



CASE STUDY | LONDON'S STRENGTHENING NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY: THREE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO SUSTAINABILITY

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“The heart and essence of every city and community are its neighbourhoods.” This belief is central to London, Ontario’s neighbourhood based work driven by a desire to see all neighbourhoods thrive. Over the past decade, London’s Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy has been sustainable through their ongoing commitment to resident engagement, cross-departmental collaboration and their ability to adapt.

INTRODUCTION

A decade into their neighbourhood strategy, the City of London, Ontario has demonstrated what is possible when neighbourhoods are empowered, connected and involved in making decisions about the places where they live, work, and play. Originating from engagement with residents in 2009, the first iteration of the London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy (LSNS) was implemented in 2010. As they wrap up the work in their second iteration of the LSNS, it is important to pause and reflect on what has made their strategy successful and sustainable.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE LSNS

The LSNS is firmly rooted in five core principles. The first two make the case for neighbourhoods and the importance of having a neighbourhood strategy. The strategy and its actions are guided by the vision:

Our London is a city of Neighbourhoods. Our London neighbourhoods will be empowered, sustainable, safe and active communities. We will care for and celebrate each other while encouraging diversity and inclusiveness. Our neighbourhoods will be environmentally and socially responsible and will have available green space, vibrant local economies and accessible amenities of daily life.

Core Principle #1

The heart and essence of every city and community are its neighbourhoods. Strong neighbourhoods are about people and places and how they work together to make neighbourhoods great places to live, work and play.

Core Principle #2

A strategy for stronger neighbourhoods will impact every neighbourhood and contribute to the quality of life for everyone; London is stronger when ALL its neighbourhoods are stronger.

Additionally, the LSNS supports Council's Strategic focus area of "Strengthening our Community" and their strategic direction that "Londoners are engaged and have a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods and community." The success and sustainability of the LSNS overtime consist of three essential elements: resident engagement, cross-departmental collaboration, and staying relevant as neighbourhood priorities shift and change.

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

The City of London has remained committed to engaging citizens throughout the phases and iterations of the LSNS because they recognize residents as having unique expertise about their neighbourhoods. The City also values the opportunity to work alongside residents as a means to support leadership development and capacity at the neighbourhood level as well as providing opportunities for social capital to grow. Additionally, the City understands that for any strategy, program or initiative to be successful and sustainable it requires ongoing neighbourhood level insights, direction and involvement.

Without a doubt, the LSNS is resident-driven.

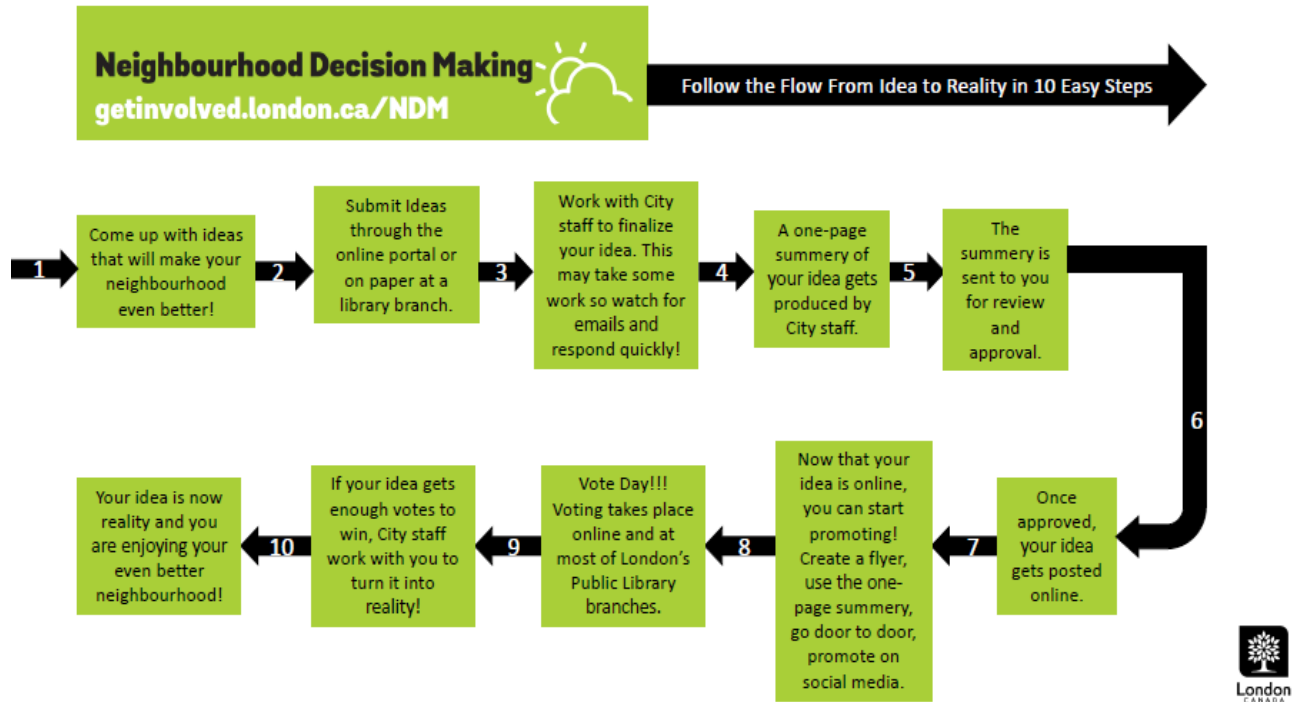
Before the first LSNS was undertaken, the City of London undertook a substantial community engagement process to learn from residents about their experience in neighbourhoods. For 18 months, they worked alongside a resident task force of more than 100 people with representatives from every neighbourhood to develop the strategy. When it came time to re-evaluate the LSNS and update the strategy, again, residents were at the helm alongside city staff. 4500 residents were engaged over 12-months through a variety of means including pop-ups at events, kitchen conversations, a photo contest, a kids' survey and more. As with the original LSNS, a resident task force guided the overall strategy.

Core Principle #3

Residents will lead the change! They know what's best for their neighbourhoods and will support what they create.

Engagement in developing the strategy is only the beginning of how residents are engaged. Through the LSNS, the City provides multiple ways for residents to engage. Neighbourhood Decision Making is one such way. This process is used to determine which resident-generated, neighbourhood-based ideas get implemented.

One of the projects that have stemmed from Neighbourhood Decision Making is the [Way Finder Project](#).



Led by artists from the London Clay Art Centre, who proposed building mosaics at two intersections in the neighbourhood and through the neighbourhood decision-making process received enough votes to be awarded a \$15,000 grant. They collaborated with business owners at those intersections to use their buildings as the canvas and involved many community organizations and clay art centre participants in creating tiles for what would become two large-scale mosaics.

“Art has a way of making the neighbourhood a better place. And so, as the neighbourhood gets more beautiful, the mood in the neighbourhood rises, everyone takes more care in the neighbourhood, and it’s just a better place to be.”

Way Finder Project Organizer

Through the process of creating the mosaics, the ties between neighbours were strengthened and the results were a source of community pride. So much so that a year later when a car crashed through the building wall, ruining the mosaic, the community rallied together to rebuild the mosaic.

CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION



Great work does not happen by accident, nor is it possible by operating within a silo. From the get-go, the LSNS has been a collaborative effort internally. Recognizing that strengthening neighbourhoods was going to take the knowledge and buy-in from all City departments, the neighbourhoods team engaged fellow city staff in the development and implementation of the strategy. With the first iteration of the LSNS, every other department was part of the backbone of the strategy. Beginning this way meant learning from the community engagement process and work with the resident task force was shared among all staff. This set the stage for developing an internal culture that values both community engagement and the focus on building strong neighbourhoods.

The success and sustainability of the LSNS can in part be attributed to how the strategy aligns with the Council's focus areas and strategic directions. Where it gains extra traction is in the cross-integration between the LSNS and other city strategies. Neighbourhoods and residents now play a significant role in all city-building initiatives, with LSNS playing important roles in numerous cross-departmental strategies:

- The London Plan (Official City Play)
- Age-Friendly London
- Child & Youth Network
- The Housing Stability Action Plan
- Transportation Master Plan
- Cultural Prosperity Plan
- Community Energy Action Plan
- The Community Diversity and Integration Strategy

Core Principle #4

The new strategy will build upon LSNS (2010-2015) and the many other city building initiatives that have taken place in the last 5 years.

A city is comprised of neighbourhoods so the ongoing importance of LSNS will be prevalent in all City of London plans covering a broad spectrum of topics.

STAYING RELEVANT

The LSNS is dynamic, changing and adapting over time to stay relevant to emerging neighbourhood realities and shifting priorities. The commitment to ongoing resident engagement helps the LSNS keep the pulse on what's happening in neighbourhoods and what resources or initiatives may prove helpful.

Core Principle #5

Collaborative effort will include many community stakeholders, organizations, businesses, and staff from several City of London Service Areas.

Many of the resources, programs and tools that make up the NeighbourGood London program are as a result of LSNS 1.0 and LSNS 2.0. The [NeighbourGoodLondon website](#) boasts a plethora of resources to assist anyone wanting to get more involved in their neighbourhoods. If residents have any questions about the neighbourhood in which they live, this site offers descriptions, photos and a map of the area, as well as helpful links to the Ward Councillor, Community Association and recreational opportunities. If residents would like to get more involved in their neighbourhood, this website has resources to help with anything from organizing a neighbourhood safety audit to outdoor movie nights, from adopting a street or a park to creating an outdoor skating rink.

Feedback from residents and recommendations from the resident task force has also led the way in developing a suite of tools and programs to aid in reducing barriers to holding events. The LSNS values supporting residents in connecting and engaging with one another, and has worked to create a fund to help offset the costs, streamlined the process for booking neighbourhood parks and created an event equipment lending program.



By working alongside residents and staying attuned to what makes neighbourhoods thrive amidst shifting realities, the LSNS continues to adapt. This process of continual movement is critical to ensuring that the LSNS remains relevant.

CONCLUSION

The LSNS is a remarkable example of what it means to build a sustainable neighbourhood strategy. By taking time to build the culture of cross-collaboration internally, staying adamant that the process be resident-led and flexible enough to remain relevant, the LSNS offers a promising example of how to embed the focus on neighbourhoods into the way a municipality does business.

“The City of London believes that we need to support every neighbourhood to become stronger, a “rise all boats” philosophy, so that our city is a strong vibrant connected city for people to live, work and play in.”

Karen Oldham

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