
A Social Development Strategy for the City of Toronto

2001

SUMMARY

Social Development is About Quality of Life

Social development is about improving people's quality of life. The City of Toronto plays a key role in this process. By itself, and in partnership with community organizations, the city provides a wide range of services to the residents of Toronto, including child care, homes for the aged, libraries, recreation, social housing, public health, hostels and social assistance.

The city also works to improve quality of life by helping strengthen communities and by encouraging residents to participate in decisions about the future.

In December 2001, Toronto City Council approved a social development strategy for the city. This plan outlines the city's social priorities and gives direction to its role in providing service and supporting communities.

The Social Development Strategy describes some of the challenges Toronto faces, the shared values that bind us together as a city, and the principles that should underlie our approach to social development. It also lays out a set of specific strategic directions to guide Toronto's course.

Toronto's Challenges

Toronto has a history of success as an inclusive, multicultural city that has provided social and economic opportunity for its residents. However, the city now faces several serious challenges which put that reputation in jeopardy:

- The gulf between Toronto's haves and have-nots is widening, threatening the quality of life for all residents of the city. Levels of homelessness and child poverty have risen alarmingly. Income disparities are increasing.
- The federal and provincial governments have abandoned many of their traditional funding responsibilities for social programs — particularly those focusing on income redistribution and housing.

- New funding and management responsibilities for important social programs have been shifted to the city, in addition to its traditional social obligations such as public health and parks and recreation.
- The city is limited to using property taxes and user fees to meet its responsibilities.

If the city is not given the tools it needs and if communities are not enabled to meet the challenges they face, the inevitable result will be an erosion of the quality of life for all residents.

Social Development Principles

The ultimate goal of the Social Development Strategy is to improve and enhance the quality of life of all people. Five principles guide the strategy:

- **Equity** — the fair distribution of resources, free from discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, socio-economic background, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
- **Equality** — equal, effective and comprehensive rights for all.
- **Access** — fair and equitable access to all services, so that no one falls below minimum standards that include adequate income, sufficient nutritious food, adequate and affordable shelter, and sufficient clothing.
- **Participation** — the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the city and the decision making that will determine our collective future.
- **Cohesion** — the fostering of social trust, mutual care, and respect for diversity as the foundation for supportive communities.

Strategic Directions

The City of Toronto has consulted with community residents, planners and service agencies, to identify the city's social priorities and to develop a set of directions to guide future action.

The Social Development Strategy contains the following set of strategic directions:

Strengthen Communities

■ Actively support the building of community capacity

The city must:

- renew its commitment to a mixed system of human services in which both the city and community-based agencies share the responsibility for delivering programs and services;
- provide stable funding to support the functioning of a flexible and responsive community infrastructure;
- maintain an effective balance between its dual roles as a manager of service systems and as a direct provider of service;
- help build strategic partnerships, alliances and networks among community-based organizations and institutions to provide effective services and advocacy; and
- provide staff resources to support community capacity building.

■ Encourage participation in communities and government

The city must:

- actively foster the participation of all sectors of the community in the decision-making process;
- help shape a “civic consciousness” among residents by providing information and education about how the city works and how they can become actively involved;
- use creative and flexible outreach and communication techniques to reach all parts of the community;
- ensure community access to publicly-owned facilities for meeting, recreational, cultural, and educational purposes;

- encourage political responsiveness and accountability at the neighbourhood level; and
- seek and respect community input on issues of public concern.

■ Increase access to community space

The city must commit itself to increasing the availability of community space by:

- making city-owned space available for public use on reasonable terms; and
- advocating that the provincial government acknowledge that schools are a community asset and recognize in its education funding formula the costs associated with the community use of schools.

Invest in a Comprehensive Social Infrastructure

■ Identify areas for strategic investment in social development

In consultation with the community, the city must determine the key areas for investment that will significantly improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Investment decisions must be guided by both community need and the principle of equitable access to services and facilities throughout the city.

■ Increase the effectiveness and co-ordination of planning activities

- The city must use all available planning and regulatory tools to encourage the expansion of social infrastructure.
- All sectors that provide human services must work together more closely in planning service systems to better meet local and city-wide needs. The various sectors must also do more to co-ordinate and integrate the planning and delivery of their services and to share facilities.
- Community-based agencies and planning organizations must be funded to undertake community planning initiatives and to develop indicators of community capacity and well-being.

■ **Extend social monitoring and reporting**

Community and Neighbourhood Services must continue to play a lead role in the development and updating of social monitoring and reporting tools such as report cards. Report cards should contain comprehensive sets of indicators which are linked to specific targets for improvement. These tools will help to identify areas in need of strategic investment and to guide departmental system planning.

Key monitoring indicators include:

- indicators assessing the health and well-being of individuals and communities with a particular focus on vulnerable populations; and
- indicators measuring the progress of social development which are clear and direct enough for broad community understanding and usefulness.

■ **Evaluate program success**

As part of its commitment to a flexible and responsive human services system, the city must:

- continue to develop and refine evaluation techniques which regularly measure the effectiveness and cost efficiency of programs in achieving defined outcomes; and
- use the findings of evaluation to continuously improve service planning and delivery.

■ **Seek more fair and flexible sources for city revenue**

The city must seek the authority to implement new revenue-generating and sharing mechanisms that are both fair and appropriate to its stewardship responsibilities.

Expand Civic Leadership and Partnership

■ **Work towards a joint strategy for social development in the Greater Toronto Area**

Toronto must work together with other municipalities in the GTA to find a co-ordinated approach to social development and the delivery of human services.

■ **Work with other municipalities to develop a national urban agenda**

The city must continue to work in partnership with other municipalities in the GTA, Ontario, and the rest of Canada as well as with municipal organizations to:

- redefine the powers of cities and their relationship with other orders of government; and
- persuade the federal government to develop a national agenda on urban issues and to play a more active role in supporting urban social and physical infrastructure.

■ **Strengthen the city's role as advocate**

Working with all sectors of the population, the city must advocate with senior levels of government to provide adequate authority and resources to manage and fund community and social services. The city's advocacy must be based on the premises that:

- the provincial government must commit to funding support for vital parts of the social infrastructure such as social and affordable housing; and
- the federal government must re-assert a national leadership role in important areas of social responsibility such as housing, child care and immigration and settlement services.

For more information on the Social Development Strategy:

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