

**GENERAL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT**  
**RECREATION, SPORT AND CULTURE DIVISION**

**REPORT CS-2024-16**  
**October 22, 2024**

**SUBJECT:** Neighbourhood Association Policy Options

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT GENERAL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF WELLAND receives for information report CS-2024-16 Neighbourhood Association Policy Options; and further

THAT General Committee recommended the preferred the Neighbourhood Association Policy option.

**RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:**

This recommendation is aligned to Council’s strategic priority of ensuring “**Liveability**” by creating a sense of belonging while enhancing mobility by improving access to recreation and community events, ensuring adequate housing options, encouraging job growth, and improving ways to efficiently move people throughout the city.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

A neighbourhood is defined as a space where people live and engage with one another, making a Neighbourhood Association a valuable opportunity for residents to connect. Formed by volunteers from the same geographic area, these associations work together to enhance their surroundings and implement positive changes. They are influenced by factors such as geographic location, access to amenities, shared goals and values, and the unique identity of the neighbourhood. Through Neighbourhood Associations, members can identify the community’s strengths and challenges and collaborate on improvements. Neighbourhoods with strong connections tend to be more resilient.

This report outlines three options for enhancing the effectiveness of neighbourhood associations within our community, aiming to foster engagement, sustainability, and accountability.

**Option One** focuses on the Impact Fund initiative, providing neighbourhood associations with funding for neighbourhood-driven projects through a detailed application process. Funding is merit-based, with successful applicants required to report on their projects to ensure transparency and accountability.

**Option Two** establishes a framework for neighborhood associations to formally affiliate with the City. This affiliation provides access to resources such as City-owned meeting rooms and funding for activities. It also requires associations to hold neighborhood public meetings and maintain regular reporting.

**Option Three** requires neighbourhood associations to demonstrate specific competencies to receive support. Associations must show sustainable practices through budget reviews and focus on measurable outcomes with regular reporting.

To move forward, staff seek input from General Committee on these options. With feedback, staff will develop a policy that effectively meets community needs.

## **BACKGROUND:**

A neighbourhood association is a community-based organization that serves to represent the interests of residents within a specific geographic area. These associations typically focus on improving the quality of life for their members through community engagement, advocacy, and the promotion of local initiatives.

Welland is home to three active neighbourhood associations, each with a rich history ranging from 5 to 55 years. These associations have developed their own priorities and goals, tailored to the specific needs of their neighbourhoods. Their focuses include organizing events, recreational programming, community garage sales, neighbourhood safety and security, and heritage preservation. However, a shared concern among these groups is the lack of a structured governance and operational framework.

Currently, there exists an inequity in the resources and benefits available to these associations. Two of the associations have access to storage facilities at no cost, while the third does not have this benefit. Although the budget allocates \$1,000 to each association, there is no formal process or timeline for requesting these funds. Additionally, while some associations manage their budgets by distributing funds between city services, programs or event requests, others have receiving considerably more—over \$12,000—in city services and event funding. This neighbourhood association previously served as the facility's watch person, opening and closing the venue to help offset increased usage. However, due to changes in volunteer availability, this support has now been reduced to just one

day a week. This situation underscores the need for a more equitable distribution of resources among the associations, ensuring that all neighbourhoods can thrive and benefit from the City's services.

Projections indicate that Welland's population will experience significant growth, reaching an estimated 83,000 people by 2051, which represents an increase of 26,790 individuals. As this population expands, the diversity of needs and priorities within our neighbourhoods will also evolve. This highlights the critical need for robust neighbourhood associations to effectively address emerging challenges and opportunities. The Hey Neighbour Collective (see Appendix 1) emphasizes that social connectedness among neighbours greatly enhances health and well-being, fostering a supportive environment that reduces isolation and builds community. Neighbourhood Associations play a vital role in this process by organizing activities, events, and shared resources that bring residents together. These associations create platforms for communication and collaboration, strengthening relationships and promoting mutual support. By encouraging social engagement, neighbourhood associations cultivate a sense of belonging and security, ultimately leading to better mental and physical health outcomes for all residents.

Many municipalities have successfully implemented policies, standard operating practices, and micro-grant programs to support neighbourhood development and build resiliency and neighbourhood connections. This trend is not only evident in our region but is also a common practice across much of Ontario.

This report aims to explore the current landscape of neighbourhood associations, identify best practices, and recommend the development of a comprehensive policy that can support the growth and sustainability of these essential community organizations.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The insights gathered during our consultations with neighbourhood associations revealed a diverse landscape of operational practices and preferences. Some associations utilize specific facilities within their geographical boundaries, while others adopt a more flexible approach, making use of a combination of private and public spaces. This flexibility is essential for maximizing community engagement and ensuring that the needs of residents are met effectively.

Furthermore, the associations have expressed a desire for quarterly meetings with a staff liaison. They have also proposed a grandfather clause to assist associations with three to five years of established support in strategically planning for future needs while adapting to the evolving framework.

Any policy option chosen will adhere to high standards of good governance, ensuring that associations are based in Welland with clearly defined geographical boundaries. Each association must consist of at least 50% of members over the age of 18 and include a minimum of five members from

different households operating on a volunteer basis. Each association will have a designated staff liaison from the City for support. All neighbourhood associations must adhere to all applicable laws, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and City bylaws.

Each neighbourhood association will have year-round access to its staff liaison, who will facilitate quarterly meetings to encourage ongoing communication and collaboration. These meetings will provide a platform for sharing best practices, offering resources, and fostering cooperation among associations. They will create an environment for discussing challenges, celebrating successes, and seeking guidance.

To enhance communication and transparency, a dedicated webpage will be created to showcase the successes and ongoing projects of neighbourhood associations. This page will feature new initiatives, project outcomes, upcoming events, resources for associations, and opportunities for community involvement, emphasizing the importance of engagement and encouraging the formation of new associations.

The policy will support a diverse array of community-focused initiatives, building on successful efforts already in place. Possible initiatives may include organizing litter clean-ups, hosting holiday parties, coordinating days in the park, neighbourhood garage sales, and promoting community safety. New projects could also involve graffiti removal, enhancing neighbourhood entrances with flower beds and creative artwork, and organizing community events such as street parties and barbecues. Activities that engage youth and ensure access to local facilities will be encouraged, along with events promoting responsible pet ownership and community fitness programs, all aimed at fostering a vibrant and engaged community.

To ensure a seamless transition to the new policy after Council approval, staff will develop a thorough marketing program that includes information sessions and an online application platform. Staff will also meet with current groups to provide them with the necessary support and information during this process.

### **Option 1: Neighbourhood Association Impact Fund**

Inspired by St. Catharines' 2024 launch of a similar program (see Appendix 2), the Impact Fund initiative will encompass key components designed to support neighbourhood associations. This initiative would provide funding ranging from \$500 to \$1,500 per project to approved applicants.

The Impact Fund initiative is designed to enhance neighbourhood engagement and support neighbourhood associations in Welland through a structured framework. To participate, associations must navigate a clear application process that requires them to submit detailed proposals outlining their project goals, expected outcomes, and budget. This ensures that all initiatives align with community needs and objectives.

Funding allocation is merit-based, focusing on projects that promote neighbourhood involvement and deliver tangible benefits to the neighbourhood. Successful applicants receive the necessary funds to execute their projects, with stipulations for transparency and accountability in their financial dealings. A grandfather clause will allow associations with three to five years of established support to strategically plan for their future needs, aligning with the evolving framework set by the City. This provision ensures continuity and stability as associations adapt to new guidelines. To maintain effective oversight, recipients are required to submit structured reports detailing project progress, expenditures, and outcomes. This reporting process, along with access to staff liaison and quarterly meetings, fosters a collaborative environment where associations can discuss challenges, share successes, and seek guidance.

**Benefits:** The Impact Fund offers valuable opportunities for neighbourhood associations by providing essential resources and funding for neighbourhood-driven projects. It promotes collaboration, accountability, and transparency, helping to build trust within the community. The grandfather clause allows established associations to leverage their experience while adapting to new guidelines, ensuring continuity and sustained impact.

**Limitations:** However, the initiative also presents some challenges. The complexity of the application process may deter smaller or less experienced associations from participating. The competitive nature of funding allocation could leave deserving projects without support, creating a sense of competition rather than collaboration among associations. Furthermore, the reporting requirements may be burdensome for smaller organizations, diverting resources away from project implementation. Lastly, the program's transactional focus might limit deeper, more sustained engagement between the City and associations, as it prioritizes funding specific projects over fostering long-term partnerships.

## **Option 2: Neighbourhood Association Policy**

Option 2 establishes a framework for neighbourhood associations to achieve formal affiliation with the City, inspired by practices in Brampton (see Appendix 3). This affiliation provides access to various benefits and resources designed to enhance operations and neighbourhood impact. A grandfather clause allows associations with three to five years of established support to strategically plan for their future needs, ensuring continuity and stability as they adapt to evolving City guidelines.

To become affiliated, associations must complete an application and maintain active status through regular renewal processes. Benefits include free use of City-owned meeting rooms, assistance with training and recognition, and access to up-to-date information on federal and provincial grants for recreation and cultural organizations. Neighbourhood Associations can receive up to \$1,000 for activities and special events, and access up to \$500 in City services for room rentals and equipment. An agreement outlining the conditions of affiliation will be required, and associations must hold at least one public meeting annually for

neighbourhood residents. Additionally, a closeout report template will be provided at the end of each year to summarize activities, meetings, finances, and projects.

**Benefits:** This framework enhances neighbourhood engagement by providing essential resources and support for the associations. The grandfather clause ensures that established associations can adapt to new guidelines without losing momentum, allowing them to leverage their experience for continued success. Access to City-owned meeting rooms reduces operational costs, enabling associations to allocate funds toward community initiatives. The assistance with training and recognition fosters capacity building, empowering association members with the skills and knowledge needed for effective governance.

The funding for activities and special events not only enhances engagement but also strengthens neighbourhood ties, while the public meeting requirement ensures that neighbourhood residents have a voice in local governance. Finally, the closeout report template streamlines accountability and transparency, helping associations effectively communicate their achievements to stakeholders and the City.

**Limitations:** However, the requirements for affiliation, such as maintaining active status and holding public meetings, may pose challenges for smaller or less organized associations. The need for regular reporting and compliance with conditions could also create additional administrative burdens, diverting attention from neighbourhood-focused activities.

### **Option 3: Neighbourhood Association Policy**

Option 3 draws from the successful model established by the City of Cambridge (see Appendix 4). This approach emphasizes the importance of demonstrating specific competencies for neighbourhood associations to receive support and resources from the City. By focusing on sustainable operations and measurable outcomes, this model aims to create a more structured and effective network of neighbourhood associations that meet community needs.

To demonstrate sustainable operations, associations must provide evidence of effective practices, including a bi-annual budget variance review to assess financial health and operational efficiency. This ensures that associations manage funds responsibly while planning for long-term sustainability. Additionally, each association is expected to achieve measurable outcomes that demonstrate their effectiveness in serving the neighbourhood, with regular reporting required to illustrate key performance indicators (KPIs) and assess the impact of their activities. Associations must submit regular reports to their staff liaison detailing activities, progress, and financial status. This reporting not only provides a clear picture of the City's return on investment but also helps identify areas for potential growth, fostering a sense of neighbourhood pride by celebrating each association's successes.

**Benefits:** This model promotes accountability and transparency by requiring associations to demonstrate sustainable practices and measurable outcomes.

Regular reporting ensures that the City can effectively assess the impact of its investments in neighbourhood initiatives. By emphasizing competencies, associations are encouraged to enhance their operational efficiency and neighbourhood engagement, which can lead to stronger, more vibrant neighbourhoods. The focus on diverse funding sources through grassroots initiatives can also enhance the financial sustainability of programs, empowering associations to thrive independently.

**Limitations:** However, the absence of a grandfather clause means that newer or less established associations may struggle to meet the competencies and achievements required for support. The stringent eligibility criteria and reporting requirements could impose significant administrative burdens on smaller associations, potentially diverting resources away from neighbourhood-focused activities. Additionally, the focus on measurable outcomes may inadvertently prioritize quantifiable activities over qualitative neighbourhood engagement, potentially stifling creativity and innovation in local initiatives.

### **FINANCIAL:**

No financial impact at this time.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The three proposed options for enhancing neighbourhood associations aim to create a more structured and effective network that serves our community's needs. Option 1 introduces an impact fund program to support local initiatives, fostering grassroots engagement. Option 2 focuses on establishing clear criteria for affiliation with the City, emphasizing sustainable operations and collaboration with City staff. Option 3 highlights the importance of measurable outcomes and regular reporting.

To move forward, staff invite General Committee's input on these options. This feedback will be invaluable in refining these proposals and ensuring they align with the needs and aspirations of Welland's neighbourhoods. General Committee is encouraged to share their thoughts and suggestions so that staff can collaboratively develop a framework that empowers Welland's neighbourhood associations and enhances neighbourhood engagement.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

- Appendix 1 – HNC-Evidence-Backgrounder
- Appendix 2 – Neighbourhood Micro Grants - St. Catharines
- Appendix 3 – Brampton Neighbourhood Association Guide 2023
- Appendix 4 – Cambridge Neighbourhood Association Support Services