



CASE STUDY | Love My Hood: Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy

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Every city builds neighbourhoods with sidewalks and roads, and homes, parks and arenas. Municipalities across Canada are realizing that it's not just about pavement and buildings, it's about the people who live, work and play in each neighbourhood. The City of Kitchener is one great example of how a municipality cultivated the power of residents to develop a neighbourhood strategy, called Love My Hood.

Why did Kitchener focus on neighbourhoods?

Kitchener has a long history of working with the community to help plan, build and support healthy neighbourhoods. These past efforts led to the development of 13 community centres and 30 [Neighbourhood Associations](#). These strong partnerships with neighbourhood associations and thousands of volunteers promote civic engagement and foster a strong sense of neighbourhood belonging.

Building on these strengths, the City recognized that there needed to be a more comprehensive approach to neighbourhood development, based on many years of public engagement related to the city's strategic plans.

In 2015, Council directed staff to create its first-ever Neighbourhood Strategy. This resulted in the development of a volunteer-led project team to guide the formation of a neighbourhood strategy. This team included residents, neighbourhood associations, community partners and City staff from a variety of disciplines.

Kitchener is a Canadian city in southeastern Ontario. Kitchener is the largest municipality in Waterloo Region. Located in the geographic heart of the region, it is home to 225,000 people.

The city features a diverse mix of industry, technology and post-secondary institutions, including the University of Waterloo's School of Pharmacy and the main campus of Conestoga College.

Engagement Process

The city took a 3-phased comprehensive engagement approach that took over two years to complete.

Phase 1: The community was involved in defining the purpose and objectives

Phase 2: The community was involved in identifying the issues and opportunities

Phase 3: The community was involved in the action planning and development of the strategy

The City's engagement process reached over 5,000 residents. That's three people for every street in Kitchener. They heard from many different community groups, such as neighbourhood associations, schools, faith communities, cultural clubs, sports teams, youth and seniors' groups, to name a few.

While using some tried and true consultation tactics like focus groups and online surveys, the project team also embraced several out-of-the-box engagement methods, including:

- **Going to where people are.** Setting up a lemonade stand at neighbourhood events and gathering places across the city, staff and volunteers handed out free lemonade while residents completed a 3 minute survey.
- **Throwing a party.** Re-imagining traditional public consultation meetings as a party, this family-friendly event featured free food, live music, and activities, followed by inspiring speakers and small focus group consultations. Programmed child care was offered during the meeting, as well as free transit passes to those who needed assistance attending.
- **Asking tough questions.** Hosted first with staff and then with residents, a "red tape" reduction workshop identified a list of the city's processes and procedures that residents find challenging when it comes to improving their neighbourhood.
- **Online discussions.** Residents were given an open-ended forum to post their own ideas for making great neighbourhoods. City staff responded with further questions and dialogue.
- **Testing placemaking.** Residents were encouraged to try placemaking themselves! Nine groups of residents received grants to do placemaking. Staff learned the types of placemaking projects residents want to lead, as well as some of the internal barriers that make placemaking difficult.

The two charts are from the Staff report to Council on February 2, 2017 that outline the engagement activities that were used to develop the strategy.

HOW DID WE INFORM RESIDENTS ABOUT THE CONSULTATIONS?	Total Quantity
E-Newsletters Sent (1242 individual email addresses)	9,280
Letters Mailed to Community Groups	1,870
Phone Calls to Cultural Groups / Service Clubs / Faith Organizations	99
Social Media Interactions – Dec. 2015 to Dec. 2016 (likes, comments/replies, shares/retweets)	16,036
#lovemyhood Stories on Social Media	27
Colouring Books Distributed to Grade 3-5 Students	7,042
Colouring Books Distributed to Other Residents	9,958
Hot Chocolate Blitz at Multiple Locations Across the City	750
Beer & Colouring Night	100
Media Stories	58

HOW DID WE CONSULT WITH RESIDENTS TO GET THEIR INPUT?	# of People	# of Hours
Lemonade Stand Surveys	1308	65
Neighbourhood Party (strategy launch event)	400	1,000
Street Team Interviews	1,093	182
Focus Group Discussions	408	408
Neighbourhood Association & Community Partners Meetings	111	222
Statistically Representative Telephone Surveys	600	150
Online Engagement (survey, ideas forum, social media)	961	39
Red Tape Reduction Exercises	134	268
Draft Recommendation Prioritization Survey	308	16
TOTAL	5,323	2,350

The results of the engagement process indicated that residents were willing and able to lead neighbourhood development with support from the City. Further, the results helped to identify a vision and three areas of focus.

Vision: Residents take the lead in making their neighbourhood great. The City supports them along the way

**Focus area #1
Great Places**

- Create a variety of things to do at neighbourhood outdoor places, to attract lots of different people to spend time together
 - *Examples: community gardens, pop-up markets, Placemaking challenge grant, parks community engagement review*

**Focus Area #2
Connected
People**

- Strengthen relationships between neighbours by creating more ways to connect with one another
 - *Examples: More neighbourhood events, block connectors and a new neighbourhood website*

**Focus Area #3
Working Together**

- Help residents lead positive change in their neighbourhood, through cooperation with neighbours, organizations and the City
 - *Example: Neighbourhood action plans, neighbourhood matching grant increase and reducing municipal barriers*

Doing a comprehensive engagement process allowed the City to gather rich data/resident input that shaped the activities and outcomes of the strategy. Here are some lessons learned from the engagement that the City learned during their process:

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Residents have different preferences, communication styles and lifestyles, requiring a variety of engagement techniques to reach different audiences.
- Meaningful, two way conversations in comfortable settings can provide more effective input.
- Resident participation is easier when you go to where people are, use plain language, offer language interpretation, and provide child care or transit assistance.
- When residents are given support and guidance to bring their own knowledge and expertise to neighbourhood planning, strong collective decisions can be made, rooted in resilient relationships.



Implementing the plan

Once all the information was gathered and analyzed, the project team identified 18 action items and consulted back with the community to make sure that they were on board. Draft action items were shared with the public in November 2016 and the final strategy was approved in February 2017.

The next steps in implementing the plan was to communicate with both the community and different City departments, to discuss how to move the strategy forward. The strategy has some amazing ideas

that resulted in changes to policy, procedures and how departments work together. Through a series of change management workshops designed to shift the corporate culture, the City is coming up with new ways to support resident-led initiatives.

The City is working on developing an evaluation plan that will help inform, improve and sustain the programs. Currently, they have debrief meetings that document what worked, lessons learned and how to bring forward the lessons to future programs. The next step for the City is to look at equity and social inclusion.

Outcomes to date

The Neighbourhood Development Office – the driving force behind the Love My Hood strategy - has been working hard since February 2017, when City Council unanimously endorsed the strategy. Most importantly, residents have embraced the new tools, resources and grants becoming available to them. Below you will find a list of achievements, during year one (Feb-Dec 2017).

Love My Hood action item	Activity	Community impact
Resident-led traffic calming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a new guide for intersection murals, painted crosswalks, pop-up measures and more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilson Avenue Public School painted two crosswalks outside their school
Community gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated program with new guide for starting community gardens and enhanced grant support Goal of building one to three community gardens every year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stanley Park Community Garden is now open! Approved gardens for 2018: Henry Sturm Greenway, King East/Auditorium and Cherry Park
Neighbourhood Placemaking Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a user-friendly guide to describe placemaking and how to get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More people becoming engaged in neighbourhood placemaking
Neighbourhood Placemaking Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a new grant to support creative placemaking ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received 43 applications for just 5 available grants!
Neighbourhood Action Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created a guide for developing a long-term vision for change Piloting the process with several neighbourhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victoria Park Neighbourhood Association is the first group to complete a Neighbourhood Action Plan
Neighbourhood Matching Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tripled the funding and simplified the grant process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly distributed the full funding amount of \$60,000 in 2017 to 12 resident-led projects in 8 out of 10 city wards
Reduce red tape - Noise exemptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified the process to get a noise exemption for small events and parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 44 exemptions provided in 2017, compared to 10 in 2016
Reduce red tape – Approvals for road painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced requirements for demonstrating neighbourhood support for road painting projects, to make it easier for volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier process for Wilson Avenue painted crosswalks

Lessons Learned

Love My Hood is a great example of a City embracing a new way to support neighbourhood development. Their vision is resident-led, City-supported. This has been a two-and-a-half-year journey and there have been many successes and some lessons learned:

- Workplans should be adaptable and treated as a livable document with realistic timelines.
- Develop an evaluation strategy along with the plan so that you have indicators to measure.
- Developing a new strategy with many stakeholders requires some change management processes.
- To do an extensive engagement process takes time and a lot of resources, both financial and human resources.
- Develop an engagement plan that includes diversity and equity into the process (have more tailored and specific targets).
- Internally, City staff need to embrace collaboration across departmental teams, as resident-led initiatives are rarely bound to a single department's expertise.
- A firm commitment to work together, be flexible and collaborate to find solutions is essential – for both residents and City staff – to achieve a resident-led, City supported approach to neighbourhood development.

History of Project

July 2015: Project team was established to guide the development of the neighbourhood strategy

December 2015 – October 2016: Community Engagement Process

November 2016: Draft Recombination's went to council

February 2017: Council unanimously approved the Neighbourhood strategy plan

December 2017: Phase one Implemented



Sources

- *City of Kitchener Community Engagement review*
- *Kitchener Neighbourhood Strategy-How did we make it work*
- *Staff Report to Council February 2, 2017*
- *Webinar- Neighbourhood Strategy Leaders: City of Kitchener #lovemyhood*