



Figure 1. Love My Hood – Community Gardens

Case-in-Point 2019

A New Approach in Public Engagement

LOVE MY HOOD: KITCHENER'S GUIDE TO GREAT NEIGHBOURHOODS

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ABSTRACT

The importance of public engagement is widely recognized in planning theory and practice. In addition to traditional ways of public engagement, new ways have also been emerging. This Case-in-Point explores *Love My Hood: Kitchener's Guide to Great Neighborhoods* as a new way of engaging the public. Love My Hood, a new resident-led, city-supported approach in public engagement and neighbourhood planning, was launched by the City of Kitchener in 2017. Love My Hood was developed to make Great Places, support Connected People, and encourage Working Together in the city of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Public engagement is integral to city planning. While there are many traditional ways of engaging the public in city planning, new approaches have also been emerging such as Love My Hood: Kitchener’s Guide to Great Neighbourhoods.

In 2017, the City of Kitchener adopted Love My Hood: Kitchener’s Guide to Great Neighbourhoods (Love My Hood, n.d.a). Love My Hood is a resident-led, city-supported approach to neighbourhood planning that helps people to “connect and work together to do great things in their neighbourhood” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 4). In other words, residents “take the lead in shaping their neighbourhood, with help from the city” (Love My Hood, n.d.a, “The Love My Hood Strategy”).

Also, the City of Kitchener received the Award for Planning Excellence in New and Emerging Planning Initiatives from the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) in 2018 because of its “unprecedented approach to traditional municipal planning” (CIP, n.d., “New and Emerging Planning Initiatives”).

FACTS OF THE CASE

HOW LOVE MY HOOD WAS DEVELOPED

Love My Hood is built on “Kitchener’s tradition of working together to make things happen” (Love My Hood, n.d.b, “Working Together”). It was developed by a diverse group of volunteers and City staff (Love My Hood, n.d.a).

Love My Hood was developed through an extensive public engagement. 5,651 community members were involved and provided input; which means three people for every street in the city of Kitchener (City of Kitchener, 2017a).



Figure 3. Public engagement in developing Love My Hood

Many different ways of engagement were used such as neighbourhood parties, meetings, phone surveys, and focus groups (City of Kitchener, 2017a).



Figure 4. Different ways of public engagement in developing Love My Hood



Figure 2. #LoveMyHood

THE LOVE MY HOOD VISION & ACTIONS

“Residents take the lead and the City supports them along the way” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 4) is the vision of Love My Hood that is built on three themes:

- **Great Places** – “Create a variety of things to do at neighbourhood outdoor places, to attract lots of different people to spend time together” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 14).
- **Connected People** – “Strengthen relationships between neighbours by creating more ways for them to connect with one another” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 14).
- **Working Together** – “Help residents lead positive change in their neighbourhood, through cooperation with neighbours, organizations and the City” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 14).



Figure 5. Three Themes of the Love My Hood Vision

Also, 18 actions are defined to make Great Places (5 actions), support Connected People (7 actions), and encourage Working Together (6 actions) (City of Kitchener, 2017a).

ACTIONS TO MAKE GREAT PLACES

- **Neighbourhood Places Program** to improve public places such as neighbourhood community gardens, resident-led traffic calming, neighbourhood markets, neighbourhood greening, public seating, resident-led public art, little libraries in public spaces, neighbourhood signage, and cul-de-sac enhancements
- **Neighbourhood Placemaking Guide** to improve public places (not included in the

Neighbourhood Places Program

- **Neighbourhood Placemaking Challenge** to provide clarification about placemaking and inspire people to be involved in what is happening in their neighbourhood
- **Tree Planting on Private Property** to improve the quality of streets by trees and using related incentives and programs
- **Parks, Playgrounds and Trails Community Engagement Review** to engage people to explore options for these places that respond to their needs (City of Kitchener, 2017a)

ACTIONS TO SUPPORT CONNECTED PEOPLE

- **More Neighbourhood Events** to organize events
- **Event-in-a-Trailer** to make it easier for people to host their events by providing equipment
- **Inviting Front Porches** to create more connections between neighbours by improving zoning requirements and urban design guidelines related to front porches in new housing development areas
- **Research into Best Practices for Community Spaces in Multi-Residential Buildings** to make more connections between neighbours by learning from the lessons of other cities
- **Block Connectors** to make connections between neighbours by identifying residents who encourage others to get involved
- **Snow Angel Program** to create safe and accessible neighbourhoods by helping clear snow and connecting volunteers to those need assistance



Figure 6. Love My Hood – Little Libraries

- **Neighbourhood Website** to create a “one-stop shop” for all the neighbourhoods in the city (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 21)

ACTIONS TO ENCOURAGE WORKING TOGETHER

- **Neighbourhood Action Plans** to shape the future of neighbourhoods by developing Action Plans
- **Neighbourhood Matching Grant Increase** to financially support neighbourhood efforts
- **Reduce Municipal Barriers** to make it easier for residents to get involved by revising some City policies and procedures
- **Neighbourhood Leadership Program** to help residents improve their knowledge and skills by developing training programs designed for neighbourhood volunteers
- **Neighbourhood Demographic Profiles** to help residents gain an understanding of their neighbours by providing demographic profiles
- **Neighbourhood Use of Schools and Faith-Based Facilities** to explore opportunities for residents to gain access to schools and faith-based facilities (City of Kitchener, 2017a)

THE CITY’S ROLE

- **Funding for Neighbourhood Projects** available through the Neighbourhood Matching Grant,

Neighbourhood Action Plans, and the Neighbourhood Placemaking Challenge

- **Staff Support for Neighbourhood Projects** by navigating city hall, building partnerships, and making it as easy as possible for residents to get involved
- **Monitoring and Reporting** the progress for the community
- **Evaluating Our Work** to create and support “neighbourhoods that are safe, connected, engaged, accessible, inclusive and diverse” (City of Kitchener, 2017a, p. 30)

According to the Staff Report submitted regarding Love My Hood, monitoring and evaluating the changes as a result of this initiative are important. However, “unlike many other municipal investments, changes are not necessarily tangible and can be difficult to monitor and evaluate” (City of Kitchener, 2017b, p. 11). Therefore, characteristics of great neighbourhoods such as safe, connected, engaged, accessible, inclusive, and diverse are defined to allow for collecting the related data in 2017 (as a baseline) and re-collecting the related data in four years to monitor and evaluate the results of the initiative (City of Kitchener, 2017b).



Figure 7. Love My Hood – Community Gardens

THE RESIDENTS' ROLE

- **Accessing City Resources** to get the ideas implemented and the projects done
- **Strengthening Relationships** and making connections between neighbours through neighbourhood programs and services
- **Working with City Staff** through the defined processes to get support on neighbourhood ideas and projects
- **Sharing Feedback** with City staff and helping them to improve the initiative
- **Being Intentional to Include Everyone** in their neighbourhood, and enhancing a sense of belonging (Love My Hood, n.d.b)



Figure 8. Love My Hood – Street Parties

OUTCOMES

The City of Kitchener is still working on Love My Hood. While Love My Hood was launched recently (2017) and all the actions are not completely developed, it has already yielded some achievements (Love My Hood, n.d.c.). It may present more outcomes, when further developed and used.

Some significant achievements of Love My Hood are including:

- New resident-led traffic calming program
- Updated community gardens program
- New neighbourhood markets program
- New Placemaking Guide
- New Placemaking Challenge grant
- New Love My Hood website
- Piloting new Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Tripled Neighborhood Matching Grant funding
- Reduced red tape – Noise Exemptions
- Reduced red tape – Approvals for road painting (Love My Hood, n.d.c.)



Figure 9. Love My Hood – Little Libraries

LESSONS LEARNED

CREATING A ONE-STOP SHOP AT A CITY-WIDE LEVEL

The City of Kitchener has branded Love My Hood and created a one-stop shop for residents who are interested in getting involved in neighbourhood improvements. While many other cities have also supported residents and neighbourhood associations to improve neighbourhoods, creating a one-stop shop is an easy and accessible way for residents to approach that may also increase engagement.

DEVELOPING A USER-FRIENDLY WEBSITE

The City of Kitchener has developed a user-friendly website that compiles the necessary information regarding Love My Hood. Developing a user-friendly website may help residents to gain a better understanding of the initiative and encourage them to get involved.

EMPOWERING RESIDENTS TO GET INVOLVED

Love My Hood empowers residents and supports what they want for their neighbourhood. This means that the outcomes of this initiative will be neighbourhoods that are designed, planned, and developed by their residents. Helping residents to get connected and involved may also contribute to addressing other issues in neighbourhoods – that are not under the initiative, but are important.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Love My Hood is built on public engagement. Residents have not only got involved in developing Love My Hood but also in implementing it. Therefore, the success of this initiative is largely based on residents' engagement. However, most neighbourhoods in

Canadian cities have residents who might be interested in being involved in such initiatives.

USING DIFFERENT METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

Many different methods of engagement were used in the initial development of Love My Hood. While, using different methods of engagement is time consuming and needs human and financial resources, it may increase participation.

SHARING LESSONS FOR OTHERS TO LEARN

Love My Hood provides a platform, such as #LoveMyHood, for the Kitchener's residents to share their stories. This may help residents to learn from others' successes and failures and also may inspire more residents to get involved.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING

Love My Hood is not completely developed yet and the City of Kitchener is still working on it. However, the results of this initiative should be monitored and evaluated. This may help determining how effective this initiative is and how it should be modified to respond to the current and emerging needs.



Figures 10-11. Love My Hood – Events and Parties

CONCLUSION

Love My Hood is about empowering residents by the City to improve their neighbourhood. While cities are unique and need tailored approaches and initiatives, Love My Hood may present lessons for other cities to learn. However, as Love My Hood was launched recently, it is not possible to recognize all of its areas of success and failure.

Additionally, the importance of public engagement is widely recognized in planning theory and practice. However, the extent to which public should be involved in planning neighbourhoods and cities, is an important question that needs to be addressed.

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Figures 6-12: www.lovelyhood.ca



Figure 12. Love My Hood – Neighbourhood Markets