



CASE STUDY | #lovemyhood

Kitchener, ON

This case study highlights the community engagement process used by the City of Kitchener to develop its neighbourhood strategy which was profiled in a webinar presented by Michelle Drake and Darren Kropf of the City of Kitchener, ON in March 2017.

Region Overview

The City of Kitchener is part of a two-tier Municipality within the Region of Waterloo. The first tier – the City of Kitchener – includes 13 community centres and 31 affiliated neighbourhood associations. The Regional Municipality of Waterloo includes the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. The Region of Waterloo has a population of 563,000 people, of which the City of Kitchener makes up about half.

City Profile: Kitchener

Population: **233,000**

Density: **1705.2/km²**

Motto: **Industria. Prosperitas (From Industry Comes Prosperity)**

Website:

<http://www.kitchener.ca/en/livinginkitchener/neighbourhood-strategy.asp>

The #lovemyhood Neighbourhood Strategy

Great Places – Connected People – Working Together

#lovemyhood is the City of Kitchener's first-ever neighbourhood strategy. It builds upon Kitchener's long tradition of neighbours coming together. The vision of #lovemyhood is: **Helping people connect and work together to do great things in their neighbourhood.** This vision recognizes that neighbourhoods are the foundation of the community that Kitchener is working to build together. Recognizing that the best neighbourhoods are made by the people who live there, a core principle of #lovemyhood is: "Residents take the lead and the City supports them along the way." The #lovemyhood neighbourhood strategy was endorsed by Kitchener City Council in February 2017.

Program/Team Structure

#lovemyhood was championed by a diverse project team of 28 members – both volunteers and city staff – who met over 18 months and contributed nearly 1,000 hours to ensure that their neighbourhood strategy was rooted in the ideas of the City of Kitchener.

The Project Team engaged an additional 150 volunteers to gather input for Kitchener's neighbourhood strategy, making it one of the city's largest and most inclusive community engagement processes. In total, **5,651 people** gave input to #lovemyhood (that's 3 for every street in the city!) and included: neighbourhood associations, schools, faith communities, cultural clubs, sports teams, youth and seniors' groups as well as people waiting at bus stops, and those attending community events.

Community Engagement Strategies

Phase 1 – Lemonade Stand

#lovemyhood Kitchener used a variety of approaches to engage their community, each with varying degrees of success. The first was a lemonade stand with snacks that traveled around to various events in the city. The lemonade stand provided a way to get the conversation started with residents and raise awareness about the city's neighbourhood strategy. In exchange for the completion of a high-level question survey, participants received lemonade and a snack.

Phase 2 – Neighbourhood Stories and Colouring Books

Kitchener wanted to keep the neighbourhood strategy on residents' radar over the winter. To do this they developed several in-person and online activities. For example, #lovemyhood recruited a local volunteer photographer to take pictures of different neighbourhoods to be posted on social media. Once posted, residents were invited to share: "Why do you love your neighbourhood?" This simple yet successful initiative had the highest online engagement rates that the City of Kitchener had ever seen.

Another successful program was a set of colouring books released by the City of Kitchener. An ad was put out to local artists to create pages for two colouring books: one for children and another for adults. The adult colouring book was launched at a local museum that hosts a beer and hobby night. The children's colouring books were distributed at local parks, libraries and pools.

Phase 3 – A Neighbourhood Party, Street Teams and Focus Groups

To promote the neighbourhood party, many personal invitations were mailed to different stakeholders impacted by a neighbourhood strategy. Broad based advertising over many mediums was also used to encourage wide participation at the Neighbourhood Party. The Party was entirely free and included a variety of activities for both children and adults. Free food was served and a live band played, creating a sense of fun. The first part of the party was informal and allowed children to engage. The second part was more formal and included renown neighbourhood-builder Jim Diers as a keynote speaker. Children were supervised so parents could fully participate. The party ended with 15 focus groups each with about 25 people per group. Overall the party was a huge success attracting 400 people.



We need to go above and beyond what is expected from city consultation to reach diverse people



Street Teams - Volunteers were given a list of questions and tasked to stop people on the street or at key venues where different stakeholders meet. In total the Street Teams manned 86 locations and helped ensure input from every neighbourhood.

Phone Survey & Focus Groups – A phone survey was conducted with about 600 residents. Thirty-five focus groups were also hosted which attracted more in-depth input from 408 people. To encourage maximum input, #lovemyhood also developed a moderator kit so residents could host their own focus groups in their neighbourhood. For added incentive, a local sponsor offered to provide food for every focus group conducted.

Online Engagement

The City of Kitchener created a short, close-ended online survey and an idea forum using a modified version of the Street Teams' questions. An online open forum was also created for residents to post their own ideas. Some of this online engagement was not related specifically to the neighbourhood strategy, but allowed questions and comments related to the neighbourhood strategy to be directed to the team leading this effort.

Community Engagement Challenges

Like many community engagement efforts, public engagement regarding the #lovemyhood strategy had two primary objectives: raising public awareness and obtaining input and feedback for the neighbourhood strategy from residents. Throughout the engagement process, the Project Team found it difficult to effectively balance the tension between raising awareness and generating feedback, but ultimately they were satisfied that the diversity of inputs they received through the wide variety of approaches they used was successful in achieving both objectives."

Some of the other challenges identified with #lovemyhood's community engagement strategy included:

- Balancing quality versus diversity versus depth in resident input
- Difficulty recruiting for focus groups
- There was "push back" on some of the demographic questions asked – suggesting that we asked the "wrong questions"
- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

#lovemyhood Engagement Timeline

Phase 1 (July – September 2015)

Phase 2 (Dec 2015 – March 2016)

Phase 3 (April 2016 – August 2016)

Phase 4 (September 2016 – Current)

#lovemyhood Engagement Impact

- 5,651 people consulted (that's 3 for every street in the city!)
- 145 neighbourhood organizations reached
- 5,500 adult and 11,500 children's colouring books completed
- 1,093 participants in 85 locations participated in Street Team one-on-one interviews
- 1,269 people shared comments online or via social media

The Outcome: #lovemyhood's 3 Specific Areas of Action

The concept of a resident-led, City-supported approach to supporting neighbourhoods was strongly endorsed by the #lovemyhood engagement process. Furthermore, community input clearly identified the following 3 areas of focus for the City of Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy and a total of 18 actions to translate these 3 focus areas into reality.

The 3 areas of focus – and 18 actions – outlined in the City of Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy are:

Great Places – Create a variety of things to do at neighbourhood outdoor places, to attract Kitchener wanted to keep the neighbourhood strategy on residents' radar over the winter. To do this they developed strategies to get different people to spend time together. Actions to make Great Places include:

- **A Neighbourhood Places Program** – This will make it easier for residents to lead improvements to public places
- **A Neighbourhood Placemaking Guide** – This is an easy-to-use guide that outlines how to work with the city to implement a neighbourhood improvement idea
- **A Neighbourhood Placemaking Challenge** – This annual event will provide grants to for interested residents to complete temporary or permanent improvements to public places
- **Tree Planting on Private Property** – Through partnerships with the private sector, the City of Kitchener will implement greening incentive programs, tree giveaways and/or neighbourhood tree planting parties.
- **Parks, Playgrounds & Trails Community Engagement Review** – The City will engage with residents to explore uses for multi-use public spaces. Throughout the process the City commits to being upfront about funding and maintenance constraints so planning for each space is rooted in an appreciation of reality.

Connected People – Strengthen relationships between neighbours by creating more ways for them to connect with one another thereby strengthening people's sense of belonging and well-being. To nurture a greater sense of connection between residents the City intends to:

- **Support More Neighbourhood Events** – The City will create a Neighbourhood Activity Guide to provide simple guidelines for how to work with them to plan neighbourhood events. They will also work with the Festival of Neighbourhoods to build upon their current programming.



We could create more friendships by having a party in every neighbourhood.

– Local Resident



- **Event in a Trailer** – This trailer contains everything needed to host a neighbourhood event: tables, chairs, tents, barricades, sound system etc. It can be booked and used to make it easier and more affordable to host an event in their neighbourhood.
- **Inviting Front Porches** – Neighbourhoods with front porches have more informal and casual conversations between neighbours. The City will improve zoning requirements and/or urban design guidelines to improve the functionality of front porches in new housing to facilitate these more informal neighbour connections.
- **Research Best Practices for Community Spaces in Multi-Residential Buildings** – The City will work with community partners to research promising ideas for how to encourage more indoor and outdoor gathering spaces in and around multi-residential buildings to encourage more connections between the neighbours who live there
- **Establish Block Connectors** – Borrowing an idea from Edmonton, the City will work with community partners to establish Block Connectors – 1 or 2 individuals to start conversations with neighbours and encourage them to get involved. “Welcome to the Neighbourhood” packages for new neighbours are also being considered.
- **Snow Angel Program** – This program will encourage neighbours to do their part to make neighbourhoods safe and accessible by helping clear snow from driveways and sidewalks.
- **Neighbourhood Website** – This website will showcase ideas and highlight neighbourhood events to accelerate the sharing of good ideas. The site will also provide access to information on all things neighbourhood, including neighbourhood associations, and available granting programs.
- **Working Together** – Recognizing that no one group or sector can do the work of creating dynamic and engaged neighbourhoods alone, this focus area will facilitate neighbours to work together with community partners, neighbourhood associations and the City to make positive neighbourhood change a reality. Actions to encourage working together include:
 - **Neighbourhood Action Plans** – These resident-led, City-supported plans will develop a clear vision for the neighbourhood that is widely supported and a clear plan to achieve it. Neighbourhood Action Plans will be piloted in two neighbourhoods in 2017-18 and will be city-wide in 2019.



I think that this placemaking is fantastic. It allows members to see something improved, and take action to get things done. In time, this can become something great.

– Local Resident



- **Neighbourhood Matching Grant Increase** – The City will partner with United Way Waterloo Region to administer its fund for neighbourhood projects. The overall amount in this fund will be tripled to \$60,000 per year and the amount available per project will also be tripled to a maximum of \$15,000 per project.
- **Reduce Municipal Barriers** – The city will review and change some of its policies and procedures to make neighbourhood-based projects easier to implement.
- **Neighbourhood Leadership Program** – A unique training program will be created and delivered by the City and its local community partners so that residents can grow their knowledge and skill to effectively implement their ideas and projects.
- **Neighbourhood Demographic Profiles** – The City will make neighbourhood demographic information freely and easily available to support neighbours in planning to make their projects as inclusive as possible.
- **Neighbourhood Use of Schools and Faith-Based Facilities** – The City will engage schools and faith-based organizations to explore how neighbours can gain greater access to their indoor and outdoor facilities.



The leadership program should have a youth component so that tweens and teens can get involved and be more connected to their “hood” in positive ways.

– Local Resident



[Click here](#) to learn more about Kitchener’s #lovemyhood Neighbourhood Strategy, access the full [#lovemyhood Neighbourhood Strategy](#) and/or visit the City of Kitchener’s [Neighbourhood Strategy webpage](#).

This case study was developed from a presentation made to Tamarack’s [Neighbourhood Strategy Leaders’ Community of Practice](#), a network of peers from across Canada and beyond that share responsibility for developing and implementing neighbourhood strategies. [Click here](#) to learn more about how you can join this free – and growing – peer network.