



CASE STUDY | BUILDING CITIZEN ADVOCACY SKILLS FOR STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS

CONNOR JUDGE & HEATHER KEAM

Across Canada, there has been a decrease in voter-turnout at every level of government. This means that government policy and decision-making represent only a small percentage of citizens. To tackle this issue, four grassroots-led neighbourhood initiatives in Windsor, Ontario are empowering residents to advocate for the change they want to see by developing their advocacy skills.

INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is an important community process that allows people to have their voices heard on issues that are important to them. Advocacy can help decision-makers understand what is important to their members, the public or constituents, and make decisions that incorporate what their citizens and constituents believe is important ([Halidmand & Norfolk Advocacy Toolkit](#)).

Advocacy can be a simple or complicated process. It can be as simple as a call to your city councilor, telling them what you think about an issue and how you want it changed. Or, it can be more formal, developing a plan of action with a group to influence or change a decision that is being made by an organization or government body. The process of researching and understanding the issues, finding supporters, building support and making your case to decision makers can seem long and complicated.

There are many types of issues for which individuals and groups can advocate their position to decision makers. For example, the type of services being offered, changes in their neighbourhoods, the location of a planned waste treatment plant, where a park should be built, or whether an organization should expand service hours.

This Case Study outlines four neighbourhood initiatives, representing four core Windsor neighbourhoods, that are collaborating to help residents learn how to be effective advocates.

ADVOCACY IN WINDSOR

The City of Windsor operates a mayor-council style of governance, where the city is divided into 10 wards, with each of them having an elected councilor. Each ward's elected representative and the mayor make up the 11-person City Council. Windsor is the fourth most diverse city in Canada and is referred to as a landing pad, meaning it is a popular place for new Canadians to begin their new life. Relative to other neighbourhoods across the city, three of the four neighbourhood initiatives are known to attract a large immigrant population. All four of the neighbourhood initiatives have lower income, low education, and low voter turnout rates; a result of a high percentage of New Canadians, who speak little English and are unfamiliar with the democratic political system that municipalities operate within.

The City of Windsor, one of Ontario's best kept secrets, and the proud International Gateway between Canada and the United States of America, is an incredible community that offers world-class entertainment, fascinating historical and cultural landmarks, and unparalleled waterfront parks and gardens.

Windsor is the seventh-largest population centre in Ontario by population (287,069). It is home to 215 parks encompassing 2,800 acres of green space.

Across the four priority neighbourhoods exists a stigma where residents from other parts of the city believe the core neighbourhoods are not safe. In addition, due to low voter turnout, political candidates often overlook these neighbourhoods and focus on wealthier areas with higher voter turnout. This, in turn, creates very little development in the already neglected neighbourhoods.

It is for the reasons above the four initiatives have come together to work on building the capacity of residents and to mobilize communities to make a collaborative change. The collaborators are [Glengarry to Marentette Neighbourhood Renewal \(IGNR\)](#); [Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative](#); [Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal](#); and, [Our West End](#).

Each of the four priority neighbourhoods faces their own unique challenges and barriers, though there are many issues that are shared across all of them. The shared issues across the neighbourhood catchments have created a united voice. This voice has inspired more grassroots actions and led to positive changes across the city, taking on a life as a social change movement. Here is a summary of each of the four sites.

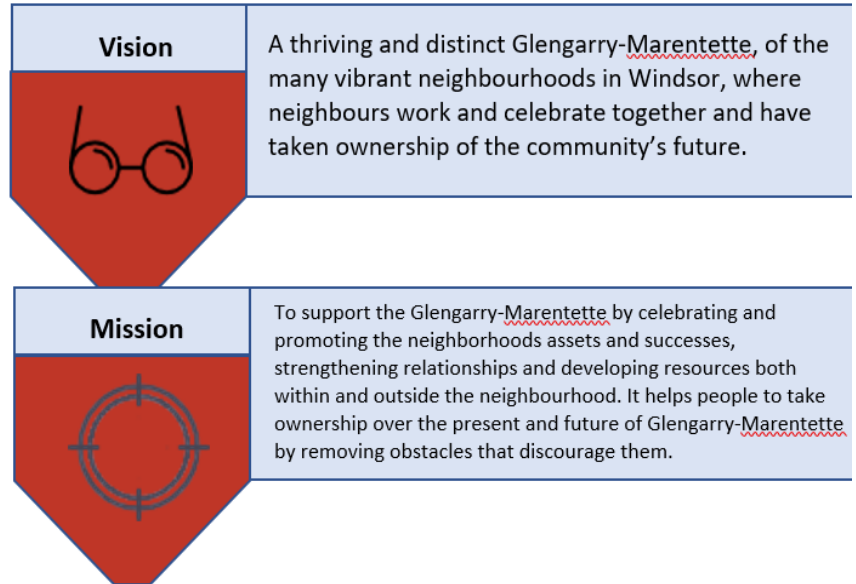
THE GLENGARRY-MARENTETTE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The IGNR is the result of a local steering committee that consists of resident champions, local businesses, city employees, not-for-profits, and others. This collective is the heart of the Glengarry-Marentette neighbourhood.



ENGAGEMENT

The Glengarry Initiative chose an asset-based engagement process to interact with its residents. This approach was chosen due to the existing presence of community champions. Prior to the initiative, these individuals were contacting the council, but they were continuously unsatisfied with the results. This engagement process utilized these community champions by fostering meaningful relationships between residents, ultimately developing the capacity for citizens to make their own change.



A UNIQUE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHALLENGE: COMMUNITY CENTRES

A unique challenge that affected Glengarry-Marentette was the proposed closure of a community centre in the neighbourhood. The centre had been on the chopping block before and has already suffered a pool closure. Despite this, it is a well-utilized institution in the neighbourhood and many families would suffer if it closed. The neighbourhood's concerns were underrepresented in the city's improvement plans and the closure of this centre may have resulted in the further disengagement of citizens.

“ I believe that all cities should have neighbourhood strategies and community coordinators. ”

Patrick Firth – Glengarry-Marentette Neighbourhood Coordinator

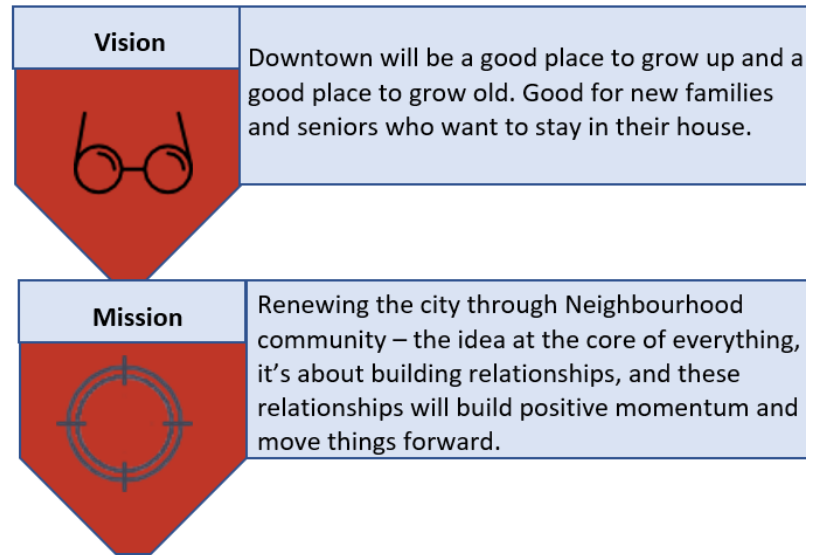
THE DOWNTOWN WINDSOR COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

The Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative (DWCC) began with one resident who wanted to get to know their neighbours and to create positive change in the community.

All the work done by DWCC involves breaking down different types of barriers for residents, including political, physical, social, and language barriers. Increasing the capacity of residents was the perfect way to address the barriers and empower them to unite and break barriers together.

ENGAGEMENT

In January 2017, a series of neighbourhood conversations began in the Windsor City Planning Department. The goal of these conversations was to help residents create a vision for their own community. The City of Windsor was careful to work alongside residents to develop a vision that is realistic, rather than utopic. The feedback and results from these conversations were included in the City of Windsor Community Improvement Plan.



A UNIQUE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHALLENGE: POLITICIZATION OF BIG TICKET ISSUES

As DWCC increases in size and receives more media coverage, it has also gotten the attention of politicians. This has created a trend of politicians campaigning on local issues to gain votes. The politicization of these issues has resulted in a divided city council, where most votes are split down the middle and requests will often not move forward.

“Council really recognizes when a group comes together, they can move mountains together.”

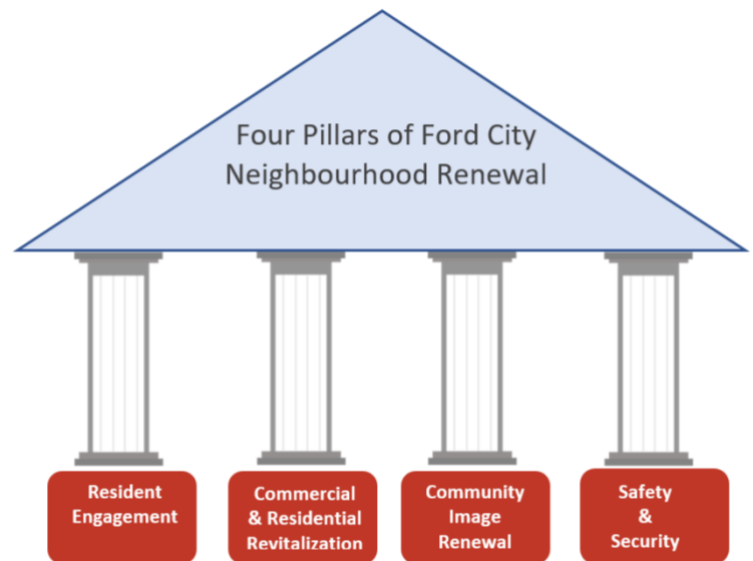
Leo Gil – OWE Outreach Coordinator

FORD CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL

Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal (FCNR) was created and funded under Drouillard Place and United Way of Windsor Essex County. Once funding became available for the Windsor region, FCNR was funded to focus on Resident Engagement, Commercial and Residential Revitalization, Community Image Renewal, and Safety and Security.



The community used to be vibrant and self-sufficient but became stagnant as people left to find work. The response from the neighbourhood residents was to start meeting at churches and working with Drouillard Place to come together and express their opinions and concerns. Eight years later, the vibrancy that once was has begun to return as the priority neighbourhood now has a resident group, a business improvement plan, and a revitalization plan with Windsor Police Services, and members in the community.



ENGAGEMENT

FCNR used several traditional community engagement methods, such as going door to door to complete surveys, sending out e-newsletters and inviting residents to events hosted throughout the city. Fun incentives such as raffles and draws, with prizes donated by local businesses, have also been used throughout the in-person and online engagement process.

A UNIQUE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHALLENGE: STIGMA

As one of the oldest neighbourhood strategies, FCNR has overcome many different challenges. One of the more significant challenges that still exists almost a decade later, is the stigma. The stigma that is still associated with this neighbourhood has historically prevented people from across the city to visit, which creates a domino-like effect for the economy and community.

“Each neighbourhood is different. Despite being priority neighbourhoods, we have strengths, talents, and resources that we utilize, embrace, and go with.”

Alana Usakov – FCNR Resident Engagement Coordinator

OUR WEST END



Our West End (OWE) began with a resident who had a negative experience with crime in their neighbourhood while attending the University of Windsor. To ensure history did not repeat itself, this resident knocked on over 3,000 doors to have conversations about the neighbourhood and what changes they would like to make.

The results of these conversations was an email service that alerted neighbourhood residents of crimes that occurred in the area. While the service was helpful, some long-term residents of the community felt that this new email service only focused on the negative aspects of the neighbourhood and did not acknowledge the vibrancy and sense of community that also existed. As the emphasis of the email service became more positive, more people reached out to join. Since its inception, OWE now has a resident roundtable, works under the parent organization *LifeAfterFifty*, and is one of four priority neighbourhood strategies.

ENGAGEMENT

The engagement process for OWE began unofficially with the development of the email service. This provided a platform to start conversations between residents' and was what really moved the needle on crime. After the neighbourhood strategy was more developed, there was another wave of engagement. OWE conducted 400 telephone surveys to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on various topics and issues in the community.

A UNIQUE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHALLENGE: AN INTERNATIONAL CROSSING

A challenge that is unique to Our West End is the development of a bridge from The United States to Canada. The proposed bridge would be built in a neighbourhood that is in the heart of the west end of Windsor. For this bridge to be built, many homes would have to be torn down. The lead developer of the bridge individually reached out to residents to buy-out properties. Residents who sold their properties signed a non-disclosure agreement and had exactly one year to leave.

“These are David and Goliath battles.”

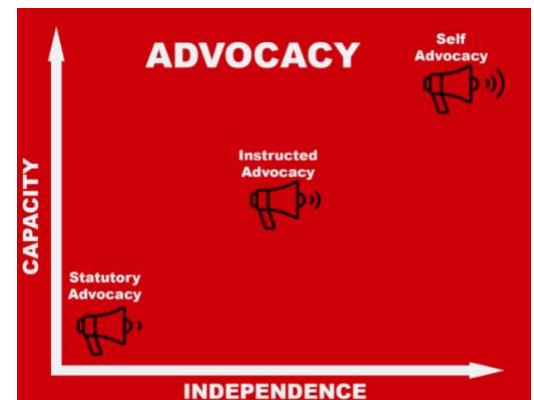
Tamara Murray – OWE Outreach coordinator

The problem with the development of the bridge was that residents were not consulted and had no say on issues related to the bridge.

The lack of transparency left residents in the dark, not knowing what could happen next. Many of these residents had reached out to multiple levels of government but were mired with red tape and dead ends. While the development of an international crossing impacts the entire city, OWE would be disproportionately affected.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY TO ADVOCATE

The four neighbourhood initiatives strive to eventually have all operations planned and executed by the residents themselves, without the help of the initiatives' employees. Advocacy was chosen across the four initiatives as the primary focus area for skills development because it empowers citizens to take action on issues themselves. There are several different types of advocacy and many different sectors that take this approach to influence social change.



TYPES OF ADVOCACY

Self-Advocacy: Citizens create and put forward their point of view without the help of others.

Instructed Advocacy: Citizens work with a third party to organize their point of view clearly.

Statutory Advocacy: Citizens advocate through a legal representative due to their mental or physical capacity.

In the early phases of the work, much of the advocacy activities the four neighbourhoods have done can be considered Instructed Advocacy, such as combing through municipal budgets or participating with citizens at council hearings. This form of advocacy is effective and there have been successes across Windsor that will be highlighted in the Outcomes section of this Case Study. However, Self-Advocacy is the main goal of the *four neighbourhood initiatives*. This type of advocacy encourages individuals to express their own point of view, exclusively by themselves and without the help of any third-party. Self-Advocacy does not have to be individualistic; groups of citizens can self-advocate, but a third party is not involved in this kind of advocacy.

Until the Windsor Municipal Election takes place in October 2018, each priority neighbourhood will be hosting workshops that focus on various elements of politics. To encourage residents to participate, a raffle will be held, and residents will receive raffle tickets for each workshop attended. Below is an overview of the workshops that residents will be able to participate in:

Workshop 101 – Why Your Vote Matters

The focus of this workshop is to get people to talk about politics and help them address barriers that prevent them from voting. In addition, this workshop covers reasons residents

“ If we are doing something on our own, we are doing it wrong.

Sarah Cipkar - DWCC Neighbourhood

should vote and how their vote matters in the upcoming election.

Workshop 202 – Getting Involved

In this workshop, residents will be given the resources and information required to cast their ballot. Some of the topics in this workshop will teach residents where their polling station is, and what ward they live in.

Workshop 303 – Local Issues that Matter to You

The purpose of this workshop is to get residents to take a step back and think about issues that are happening in their ward. While the neighbourhood collaborative does not endorse any candidates, the workshops will link residents with campaigning candidates with platforms on issues that matter to them.

Candidate Debates

The fourth workshop is not like the others. This session will include a mock candidate debate for the wards of each priority neighbourhood. Residents will be able to formally engage with local candidates and ask their own questions, push candidates to comment on how their platforms will address their neighbourhood priorities, and engage informally with them at a small meet-and-greet ahead of the debate.

OUTCOMES

Together, the four neighbourhood initiatives have advocated for change during the 2018 city budget and here are the results:

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- \$250,000 Lighting and Security Alley way fund
- Funding for three municipal staff for the Vacant Building Enforcement Strategy
- Increased penalties and fines for individuals who own vacant buildings

COORDINATED STRATEGY FOR SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES

- Funding for a one year term outreach worker position
- Established a city wide Sharp & Syringe Disposal Bin program

POVERTY REDUCTION

- \$143,000 increase to Pathway to Potential funding for various affordability programs (e.g. affordable city bus passes)

ACCESS TO PARKS/GREENSPACE

- Established extra funding for municipal staff to maintain vacant land and ditch clearing maintenance

PUBLIC WORKS

- Bulk Item Pick up reduced \$10.00 from \$20.00 per item

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

- Bikeway Development Initiative received funding from the city

CONCLUSION

The world is becoming increasingly complex, with new innovations in technology and changes in social policy occurring every day. This has resulted in increasingly complex problems that have multiple possible solutions and multiple root causes. To ensure that the everyday citizen is not excluded from the conversation with powerful corporations and governments, they must become active in local democratic processes.

This is why the advocacy work being done in Windsor is so important. The growing achievements of the neighbourhood collaborative is a great example of the collective power of citizens. Citizens are capable of changing municipal budgets and can have a voice in deliberations for international crossings. Citizens need to get more politically involved in their community by voting on election day and community agencies need to support residents and help them to vote.

The purpose of this Case Study is to highlight the advocacy work being done in Windsor and to help other neighbourhood groups and organizations focus on fostering citizen advocacy. It is important for residents to build personal capacities to be able to advocate on their own behalf, and on the behalf of their community. Canada is a diverse country with different levels of education and ethnic backgrounds, and not every citizen has equal skills or access to engage in political life. However, by investing in advocacy capacity building for all residents, the result will be policies and laws that reflect a greater majority Canadians, rather than just the individuals with the means to engage.

The Tamarack Institute is very grateful to feature the four neighbourhood initiatives; [Glengarry to Marentette Neighbourhood Renewal \(IGNR\)](#); [Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative](#); [Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal](#); and [Our West End](#) and would like to thank all the coordinators for taking the time to co-author this case study.

Priority Neighbourhood Contact Information

Patrick Firth
IGNR
226.674.4303
firthp@g-mnri.org

Sarah Cipkar
DWCC
519-790-9518
sarah@dwcc.ca

Kayla Lessard
FCNR
519-915-9583
klessard@fcnr.org

Leo Gil
Our West End
519-254-1108
lgil@lifeafterfifty.ca

Alana Usakov
FCNR
519-915-9583
ausakov@fcnr.org

