

Activating People, Resources and Policies: Progress on Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020

Date: February 8, 2017

To: Community Development and Recreation Committee

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

Since the inception of the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy (TSNS) 2020 in 2014, over 24,000 residents, 1,700 stakeholders and 21 City Divisions and Agencies have been engaged in coordinated service planning and delivery in 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). TSNS has provided a new mechanism for residents, who historically have been disconnected from civic participation, to influence policies and decision making at the citywide level.

Fifteen neighbourhood planning tables across the 31 NIAs consisting of residents, businesses, community agencies, Councillors and City staff meet regularly to identify priorities and actions in support of neighbourhood well-being. Each of the tables is supported by a Community Development Officer (CDO) whose role is to connect residents with decision makers so that neighbourhood goals and priorities are addressed through responsive policies and programs, and resident-led initiatives. This engagement has strengthened relationships between residents, City staff and community stakeholders.

The TSNS 2020 implementation plan, developed in partnership with residents, community agencies, funders, and Toronto Public Library (TPL), Toronto Public Health (TPH), Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), and City divisions has three key objectives:

- Activating People
- Activating Resources
- Activating Neighbourhood-Friendly Policies

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the implementation of the TSNS 2020 in the designated 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) and recommended projects for the Partnership Opportunities Legacy (POL) funding for 2017.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommendations in this report will have no impact beyond what has already been included in the 2017 Council Approved Operating Budget for the City.

The Partnership, Opportunities and Legacy (POL) Fund, with funding of \$3.398 million included in the 2017 Council Approved Capital Budget for Facilities, Real Estate, Environment & Energy (FREEE), and \$3.1 million in previously approved projects, provides total capital investment for POL projects of \$6.498 million, providing funding for 24 projects underway and underdevelopment.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2013, City Council adopted the report titled Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 Implementation with amendments. The report provided updates on the process to develop the Neighbourhood Equity Score and establish an evidence-based approach for the designation of Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD22.7>

On April 2, 2014, City Council adopted the report titled Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020-Recommended Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. The report designated 31 neighbourhoods as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and directed staff to work with partners in the implementation of the TSNS 2020 strategy.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD27.5>

As part of its 2014 Capital Budget Process Council approved a total of \$12 M in funding for infrastructure investments in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. A Total of \$3 M was approved for each of 4 years beginning in 2015. Council also approved \$300,000 per year in Community Funding to support neighbourhoods that were transitioning from the Neighbourhood Improvement Area portfolio.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilMinutesReport&meetingId=7848>

In July 2014, City Council delegated authority to the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to allocate the Council approved \$300,000 in

Community Funding for 2014 to support the four neighbourhoods that are transitioning from the Neighbourhood Improvement Area portfolio.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2014.CD30.2>

COMMENTS

In April 2014, City Council designated 31 NIAs for the new TSNS 2020. City Council also established a fund to support Emerging Neighbourhoods that received investments through the first Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, but were not identified for TSNS 2020. As part of the 2014 Operating and Capital budget process, Council also approved \$12M over 5 years to invest in community capital infrastructure in the NIAs.

TSNS implementation has been guided by a resident-led approach that has helped to leverage resources for community infrastructure and programs and influence policy direction and priorities for the City. Activating people, resources and neighbourhood-friendly policies are the foundation of the success of TSNS 2020 to date (see Appendix 1 - TSNS 2020 Community Update).

TSNS Activities to Date

1. Activating People

TSNS is based on the principle that residents should be at the core of the decisions that impact their lives and community. TSNS resident engagement has resulted in new resident engagement structures, capacity building and training opportunities, and increased resident decision making power and influence. The best practices of resident engagement structures and approaches are being adopted by other City initiatives such as Poverty Reduction and Tenants First strategies.

Resident Engagement Structures:

TSNS Resident Advisory Committee (RAC)

Implementation of TSNS is led by the RAC in partnership with City staff and community agencies. The RAC consists of local residents who live in the NIAs and was established in the summer of 2015. Members were selected through a public expression of interest process that was aligned with the City of Toronto's Public Appointment protocol.

A "Call for Participation" was posted on the Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) website and distributed through various networks and agencies, including the Councillors' offices. Selection criteria included:

- Lived experience and/or experience working in neighbourhoods and active participation in neighbourhood based planning.
- Membership in Neighbourhood Planning Tables (NAPs, Networks, Coalitions, etc.) connected to TSNS 2020.
- Live in a NIA or Emerging Neighbourhood.

- Demographic diversity, including age, gender and cultural origin with racialized community representation and gender balance.

The RAC meets bi monthly to advise staff on local planning issues, coordinate city-wide events and ensure accountability throughout the implementation of TSNS.

RAC members have provided input on the development of the TSNS programs including the POL as well as pilots such as the Democracy Day Pilot led by the City Clerk's Office. RAC members provide resident expertise and perspective at numerous meetings and events and often lead initiatives such as the TSNS District Summits.

In addition to providing a resident voice to TSNS activities, RAC members engage other residents in local planning processes and initiatives.

Neighbourhood Planning Tables and Action Plans

Neighbourhood planning tables are at the heart of the implementation of TSNS at the local level. The planning tables bring together residents, City Councillors, local businesses, community agencies and City staff to plan actions to strengthen neighbourhood wellbeing.

Local activities range from community health education programs, food handling certification courses, to community-led initiatives including community safety walks, back to school events, youth forums, and employment and training workshops.

In the Rexdale community, for example, residents are collaborating with 14 agencies, 6 City Divisions and Agencies and the local Councillor to offer programs and services that address neighbourhood issues of food security, employment training, and resident engagement.

TSNS partners include: Rexdale Women's Centre, Rexdale Community Hub, Rexdale Microskills, Delta Family Resource Centre, Rexdale Youth for Change, Moving Forward, Think Twice, 2677 Kipling Tenant Group, Toronto Community Benefits Network, Social Planning Toronto, Humber College, YMCA, Albion Boys & Girls Club and Toronto District School Board.

City partners supporting the local planning table include: Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR), TPL, Tower Renewal, TPH and Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS).

Through this partnership some of the programs established include:

- Rexdale Can-o-rama, a workshop series on canning, preserving and pickling
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), a training and mentorship program to promote interest and access in the field of science and math for youth
- Multi Media Portal/Website, a program that engages residents with IT skills to build and maintain a website to promote services and resources available in the community
- CPR First Aid Training

- Food Handling Certification Program.

In the Mornelle NIA, for example, the planning table initiated the Mornelle Food Pantry, delivering emergency food supports to 50 plus residents in need throughout the neighbourhood. Partners include TCHC; TPH; Daily Bread Food Bank; Mornelle CAN; Canadian South Asian Growth and Support Services; and Working Women Community Centre.

All planning tables have developed Action Plans that reflect priority projects and activities to strengthen neighbourhood wellbeing. To date 210 actions have been identified across the 31 NIAs. The following common themes have emerged from the Action Plans:

- Healthy Lives: access to healthy food, nutrition information and wellness activities
- Economic Opportunities: advocacy for community benefits agreements including job opportunities from transit development; access to employability skills including food handling and other food sector skills development and financial literacy programs
- Physical Surroundings: community service hub development; green space and arts and cultural space development; and access to more recreational spaces
- Social Development: resident leadership and local network development; youth engagement; and access to education and literacy programs
- Participation in Decision-Making: civic engagement; resident group development; and youth leadership and advocacy.

TSNS Resident Conferences

Two TSNS conferences were held in April and May of 2015 that brought together over 200 local stakeholders, including residents, local agencies, funders and City staff to develop an implementation strategy for TSNS. As a result of the conferences over 1300 actions and 4 guiding principles were documented and became the foundation for the TSNS Action Plan, a guide to developing neighbourhood priorities for neighbourhood wellbeing (see Appendix 2 - TSNS Action Plan).

The conferences were well received by participants and residents wanted more opportunities to come together, from across neighbourhoods, to share ideas and build stronger connections. As a result, District Summits were held in Etobicoke/York, North York, Toronto/East York and Scarborough. The summits connected residents to city and community services and residents showcased their TSNS projects and activities.

Resident Capacity Building:

Local Champions Pilot

In June 2016, Council directed \$200,000 toward a post-secondary certificate/credit training pilot program for residents from NIAs to build resident leadership and advance the TSNS 2020 and the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy.

A Request for Expression of Interest (REOI) was issued for a lead agency to administer the Local Champions pilot and in October 2016, East Scarborough Storefront was awarded the grant to develop the program activities and partners.

The pilot provides an opportunity for residents to assume leadership roles such as facilitators, animators and project developers. It also aims to enhance residents' skills and confidence, participation in decision making and leadership in the delivery of identified local actions in support of TSNS, while at the same time improving their educational and employment potential.

2. Activating Resources

TSNS 2020 recognizes the need to develop collective assets at the local level with the objective to ensure every Toronto neighbourhood has the public, private and community infrastructure required for equitable resident opportunities. TSNS leverages several funding opportunities to create and enhance community amenities.

Partnership Opportunities Legacy Fund (POL)

As part of its 2014 Capital Budget process, Council approved a total of \$12M in funding for infrastructure investments in NIAs. To date \$3.1 million has been allocated to 11 projects. Projects funded included playground upgrades, recreation and community hub space development, community gardens, outdoor splash pads and water play areas.

As part of the 2017 Capital Budget process staff recommended an allocation of \$5,048 million to fund 12 projects, bringing the total POL capital investment in NIAs to \$8.148 million.

The following capital projects have been identified for 2017:

- Children's playground and pollinator garden at Roding Park
- Improved viewing area, floor and snack bar at Angela James Arena
- Create community space at 1652 Keele St. Hub
- Recreation space and computer lab at Kingston Galloway
- Splash pad at Lawrence Galloway Park
- Splash pad and shade structure in Orton
- New playground in Jane/Firgrove
- Recreation rooms rejuvenation in Scarborough Village
- Improved community space in Jane Finch
- Kitchen retrofit and exterior improvements in Gordonridge
- Thorncliffe Park community hub development
- Community spaces in Rockcliffe-Smythe

Toronto Neighbourhood Funders Table

The Neighbourhood Funders Table was developed in collaboration with United Way Toronto and York Region with the goal of ensuring that federal, provincial, and local

funding priorities were informed by a neighbourhood perspective. Since 2015, thirteen (13) funding organizations have participated in the Table.

Currently funding partners are prioritizing neighbourhood issues, sharing data, resources and best practices, and developing innovative collaborative approaches to investing in local communities. Workshops and forums on grant applications have been held that engage local community groups and networks, providing them with valuable information on how to best navigate the funding sector. These forums continue to be part of the TSNS implementation.

Funders are supporting action plans from the NIAs. For example, the Jane and Finch Neighbourhood Action Youth Employment Committee received \$75,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and \$25,000 from the Canada Post Foundation to deliver a youth capacity building program entitled "Passport to Education". The program helps 300 youth increase their employability skills by offering free training programs such as: First Aid; High Five; Food Handling; and Customer Service.

Another example is the United Way of Toronto and York Region, Toronto Central LHIN and SDFA have provided funding for a project manager to help develop a community hub in the Thorncliffe Park NIA.

In the Flemingdon, Thorncliffe Park and Victoria Village NIAs the Youth Service Network received \$75,000 over 3 years from Collective Impact for Toronto Youth (CITY) to coordinate the first "Neighbourhood Cluster" to help increase the high school graduation rates of racialized youth furthest away from opportunities.

3. Activating Neighbourhood-Friendly Policies

Ensuring that services are responsive to the changing needs of diverse neighbourhoods and removing barriers to access to services is critical in promoting equitable opportunities.

Since the implementation of TSNS, several City Divisions and Agencies are applying TSNS 2020 to help develop their strategic plans, policies, initiatives and projects. Some examples include:

- Toronto Board of Health promotes health equity by prioritizing projects in the 31 NIAs including Complete Streets, Green Space Investments, Vision Assessments for Children, Student Nutrition Program, and Healthy by Design Demonstration sites.
- Economic Development and Culture Division (EDC) used the NIAs to implement their Program to Promote Economic Revitalization in Distressed Retail Areas.
- Toronto Library Board considered the feasibility of redeveloping TPL properties in order to generate excess capital funding, which could be specifically directed to rebuild and improve branches in neighbourhood improvement areas and help address the state of good repair backlog.
- Corporate Human Resources, TESS, Social Development Finance and Administration (SDFA) and EDC are working together to increase youth access to existing City positions and entrepreneurship programming by targeting youth in

receipt of Ontario Works, youth connected to other youth programs and youth in NIAs.

District Tables

Four District Tables, aligned with the City's Community Council's geographic regions, have been established and staff from 21 City Divisions and Agencies participate to address systemic issues at the local level and identify ways to support implementation of neighbourhood action plans.

The tables also provide a formal structure for City staff to coordinate the implementation of various City initiatives at the neighbourhood level. For example:

- **Participatory Budget (PB) Pilot** is led by the City Manager's Office (CMO) and was launched with the support of neighbourhood planning tables and resident advisory members within the Rustic and Oakridge NIAs.
- **BIA in NIA** is a pilot to support the development and strengthening of Business Improvement Areas in NIAs. The pilot is led by EDC staff with support from SDFA staff.
- **Democracy Day** is civic engagement skills Train the Trainer model where community leaders are trained to provide workshops so that residents can gain a better understanding municipal elections and local government. The pilot is led by the City Clerk's Office staff who rely on the neighbourhood planning tables to engage local leaders.
- **Recipe for Community** brings people together around food by connecting residents with one another, increasing community engagement and skills building, and beautifying shared neighbourhood spaces. The project is sponsored by the Toronto Foundation and implemented by SDFA Tower and Neighbourhood Revitalization staff in collaboration with other City Divisions. Since its inception, over \$1M has been invested in revitalizing and reconnecting neighbourhoods across Toronto including Alexandra Park, St. James Town, Weston-Mount Dennis, Scarborough Village and Rexdale. A new Recipe for Community neighbourhood will be selected for 2017.

Strategy Monitoring, Evaluation and Data Development

Evaluation is an important component of effective program planning and service delivery. Evaluation is important to ensure accountability and to demonstrate the value of program investments. Evaluation is also important for continuing improvement of programs and services, for knowledge development, and for community empowerment.

A wide range of partners, including City Divisions and Agencies, academic and research institutions, and community agencies are already working to develop measures of equity relevant to Toronto neighbourhoods. Discussions are underway with Ryerson University on the development of an evaluation framework for the implementation of the strategy's action plans at the local level.

Evaluation approaches will explore issues including community safety, housing, transit, racism, participation in decision-making and the community service system – areas that were identified as important for neighbourhood wellbeing during TSNS consultations on neighbourhood equity.

At the end of the TSNS implementation in 2020, staff will apply the neighbourhood equity measurement and neighbourhood equity benchmark, as defined under the Urban HEART tool, to reassess neighbourhood wellbeing in the City's 140 social development neighbourhoods. At that time, appropriate modifications will be made in the designation of NIAs.

Implementation in Neighbourhoods that are not NIAs

Because the goal of TSNS 2020 is to advance equitable outcomes across all neighbourhoods, the Strategy's implementation also supports initiatives in neighbourhoods that are not designated NIAs. For example, the local planning table model was used to develop the Oakwood Vaughan Strategy and Safe Growth Plan as a result of the relocation of the Cornerstone Shelter. The Rockcliffe-Smythe planning table included the north portion of the Junction, a non NIA neighbourhood, in their work in response to community concerns regarding a proposal to locate a men's emergency shelter in the Runnymede and St. Clair area. In Central Etobicoke, the TSNS CDO is working with community partners to develop a strategy to address the needs of youth and seniors in lower income, disadvantaged neighbourhoods that are not NIAs.

Emerging Neighbourhoods Strategy

Eight previously-designated priority neighbourhoods were not recommended in the new generation of NIAs. In order to support the transition of these neighbourhoods into non NIAs, Council approved \$300,000 yearly over 2 years starting in 2014 in Community Funding to support emerging needs in these communities.

These funds were allocated in 2014 and 2015 to support the four neighbourhood planning tables including Steeles, L'Amoreaux, Dorset Park, Malvern and Westminster Branson.

Currently the four emerging neighbourhood planning tables are completing the second year of funding to support the following actions:

- Resident engagement and capacity development initiatives
- Network sustainability planning
- Network partnership development strategies.

In addition to this targeted investment, Steeles, L'Amoreaux, Dorset Park, and Malvern received multi-year funding through SDFA's Service Development Investment Program (SDIP) to a total of \$120,000. SDIP invests in coalitions, networks and organizations that develop community capacity and build effective partnerships within Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Ongoing support from TSNS CDO staff continues to be provided and the emerging neighbourhoods are currently engaged in numerous TSNS 2020 activities.

CONTACT

Costanza Allevato
Director, Community Resources
Social Development, Finance and Administration
416-392-8608
costanza.allevato@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Chris Brillinger
Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix 1. TSNS Implementation Update: [TSNS 2020 Community Update](#)

Appendix 2. TSNS Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020: [TSNS 2020 Action Plan](#)