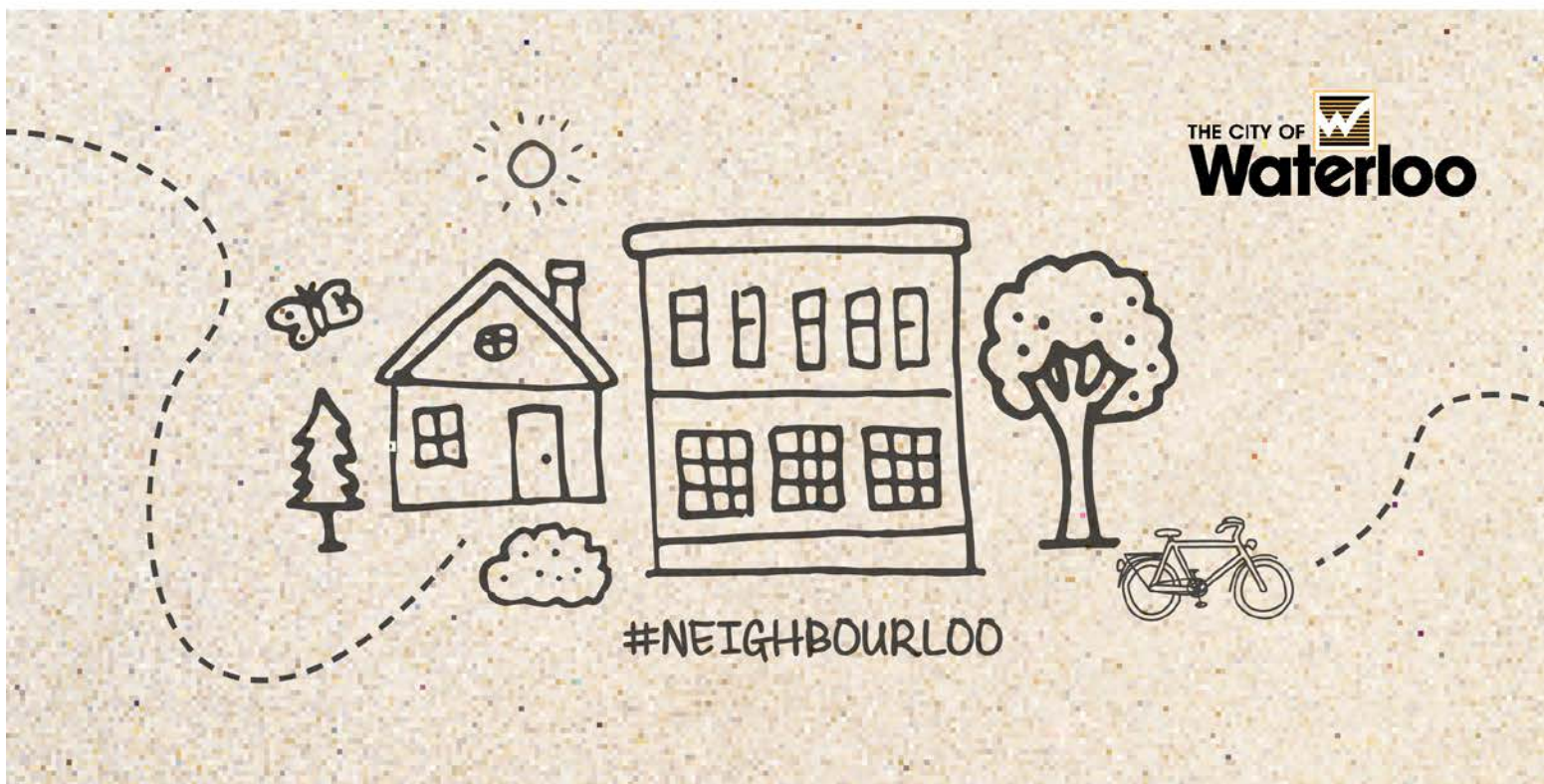




Waterloo's Neighbourhood Strategy: Supporting Resident-led Neighbourhood Community Building

May 15, 2018



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Introduction

The City of Waterloo has a long history of fostering strong and connected neighbourhoods. The City already supports neighbourhood initiatives through grants, staff resources, and other programs that community members value and that make an important contribution to our community's development.

The city and its neighbourhoods are currently experiencing significant changes, including increasing ethnic diversity and newcomers, a growing aging population, a changing economy, new technology, and urban intensification. These factors are shaping how neighbourhoods look and how neighbours interact. As the city continues to change and grow, how the City can better support residents to create even stronger and more connected neighbourhoods has come to the forefront as a community priority.

Since early 2016, the City has been partnering with the community to define a vision for resident-led neighbourhood community building in Waterloo and the City's role in striving for that vision.

This strategy is the result of this collaborative process. It builds on the long standing and successful city initiatives currently in place to support neighbourhoods, by outlining a plan to provide neighbourhoods city-wide with additional tools to build stronger communities.

How the strategy was developed

It took the commitment and passion of a lot of people to develop Waterloo's first Neighbourhood Strategy.

A City of Waterloo staff team was formed for this project to complete the behind the scenes work to develop the draft strategy. This work was done with direction from the project's steering committee. The committee includes representatives from organizations and neighbourhood groups with a direct interest in Waterloo neighbourhoods.

Steering Committee members

External Stakeholders

- Laurelwood Neighbourhood Association: Tim Osland
- Eastbridge Neighbourhood Association: Cindy Watkin
- Beechwood Homes Association: John Loncar
- Safe and Healthy Community Advisory Committee (former): D'Arcy Farlow
- Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation: Shannon Weber/Lynne Short
- United Way Waterloo Region Communities: Kristen Feduck/Jonathan Massimi
- University of Waterloo: Kelly McManus
- Volunteer Action Centre: Jane Hennig
- Waterloo Public Library: Laura Dick
- Wilfrid Laurier University: Adrianna Crusoe/Shannon Weber/Sheldon Pereira
- Waterloo Regional Police Service: Reid Pridham/Andrew Abra
- Waterloo Region District School Board: Shawn Callon
- Region of Waterloo: Katherine Pigott/Sanjay Govindaraj

Internal Staff

- Policy & Performance Analyst: Beth Rajnovich
- Jr. Policy and Research Analyst: Janet Norman
- Manager, Community and Neighbourhood Services: Lori Ludwig
- Director, Municipal Enforcement: Shayne Turner
- Coordinator, Neighbourhoods: Julie Legg
- Cultural Planning Specialist, Amy Ross

Neighbourhood Strategy staff project team

- Jim Bowman, Director of Community Programming and Outreach
- Beth Rajnovich, Policy & Performance Analyst
- Janet Norman, Jr. Policy and Research Analyst
- Lori Ludwig, Manager, Community and Neighbourhood Services
- Julie Legg/Kristy Smith, Coordinator, Neighbourhoods
- Leta Campbell, Manager, Business Services
- Shelly Reed, Communications Specialist

Community Involvement

At every stage of the project, community members shared their experiences and ideas; these have shaped this neighbourhood strategy.

Broad community engagement was needed to identify community needs. It was also crucial for determining what supports and tools would best respond to these needs and should be the focus of City investment. To create a strategy that is sustainable over the long term, community input was used to identify priority areas for investment that would best support neighbourhood-led community building.

The project staff team consulted over 1,700 community members to inform the neighbourhood strategy:

- A Resident Panel of community members met seven times over the course of the project to provide in-depth input into the draft neighbourhood strategy.
- A street team of City staff and volunteers spoke with residents about their neighbourhoods in public spaces across the City (neighbourhood events, Waterloo Public Library pop-up sessions, Artist in Residence workshops, community festivals, and public square events, among others).
- Online surveys and engageWaterloo allowed community members to tell us about their neighbourhoods at their convenience.
- Focus groups included targeted sessions (i.e. secondary students, post-secondary students, older adults) and sessions open to the general public.
- Open house session gave residents an opportunity to come share ideas with staff in person.
- A Canada Day contest asked participants to share what they appreciate about their neighbours.
- A youth contest asked participants to share what makes their neighbourhood great.
- Community volunteers hosted kitchen table talks (focus groups to gather input from their neighbours for the strategy).
- Stories about great things already happening in neighbourhoods were shared on Facebook

Project Timeline and Deliverables

1) Define project scope and approach (March – June 2016)

To determine the scope, areas of focus, and work plan, the project team:

- Reviewed City of Waterloo plans and strategies (such as the Corporate Strategic Plan and the Recreation and Leisure Services Master Plan).
- Examined neighbourhood strategies from other municipalities.
- Explored academic research and other literature related to developing strong neighbourhoods.

- Consulted 140 individuals (neighbourhood groups and community leaders) to gather their input on the project scope and approach.

2) Phase 1 (September 2016 – February 2017)

To understand the strengths, challenges, opportunities, and trends in Waterloo neighbourhoods, the project team:

- Reviewed what is currently happening in Waterloo neighbourhoods, including existing City of Waterloo programs supporting neighbourhoods.
- Consulted over 400 community members to learn about great things happening in their neighbourhoods, challenges they encounter, and ideas for how their neighbourhoods can be strengthened.
- Researched how other municipalities are addressing opportunities, challenges, and trends similar to the ones identified by the Waterloo community.

3) Phase 2 (March – August 2017)

The ideas and information gathered through the first phase was further explored. The project team:

- Consulted almost 1,100 community members to better understand what matters most to Waterloo residents and what strategies could have the best positive impact for Waterloo neighbourhoods.
- Expanded best practice research.
- Reviewed the Neighbourhood Matching Fund program to determine how the program can be improved.
- Inventoried municipal “red tape” to begin exploring how the City can make it easier for residents to lead neighbourhood projects, while also supporting resident safety, risk mitigation, and compliance with legislative and other requirements.

4) Phase 3 (September 2017 – January 2018)

Building on public consultation input and research completed, the project staff team worked with the Neighbourhood Strategy Steering Committee and other key stakeholders to develop the draft Neighbourhood Strategy.

5) Phase 4 (January 2018 – May 2018)

The draft strategy was shared with the community to gather feedback and help prioritize implementation. Based on the community’s input, the strategy was revised and an implementation plan was developed.

Broadening Our Support for all Neighbourhoods

The goals and actions outlined in this strategy, collectively, point to a need for the City to provide support for a broader range of approaches to neighbourhood community building.

Historically, City support has been focused on affiliated neighbourhood associations, with less involvement in neighbourhoods without an affiliated group.

Affiliated neighbourhood associations have been a successful approach to community building in many neighbourhoods, and ongoing City support of these groups is critical. There are, however, many neighbourhoods in Waterloo that do not want to, or have not been able to, establish a neighbourhood association. This includes areas with homes associations, non-affiliated neighbourhood groups, or no neighbourhood group at all.

This strategy points to the need for more City support in these neighbourhoods, and new ways to support resident-led community building in these areas. Unless otherwise indicated, the recommendations for action below reflect supports intended to be open to all neighbourhoods across the city.

Vision for Waterloo Neighbourhoods

The City of Waterloo's vibrant neighbourhoods make the city a great place to live, work, learn, and play. That is why the City set out to develop a neighbourhood strategy – to see how the City can best support community members to create stronger and more connected neighbourhoods.

Based on community input, the vision for Waterloo neighbourhoods over the next ten years is:

Waterloo is a city of caring, vibrant, engaged neighbourhoods where everyone belongs.

There are neighbourhoods in Waterloo that are well on their way to achieving this vision, while others are making some beginning steps. When this vision is achieved, neighbourhoods in Waterloo will have a strong sense of identity, residents will know and care for their neighbours, and neighbourhoods will be active and engaging places for their residents to live. What this looks like will be different for each neighbourhood and that is a good thing. Residents will work together, supported by the City, to build neighbourhood-based communities that reflect the areas unique needs and interests. This might mean an annual community picnic, it might mean a monthly movie night in a park or indoor space where everyone is welcome to join in, it might mean starting a neighbourhood initiative to help seniors shovel their sidewalks, or it might be something new and totally original.

The City of Waterloo has a strong foundation for the neighbourhood strategy to build on already – all thanks to ongoing activities of affiliated neighbourhood associations, homes associations, community agencies, City staff that support neighbourhoods, and the kind and thoughtful residents of Waterloo. The neighbourhood strategy outlines how the City can best support the community to achieve a shared vision for Waterloo neighbourhoods going forward.

Guiding Principles

The following principles guided the development of the strategy recommendations and will continue to guide the implementation of the neighbourhood strategy:

1. Residents and neighbourhood volunteers are at the root of great neighbourhoods.
2. Every resident is a neighbour and can help build strong neighbourhoods.
3. Neighbourhood community building should be resident-led.
4. Neighbourhood community building should aim to be inclusive.
5. City departments must work together to help support resident-led and delivered neighbourhood initiatives.
6. Collaboration with community partners is key to achieving the strategy's vision.

1. Residents and neighbourhood volunteers are at the root of great neighbourhoods.

Residents care about their neighbourhoods, and many invest their time and energy into making local neighbourhoods even better. Each resident's wellbeing is influenced by their neighbourhood, and all residents should have a vested interest in collectively shaping the direction of their neighbourhood. The genuine and devoted efforts of residents form the foundation of great neighbourhoods.

2. Every resident is a neighbour and can help build strong neighbourhoods.

Every resident has knowledge, ideas, skills, and abilities to contribute to strengthening their neighbourhood. Efforts to develop community within each neighbourhood must focus on these assets within the neighbourhood itself and must aim to include all neighbours.

3. Neighbourhood community building should be resident-led.

Community building in neighbourhoods is most successful when residents make the changes they want to see in their neighbourhoods and when activities represent the interests of the broader neighbourhood community. The City's role is to support grassroots and neighbourhood initiatives.

4. Neighbourhood community building should be inclusive.

Waterloo neighbourhoods are made up of residents from various backgrounds, including those who have moved from other cities, provinces, or countries. They have different abilities, education, and income, and are of different ages. Neighbours also have a variety of interests and experiences. All neighbours are important contributors to the neighbourhood. Community building in the neighbourhood should be inclusive and should welcome involvement from all neighbours.

5. City departments must collaborate to help support resident-led and delivered neighbourhood initiatives.

The city is more lively and vibrant when great things are happening in its neighbourhoods. Residents have ideas about what they want in their neighbourhoods, and have the skills and abilities to contribute; neighbourhood initiatives are most successful when they are planned and delivered by the neighbours directly. As such, the City of Waterloo will follow a model where the City helps support resident-led and delivered initiatives instead of going into a neighbourhood and delivering programs and services directly.

When residents bring forward an idea to City staff that is supported by the neighbourhood, relevant City departments will explore the idea together and with the residents. When an idea is not feasible due to legislative or policy constraints, financial

or human resource constraints, or public safety concerns, the City will help the residents explore other options in order to help them achieve their neighbourhood's goals.

6. *Collaboration with community partners is key to achieving the strategy's vision.*

This strategy is founded on the efforts of residents in building strong and connected neighbourhoods across Waterloo. Other community organizations and groups are a part of the community and have insight, expertise, and resources that could be invested in Waterloo neighbourhoods to make them even stronger. These partners could include: post-secondary institutions, the United Way Waterloo Region Communities, the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation, and the Volunteer Action Centre, to name a few. The implementation of the strategy will consider collaboration with various community partners, as appropriate. Additionally, as the City of Kitchener has recently begun implementing a neighbourhood strategy of its own, opportunities to work together will be explored.

Strategy Goals and Actions for Implementation

Over the years, the City of Waterloo has demonstrated its commitment to building strong neighbourhoods through grants, programs, and in-kind supports. The community was clear that they value and benefit from the range of neighbourhood supports that are already in place. However, the community has changed, and will continue to change; existing approaches can be improved to better meeting current and future needs of the community. The neighbourhood strategy includes 3 goals and actions to strengthen the City's dedication to resident-led neighbourhood community building. Each action is connected to one of the strategy's three goals. These goals are rooted in community input on roles the City can take to best support neighbourhood community building.

Goal 1: Encourage neighbourhood interactions

Encouraging neighbours to interact is important to building strong and connected neighbourhoods. When neighbours know neighbours:

- They have someone nearby they can go to for help.
- They feel safe because they recognize and know the people on their street.
- They feel a stronger sense of belonging as they develop friendships in the neighbourhood.

The City will further encourage and support neighbourhood interactions amongst residents who want to get to know each other and raise awareness of the importance of being a good neighbour. Currently, the City offers support to affiliated neighbourhood associations so they can organize neighbourhood events and activities that bring neighbours together. The strategy actions connected to this goal build on and expand the City's current approach.

The following actions will help achieve this goal:

Action 1: Encourage neighbourliness.

We heard neighbours can be an important source of day-to-day help and community connection. This might mean saying hello, helping out with snow shoveling, or dropping off a meal to provide comfort or support. We also heard that residents feel that collectively we are not as friendly and helpful with our neighbours as we were in the past.

Encouraging neighbourliness and positive interaction between neighbours can increase wellbeing – as residents have people in close proximity they can call on if they need help. It can also increase sense of safety, as people will know more faces in their neighbourhood.

What will the City do?

- Support neighbourhoods and neighbours to take a more active role in encouraging neighbourliness. Collaborations between the neighbourhoods, the City, and partners could include:
 - Sharing ideas for how to be more neighbourly. This could involve collaboration with neighbourhood groups as well as providing how-to guides.
 - Developing a campaign(s) to increase awareness of what it means to be a good neighbour and to recognize people who do something great, big or small, in their neighbourhood. This could involve collaboration with existing campaigns, such as Random Act of Kindness day.

Action 2: Support neighbourhoods seeking to build stronger relationships through a program that sparks neighbourhood community-building.

We heard that in some areas of Waterloo, particularly those without a neighbourhood association, the sense of community and neighbourhood connection may not be as strong. Neighbours know their neighbourhood best and are the best people to bring neighbours together to help each other out, but making those initial connections can be a challenge.

To achieve neighbourhood connectedness, other municipalities have successfully implemented a community connector or block connector program: locally United Way Waterloo Region Communities piloted a community connector program in a few neighbourhoods across the region. These kinds of programs help support a resident who is already an active presence in the neighbourhood or wants to take on a more active role in building community. They offer resources to help get to know the residents of their street, apartment building, block, or neighbourhood, and learn about their interests, abilities, and needs. If neighbours express interest, the Connector could put neighbours in touch with each other and create those linkages that enable neighbours to access the supports they need from the people who live right next to them. This can lead to opportunities to create resident-led activities and greater resident engagement in the development of their neighbourhood. Resources include money for small activities, tools and ideas to get things started, and learning opportunities with other Community Connectors from other neighbourhoods.

Programs to strengthen neighbourhood connections would need to be further explored to determine what approach would be most successful in Waterloo neighbourhoods. Partners like United Way Waterloo Region Communities would have an opportunity to be involved in these discussions. Any programs to help build connections within neighbourhoods should be focused on neighbourhoods where other neighbourhood-building approaches have not taken root.

What will the City do?

- Investigate existing programs within the region and in other municipalities that would help strengthen neighbourhood connectedness, and work with partners to build on these programs in select Waterloo neighbourhoods.

Action 3: Nurture place-based neighbourhood pride, belonging, identity, and placemaking.

We heard that neighbourhood identity is strong in areas of the city that have a commonly used neighbourhood name, and in particular in areas with an established neighbourhood association. However, residents in other areas do not always have a strong neighbourhood identity, and sometimes feel “neighbourhoodless,” identifying where they live not by a neighbourhood name, but by major intersections or other features. Encouraging awareness and celebration of neighbourhood identity can strengthen the connection to place as well as the sense of pride in the neighbourhood. Embracing and supporting neighbourhood-led placemaking projects in parks and other public spaces will provide opportunities to grow the identity. Neighbourhood-led placemaking will also support the development of spaces close to home that attract neighbours to gather and interact.

What will the City do?

- Share ideas and how to guides with the community on how to build neighbourhood identity through neighbourhood-led placemaking.
- Work with neighbourhoods that do not have a commonly shared neighbourhood name to collectively identify a neighbourhood name.
- Encourage and support use of neighbourhood names, including through neighbourhood name signage.
- Formalize a community garden program in city parks with support from the Parks and Environment team.
- Funding for new community gardens, outdoor community rinks, and similar neighbourhood projects in city parks.
- Establish a neighbourhood-led community art program with support from the City’s Arts and Culture team.

Action 4: Inspire those living in multi-unit buildings to connect with their neighbours.

As Waterloo's population intensifies, buildings with multiple dwelling units, such as apartment buildings and condominiums, are becoming more and more common. This impacts how neighbours interact.

Multi-unit buildings, and high-rise buildings in particular, are sometimes seen as being a vertical neighbourhood. We heard that the ways in which neighbours within a vertical neighbourhood meet and interact are different than in a more traditional neighbourhood. They are likely to bump into their neighbours in the common hallways, elevators, or underground parking, unlike those living in single-detached homes and townhomes where neighbours may interact while doing yard work or sitting on the front porch. Some, but not all, multi-story residences have active social committees or condominium boards organizing activities for residents, encouraging connections amongst neighbours. Residents living in multi-unit dwellings told us they find it harder to connect with other neighbours in their building.

We also heard that residents living in single-detached homes and townhouses find it difficult to make connections with their neighbours living in multi-story buildings. The ways neighbours connect in low-rise neighbourhoods, where neighbours chat while outside their home, or can walk up the front steps and knock on the door to make a connection, do not work in multi-story buildings with their secure front door access.

Some of the more common residents of multi-unit dwellings (post-secondary students, older adults, and lower income residents) are more vulnerable to social isolation and could most benefit from increased neighbour connection.

What will the City do?

There are actions the City can take to inspire and help interested residents to build neighbourhood connections within multi-unit dwellings:

- Help those living in multi-unit buildings who want to connect with neighbours by sharing creative ideas to encourage connections between neighbours (ex. How to organize a high rise "block party", progressive dinner party, signs for apartment doors).
- Seek opportunities to help vertical neighbourhoods connect with the broader neighbourhood, starting with connecting landlords and condo boards with the broader neighbourhood groups.
- Promote existing neighbourhood programs to those living in multi-unit buildings.

Action 5: Continue to build neighbourhood cohesion in areas with a high concentration of post-secondary students.

Waterloo's large post-secondary student population is an asset to our community, and makes our city unique and vibrant. There tends to be a high concentration of post-secondary students living around the universities and community college but these residents may not always feel that they are connected to the broader neighbourhood in which they are living.

There are already a number of projects underway in these areas to improve the physical form and amenities in the Northdale neighbourhood, such as streetscape improvement, WCI/WLU project, park development, and a focus on new buildings with mixed use, all of which will help strengthen these neighbourhoods. There have also been initiatives in the MacGregor-Albert neighbourhood aimed at improving relationships between student and non-student neighbours, but we heard that additional attention needs to be focused on the social environment.

The Town and Gown Committee, composed of post-secondary representatives, non-student residents, student leaders, and City staff, has been working over the years to align stakeholders' visions for this community. Building community cohesion has come to the forefront of their terms of reference and recently a subcommittee has been formed to lead this work. Waterloo's student population is an asset to the greater community, and we hope they stay as long term neighbours in this community after completing their formal education.

Residents in these neighbourhoods, both students and non-students, want to get to know each other, to develop relationships and a shared sense of community. We heard concerns from residents, both students and non-students, regarding issues such as garbage, noise, property maintenance, and safety related to low levels of street lighting.

We know that solutions to these challenges are not simple. We also know that not all approaches tried in the past have been as successful as we have hoped in increasing community cohesion in these neighbourhoods. For example, it has not been possible to date to establish a resident-led neighbourhood association in the Northdale area; this area has a high concentration of students, and students tend to be more involved in school activities and less able to make long term commitments in the community. These neighbourhoods are different and need different approaches to resident-led community building.

A collaborative approach is needed, supported by the City, which focuses on harnessing the neighbourhoods' existing social assets to actively improve community cohesion.

What will the City do?

- Through the Town and Gown Committee, focus efforts on tangible action aimed at enhancing community cohesion and neighborliness among all residents.
- Engage student leadership as leaders and implementers of these activities.
- Review best practices from other cities with post-secondary institutions.
- Leverage existing community events and initiatives that can engage student residents and non-student residents.
- Engage student residents and groups, non-student residents and groups, and building owners and managers in these efforts.

Action 6: Clarify the City supports available to homes associations and residents in these areas.

The same supports that are available to all neighbourhoods city-wide, regardless of affiliation status, are also available to neighbourhoods that have a homes association. For example, all neighbourhoods can access the following programs aimed at supporting neighbourhood community building, depending on the scope of their neighbourhood project: Community Cash Grants, Neighbourhood Matching Fund, and the Partners in Parks program. However, not all residents in homes association areas are aware they can apply for these programs like other neighbourhoods. Support from the City's Coordinator, Neighbourhoods is also available to all neighbourhood groups.

Pending the approval of the neighbourhood strategy, City supports for all neighbourhoods would be further broadened. Some homes associations have expressed interest in pursuing affiliation status with the City. These groups can approach the City to explore the benefits of affiliation to determine whether it is the right approach for them. It should be noted however, that affiliation status relates only to support for neighbourhood led and delivered recreation, leisure, and community events that are open to all; it does not support operational or capital issues related to shared assets on private property.

Through the neighbourhood strategy consultation, residents living in homes association areas told us that they are concerned about their covenant expiry and how to sustain their neighbourhood's shared assets (e.g. pool, tennis court). Given that these assets are on private property, the City has determined that its only role in response to covenant expiry is to offer an opportunity to initiate a Special Service/Area Levy in the neighbourhood if there is appropriate community support, in accordance with Policy A031 Neighbourhood/Home Association Special Service/Area Levy Implementation and Administration Policy. Home association leaders indicated they want to better understand this policy and what it means to them, and they also want to know what their options are should the Special Service/Area Levy not have sufficient resident support. We also heard that neighbourhood cohesion is a concern in some of these

neighbourhoods, particularly the ones that have undergone or will soon undergo a vote for a Special Service/Area Levy. Differing opinions among neighbours on this issue can lead to tension. Pending approval of the draft strategy, energy could be focused on implementing recommendations related to encouraging neighbourliness and community connectedness in these neighbourhoods.

What will the City do?

- Actively promote to homes association neighbourhoods the City supports and resources open to all Waterloo neighbourhoods to support neighbourhood community building such as grants, affiliation, and in-kind supports.
- Continue to educate Homes Associations about the City of Waterloo's policy A-031 Neighbourhood/Home Association Special Service/Area Levy Implementation and Administration Policy, what it means for homes associations that want to explore this option, and how they can support positive neighbourhood relationships during the process.
- Clarify other options available to homes associations that do not wish to pursue a Special Service/Area Levy, or do not secure resident support for a Levy, in relation to the future of the homes association's private assets. This could involve options such as land donation to the City, awareness of rezoning viability for redevelopment, a membership model, etc.

Goal 2: Empower neighbours to lead

Many residents want to be more involved in their neighbourhood – whether it is organizing a neighbourhood activity or volunteering for a neighbourhood association event. Residents do not always know where to start; they may be unsure where to go for information, what help is available, or what they can do in their neighbourhoods.

The City is committed to empowering residents to lead and deliver neighbourhood initiatives to achieve their neighbourhood's goals. Currently, the City offers capacity-building, financial, and in-kind supports to affiliated neighbourhood associations as well as the Neighbourhood Matching Fund grant program to encourage grassroots neighbourhood projects. Additional City guidance, information, resources, and programs could build even more community capacity to lead neighbourhood initiatives.

The following actions will help achieve this goal:

Action 7: Provide opportunities for neighbourhood groups to connect and collaborate with each other.

We heard that neighbourhood groups have a lot of knowledge around what neighbourhood initiatives have worked well in the past, challenges they have faced, and how they have overcome these challenges. Neighbourhood groups could do even more

for their neighbourhoods if they could share ideas and lessons learned with each other and help each other overcome challenges and achieve success. Face-to-face interaction is still very important to get to know each other and to help each other out. Also, having a method of on-going communication is helpful to address challenges and share advice quickly outside of a formal networking environment. Collaboration between neighbourhoods can lead to stronger neighbourhoods individually, as well as fostering joint neighbourhood initiatives.

What will the City do?

- Host a neighbourhood summit each year, encouraging all neighbourhood groups (whether homes associations, affiliated associations, or other neighbourhood groups) to come together to learn about and discuss topics related to neighbourhoods. The topics would be suggested by neighbourhood participants. The summit would include a networking opportunity. The summit would also provide an opportunity to share updates on neighbourhood strategy progress.
- Facilitate a Neighbourhood Leaders Committee for neighbourhood association board members and other neighbourhood group leaders to share information, ideas, and best practices and to offer each other advice, as well as to learn more about City policies, processes, and projects relevant to neighbourhoods. This committee could also provide ongoing advice on implementation of the neighbourhood strategy and topics for the Neighbourhood Summit
- Provide online space where neighbourhood groups can share ideas and tips with each other.
- Promote peer mentorship opportunities between neighbourhood groups.

Action 8: Develop and share information resources with neighbourhoods through an online portal.

We heard that neighbours want to do great things in their neighbourhoods, but may not know what kind of things they could do, or how to plan and make it happen. Having this information in an easy-to-read and access format could help neighbourhood groups and neighbours organize great neighbourhood initiatives. Helpful templates and checklists could also be shared alongside the information resources. Sharing successful neighbourhood-led events and activities in Waterloo or other cities would encourage other residents to initiate neighbourhood projects or events and give them ideas for what they could do. This would create more neighbourhood capacity to develop and implement ideas. Residents identified that an online portal or website would be the best way to share these tools, but also want to make sure that they are readily available in hardcopy for those with limited internet access.

What will the City do?

- Develop information resources, including:
 - A toolkit and an idea bank for neighbourhood initiatives.
 - Guides and best practices around board governance, volunteer management, inclusive activities/events, how to engage youth/older adults, etc.
 - Information on grants and other supports for neighbourhoods.
 - Staff contact information for concerns/topics relevant to neighbourhoods.
 - Links to websites/public contacts for neighbourhood associations and homes associations.
- Share these information resources online in a centralized location/webpage, and have materials available in print format (at municipal facilities, libraries, etc.). Implementation of the recommendation would involve active promotion of the resources.
- Provide an online space where community members can share ideas and success stories related to neighbourhoods.

Action 9: Build resident capacity to organize and lead neighbourhood initiatives.

We heard that neighbours may have great ideas, but do not always have the skills and experience to plan and implement their ideas. A capacity building leadership program would give them the tools to organize and implement these ideas.

Other cities, such as Brantford and Hamilton, run a capacity-building program in collaboration with other partners, such as post-secondary institutions and community organizations.

A program like this could lead to more neighbourhood initiatives being organized by residents in areas that currently do not have these kinds of activities and to the development of new neighbourhood leaders. There could be opportunity to develop a new program or tailor an existing program to the Waterloo context and what the community wants to learn more about. The intent would be to encourage grassroots initiatives and to build neighbourhood leaders in areas of the city that do not have an active neighbourhood group.

What will the City do?

- Partner with local organizations, institutions, and programs with expertise in community projects, neighbourhood development, and leadership to determine the kind of capacity-building program best suited to the Waterloo community.

- Promote the program to community members who are not already actively engaged in community building, to encourage grassroots initiatives and foster neighbourhood leadership.

Action 10: Provide additional training and support to neighbourhood groups in volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition.

We heard that volunteers are essential to strong neighbourhoods, whether they are on a neighbourhood association executive, or neighbours who help out with a neighbourhood activity once per year. Some neighbourhood groups would like to learn more about volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition - as this takes a lot of time, energy, and expertise. Offering more information and training sessions related to volunteers would support neighbourhood groups in recruiting and retaining their volunteers.

What will the City do?

- Collaborate with the Volunteer Action Centre (VAC) to broaden the volunteer-related supports available to neighbourhood groups.
- Improve affiliated neighbourhood groups' access to the bank of resources available through the VAC site.
- Deliver volunteer training in areas requested by neighbourhood groups, using innovative approaches to training.
- Support neighbourhood volunteer recognition. Ideas could include offering neighbourhood groups resources in order to recognize their volunteers, or strengthening the City's recognition of neighbourhood volunteers.

Action 11: Considering a range of options, explore the feasibility of providing neighbourhood groups with access to affordable event equipment.

We heard that residents appreciate the events their neighbours organize in their neighbourhood. These events bring neighbours together and contribute to vibrant neighbourhoods. Neighbours want easy and affordable access to equipment for their events, such as tables, tents, chairs, A-frame signs, and PA systems, as well as fun and novel equipment for activities. By making these types of equipment available to our neighbourhoods in an affordable and simple to access way, neighbourhood events and activities will be easier to organize and may happen more frequently.

What will the City do?

- Assess options for providing affordable event equipment needed by neighbourhoods to support their events, such as:

- discounts from local event equipment rental companies;
 - subsidizing event equipment rental for neighbourhood groups, and/or;
 - purchasing a supply of equipment available to neighbourhood groups for low or no cost.
- Implement the option that helps respond to community needs while also being financially sustainable and offering an effective use of resources.

Action 12: Identify and improve access to existing indoor space in neighbourhoods for neighbourhood initiatives.

We heard that while neighbours often use City parks to hold neighbourhood events and activities, they would appreciate more access to indoor spaces in their own neighbourhoods as park use is dependent on favorable weather and typically only allows for spring and summer use.

By helping neighbours find indoor spaces to meet within their neighbourhoods, programs and activities can happen all year round.

More information about how to access outdoor spaces in neighbourhoods, such as booking neighbourhood parks or school grounds for an event, could also be provided alongside information about indoor spaces.

What will the City do?

- Develop an asset map for each neighbourhood of the available indoor spaces within public and private facilities, including religious facilities and schools, along with contact information and rental information.
- Work with the Waterloo Region District School Board and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board to explore opportunities to allow more neighbourhood access to school space, particularly indoor spaces, where there is demand and where it is feasible.

Action 13: Strengthen existing financial and in-kind support to neighbourhoods.

We heard that financial and in-kind supports provided through the City are important to our neighbourhood groups. The City of Waterloo currently offers financial support to neighbourhoods through programs such as the Community Cash Grants and the Neighbourhood Matching Fund. Some affiliated neighbourhood associations can also receive foundational funding through affiliation service agreements. Strengthening the existing supports will allow neighbourhoods to better access the resources they need to help make their neighbourhood initiatives happen.

What will the City do?

- Based on the program review outcomes, make improvements to the Neighbourhood Matching Fund program (see Appendix C).
- Provide base level operational funding to all affiliated neighbourhood associations.
- Increase budget for in-kind supports for affiliated neighbourhood association initiatives (e.g. printing, meeting space, etc.).

Action 14: Establish a new micro-grant program that provides small amounts of financial and in-kind support for fledgling neighbourhood projects.

We heard that there are neighbours who want to put forward the time and energy to organize activities or events for their neighbourhood, but cost is a barrier. A small amount of cash or in-kind support from the City of Waterloo for expenses such as flyers, snacks, venue booking, and other supplies could go a long way to helping neighbours do great things in their neighbourhoods.

What will the City do?

- Establish a program to provide a small amount of cash or in-kind services from the City to support fledgling neighbourhood initiatives.
- Develop guidelines/policy to clarify the intent, eligibility, accountability, and other criteria of the grant. Make the application process simple.
- Focus support towards small, non-affiliated groups of neighbours that want to host a new event or start a project in their neighbourhood. This will encourage more residents to get involved in community building in their neighbourhood.

Goal 3: Commit to a corporate City culture that supports neighbourhood-led and delivered initiatives.

Neighbours have a lot of creative ideas for neighbourhood projects. City policies and practices impact the types of resident-led neighbourhood projects implemented, and sometimes create barriers to doing great things in neighbourhoods.

To encourage neighbourhood projects, the organizational culture of the City of Waterloo will need to shift to become even more neighbourhood-focused. This shift must be corporate-wide. This could include revising or developing better methods of communication, improved processes, policy changes, or new approaches to working with residents that are focused on supporting neighbourhood-led initiatives.

The following actions will help achieve this goal:

Action 15: Adopt a “Let’s Explore” philosophy among City of Waterloo staff and across departments.

We have heard that neighbours want to do great things in their neighbourhoods, sometimes involving activities on public land and/or requiring approval and support from the City. We have also heard that staff sometimes says “no” to the community when approached with unique/one-off ideas, without fully understanding the idea or exploring different opportunities to achieve the neighbourhood’s goals.

A City corporate-wide change in philosophy is needed that provides more flexibility to respond to residents. Staff would talk with the community to understand the underlying goals and/or concerns and explore options together. The goal will be to provide a “yes” response when possible. While there will be times that response in the end may need to be “no,” the community member will understand why that answer was reached and will have the opportunity to explore alternatives.

How will the City help?

- Staff will be encouraged and empowered to work with the community to explore options. This will include allocating time in staff work plans for unexpected neighbourhood project requests.
- Staff from different divisions across City departments will collaborate to examine the feasibility of neighbourhood initiatives and figure out how to make it happen.

Action 16: Streamline city processes and revisit select policy directions to make it easier for residents to implement neighbourhood projects.

The community has great ideas for neighbourhood unique and innovative projects and events. We have heard, however, that some City processes and policies can create unintended obstacles, prevent projects from taking place, or are circumvented. City processes, policies, and by-laws are established to protect citizens and support a livable city. However, some existing processes, policies, or by-laws create barriers to resident-led neighbourhood community-building. Revisiting select policy directions, streamlining processes, and removing “red tape” where it exists will make it easier to invest more time and energy into making great things happen in Waterloo neighbourhoods.

Some process and policies to explore first, as they relate to neighbourhood initiatives, include:

- vendor permits and associated fees.
- business licensing and associated fees.
- noise by-law exemption application process.

- process improvements for support of community events in parks.
- process improvements for garbage cans and picnic tables for events in City parks.
- process clarification and exploration of opportunities for signs in neighbourhoods.

What will the City do?

- Promote the City's Coordinator, Neighbourhoods to residents and City Staff as the first point of contact for all neighbourhood inquiries and supports and as a concierge service to help navigate City requirements.
- Simplify forms and number of forms to reduce duplication.
- Simplify and/or clarify processes for common neighbourhood initiatives.
- Educate the community about policy and processes to support better planning by neighbourhood groups.
- Communicate why specific permits and by-laws exist and how they impact neighbourhood activities.
- Standardize application and exemption processes where appropriate; make them simple and clear.
- Improve communication streams to allow neighbourhoods better access to information regarding City projects in their neighbourhoods.

Action 17: Further shift focus from traditional bylaw enforcement towards enhanced bylaw education, prevention, and community collaboration.

We heard that neighbours care a lot about living in peaceful, safe, and beautiful neighbourhoods. When a resident's property is not well cared for (e.g., snow is not shoveled, or there is excess noise), neighbours can call the City's Municipal Enforcement Services Division to respond. However, traditional enforcement methods can contribute to tension among neighbours as they may wonder which neighbour reported the violation. Additionally, there are often circumstances where failure to comply with a City by-law is unintentional. Residents are moving from other cities, provinces, and countries, and may not be aware of the regulations unique to the nature of our city.

The Municipal Enforcement team has already piloted collaborative efforts with local neighbourhoods to identify potential issues and take proactive steps towards prevention. For example, the team worked with the Laurelwood neighbourhood to educate neighbours on the importance of clearing sidewalks in the winter. A similar

approach could be taken to allow neighbourhood associations and neighbours to remind/inform others about by-laws in ways that contribute to a strong community and avoid the potential to cause tension in the neighbourhood.

What will the City do?

- Collaborate with neighbourhood groups to raise awareness around municipal standards and expectations within the neighbourhood.
- Educate residents on how they might resolve issues with neighbours themselves, and raise awareness of the mediation services currently available.
- Continue to participate in neighbourhood/community outreach efforts to share information about municipal by-laws.
- Consider a campaign to reach new residents to explain relevant municipal by-laws and community standards.

Action 18: To better support neighbourhood-led initiatives, explore and articulate the City's risk tolerance position, weighing risk against community benefit.

We heard that neighbourhood groups often have unique and fun ideas for neighbourhood activities and events. Sometimes, when ideas are brought forward to the City, the City will not allow it because of the perceived risks. The City recognizes that neighbourhoods want to participate in activities that may be seen as having a higher degree of risk than currently supported by the City. Understanding the benefits to the community in contrast to the possible risks, and better defining our collective risk tolerance, will provide staff with clearer direction on the level of acceptable risk for neighbourhood initiatives. The City will continue to be committed to protecting public safety, and to managing insurance and legal costs.

What will the City do?

- Explore rules and restrictions placed on neighbourhood activities and volunteers.
- Engage the Municipal Insurance Pool, Legal Services, Finance Division, Senior Management, and Council as part of the process.
- Increase community awareness of the importance of managing risk.
- Balance public safety with allowing neighbourhoods to organize the activities they want. Continue to work with neighbourhood groups to mitigate risks.
- Develop a policy framework that articulates the City's risk tolerance related to common neighbourhood initiatives.

Neighbourhood-related input for the Parks Strategy in Development

Neighbours in Waterloo turn to parks and green spaces as gathering spaces, as they are commonly the only public space in their area. Additionally parks are seen as inclusive spaces where everyone is welcome. These spaces are used for a range of activities from a parent and child playing catch, to family picnics, to larger carnival-type neighbourhood events. When speaking with the community, it was clear that parks and other green spaces are very important to residents.

As the development of the Neighbourhood Strategy comes to completion, the City is beginning development of a Parks Strategy focused on longer-term strategic planning for existing and new neighbourhood parks across the City. Given the upcoming work on the Parks Strategy, it was determined that any findings related to neighbourhood parks coming out of the Neighbourhood Strategy work should be further explored within the Parks Strategy process before recommendations are made.

It will be critical for the Parks Strategy to align with the goals and actions of this Neighbourhood Strategy, given the importance of parks as neighbourhood community-building assets.

Based on public consultation completed for the Neighbourhood Strategy, considerations for the Parks Strategy include:

- Creating more opportunity for the neighbourhood to be involved in shaping the look and feel of their parks, when a new park is developed or an existing park is renovated.
- Adapting parks to respond to changing neighbourhood demographics (including amenities for youth, seniors, and adults).
- Increasing capacity for neighbourhood parks to be used as gathering spaces for community events and activities including identify more opportunities for booking space in parks; adding additional park amenities such as potable water, electrical service, storage, picnic shelters, gazebos; and providing enhance customer service.
- Enhancing parks and trails to create a greater sense of safety.
- Improving park maintenance.
- Assessing park rental fees for community affordability.
- Developing additional off-leash areas.
- Considering current garbage and recycle rental costs.
- Supporting placemaking opportunities in parks (e.g. colourful benches, art).
- Assessing options for enhanced neighbourhood engagement in parks such as an adopt-a-park program, “friend of” program and participatory budgeting related to parks.

What Comes Next?

Over the next 5 years, City staff will work with community members to implement the 18 action items contained in this strategy. An implementation plan, including financial requirements, has been developed. This will help inform corporate budget planning and business planning. We are committed to continuing to consult the community to make sure the changes we make are helping our neighbourhoods. We will also report back to Council and community on our progress.

It will take time to make these changes and to launch new programs, but as we make progress on enhancing the range of supports available to neighbourhoods and neighbourhoods begin to use them, the City will be better supporting our local neighbourhoods to strive towards making ***Waterloo “a city of caring, vibrant, engaged neighbourhoods where everyone belongs.”***

Definitions

Asset-based community development

Community development that occurs by “building on the resources that are found in every community” (Diers, 2004, p. 14).

City (capitalized): refers to Corporation of the City of Waterloo.

city (lower case): refers to geography and/or all residents of the City of Waterloo.

Foundational Operating Funding

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

Homes Association

Neighbourhood group established by the land developer to maintain private, shared assets in the neighbourhood such as pools and tennis courts.

Inclusive Neighbourhood

A neighbourhood that values and appreciates human differences, where all residents feel respected, and where all residents have the opportunity to engage with and contribute to the life of their community.

Neighbourhood

“A district where people live” (Collins English Dictionary). Please note: the draft Neighbourhood Strategy acknowledges that neighbourhood boundaries can be flexible and can be defined differently depending on each individual.

Neighbourliness

Neighbourliness, as defined by the project’s Resident Panel, is when neighbours are: kind, considerate, helpful, friendly, caring, respectful, and accepting.

Neighbourhood Association

Neighbourhood group affiliated with the City under the affiliation policy. These groups tend to be formal in nature, with a board that operates under a governance framework.

Neighbourhood-Led Placemaking

Placemaking inspires residents to collectively reinvent public spaces as the heart of their community through events, activities, and community projects. Neighbourhood-led placemaking is when the neighbours collectively lead or help decide how their public spaces will look and be enjoyed.

**Great neighbourhoods
start with *you.***



waterloo.ca/NeighbourhoodStrategy