



A Social Vision for the New City of Hamilton

by

**Sherri Torjman
Eric Leviten-Reid
Paul Heisler**

September 2002

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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	1
<i>A Social Vision</i>	2
<i>Why Do This?</i>	2
<i>Assets</i>	6
<i>Key Goals</i>	7
<i>Core Values</i>	8
<i>Operating Principles</i>	8
<i>The Plan</i>	9
<i>The Process</i>	9
<i>Create Ownership</i>	10
<i>Raise Awareness</i>	10
<i>Build Relationships</i>	10
<i>Gather Information</i>	11
<i>Set Goals and Targets</i>	11
<i>Take Action</i>	12
<i>i. On Its Own</i>	12
<i>ii. With Partners</i>	14
<i>Preparatory Work</i>	14
<i>Specific Actions</i>	15
<i>Monitor Progress</i>	15
<i>Listen and Learn</i>	16
<i>Next Steps</i>	16
<i>Appendix A: Flagship Initiatives</i>	18
<i>Children and Families</i>	19
<i>Goals</i>	19
<i>Why Do This?</i>	19
<i>Possible Plan of Action</i>	21
<i>Review employment policies</i>	21
<i>Create coordinating mechanism</i>	21
<i>Engage citizens</i>	23
<i>Gather information on exemplary models</i>	23
<i>Commit to a Municipal Children's Strategy</i>	24
<i>Integrate services</i>	24

<i>Develop preventive supports</i>	25
<i>Promote school as hub</i>	26
<i>Help build neighbourhoods</i>	26
<i>Identify key indicators</i>	27
<i>Monitor progress</i>	28
<i>Skills Development</i>	28
<i>Goals</i>	28
<i>Why Do This?</i>	28
<i>Possible Plan of Action</i>	29
<i>Review employment policies</i>	29
<i>Create coordinating mechanism</i>	30
<i>Engage citizens</i>	30
<i>Gather data on local labour market</i>	31
<i>Raise awareness</i>	31
<i>Gather information on exemplary models</i>	32
<i>Identify specific projects</i>	33
<i>Develop customized training approaches</i>	34
<i>Other possible approaches</i>	35
<i>Provide transitional supports</i>	37
<i>Ensure access to child care</i>	38
<i>Identify indicators</i>	38
<i>Monitor progress</i>	38
<i>Affordable Housing</i>	39
<i>Goal</i>	39
<i>Why Do This?</i>	39
<i>Possible Plan of Action</i>	40
<i>Review current practices</i>	40
<i>Create coordinating mechanism</i>	41
<i>Engage citizens</i>	42
<i>Raise awareness</i>	43
<i>Gather information on exemplary models</i>	43
<i>Identify possible initiatives</i>	45
<i>Provide supports for living in place</i>	47
<i>Build strong neighbourhoods</i>	48
<i>Identify indicators</i>	48
<i>Monitor progress</i>	48

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Several sources of information contributed to the development of this Social Vision. It includes the findings of a wide range of reports prepared by various Hamilton groups and organizations. Interviews were conducted with selected key informants. The Vision also was based on a review of relevant literature and exemplary models from other communities.

A Social Vision

This Social Vision sees the new City of Hamilton as a *safe, healthy and caring community* which fosters a sense of belonging and pride. It is a *culturally rich and diverse community* which ensures that all citizens have access to opportunities and resources to meet their basic needs and promote their active participation. It is a *vibrant community* which promotes support for basic needs as well as inclusion and learning for all.

Vibrant communities ensure that basic needs are met. There is no individual or family without a roof over its head. No child goes to school hungry. No person suffers from abuse or violence without having a safe place to go.

Inclusion means that all members of a community are able to participate to the best of their ability. Inclusive communities remove more than just physical barriers. They remove the fiscal obstacles to participation and seek to engage citizens in meaningful ways.

Learning is concerned with opportunities for knowledge and skills development at all ages and stages of life. Learning communities also engage members in resolving complex social, economic and environmental challenges.

Appropriate social investments create the foundation for a strong competitive local economy. Vibrant communities create vibrant economies and societies.

Why Do This?

The purpose of a Social Vision is to identify the priority areas for investing in people and their neighbourhoods. Before spelling out the components of a Social Vision, it is important to explain why the City of Hamilton needs such a Vision and why City Council should take the lead in spearheading this work. Actually, there are several reasons.

The first has to do with the fact that City Council is putting into place a bold new Economic Development Plan. It promises to revitalize the Hamilton economy, which was hit hard in the 1990s by the loss of several manufacturing plants and many associated jobs. Profound technology shifts as well as international free trade agreements have transformed dramatically the way that many industries, both here and abroad, do business. The local economy is still adjusting to these structural changes.

The Hamilton economy did, in fact, gain substantial numbers of new jobs in 2000 and actually had better job growth relative to the rest of the province in that year. But the recent recession

took a serious toll on the local economy. Many thousands of jobs were lost, wiping out nearly all the gains of the previous year.

The good news is that the City of Hamilton is on the rebound. Like other regions of the country, it has had to formulate very carefully the transition to a new economic base. It began this challenge by identifying the traditional and emerging clusters of the local economy: industrial/manufacturing/port; agriculture; airport; health and biotechnology; information and communications technology; and film.

This framework for regional economic development is based on the recognition that healthy local economies are composed of industry clusters and their supporting economic infrastructure. 'Industry clusters' refer to interrelated, geographically concentrated sectors along with their key suppliers and supporting institutions. These industry clusters act as the drivers of local economies and have the potential to generate substantial employment.

The cluster-based approach also can have a positive impact upon social development. Research supported by the Office of Policy Development and Research of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development found clear links between the competitiveness of local businesses and poverty.

Sector-based economic development strategies that focus on low-income people and communities can be quite successful at fostering economic growth and increasing job opportunities for disadvantaged people. Research by Harvard Business Professor Michael Porter notes that economic opportunities can be generated in inner-city neighbourhoods by developing adjacent clusters.

But cluster-based development is about more than the creation of jobs. The cluster model contends that economic growth requires 'quality foundations,' which include the physical and social infrastructure of the community. Cluster-based development makes clear that economic progress is not possible unless attention is paid to skills development, social needs and the quality of life.

This model of economic development is consistent with the growing global recognition of the role of large urban centres as the engines of national economies. This recognition has created pressure for major cities to become 'world class' actors on the international stage. In order to survive in a competitive environment, cities need to attract investment and the best possible talent in the world. The City of Hamilton's Economic Development Department has been working with the Department of Human Resources Development Canada and the Hamilton-Wentworth Training Board in order to meet local human resource needs over the next two decades.

Cluster-based economic development is also consistent with the newly released National Strategy on Learning and Innovation, which notes the importance of social investment as a key element of innovative environments. The national strategy points out that investments in health and

education, in particular, are important in their own right because they help Canada attract the highly qualified talent that drives innovation; workers and their families want to live in safe, clean communities with high-quality services. A healthy and educated population also attracts investment. A ‘virtuous circle’ is thereby created: Good economic policy creates the wealth to address social priorities that, in turn, fuel more innovation and economic growth.

Other important arguments that link economic and social factors are put forward in the book *World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy* by Harvard Business Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter. She argues that communities need both magnets and glue.

‘Magnets’ are the factors that attract a flow of external resources – such as new companies and people – to renew and expand skills, and contribute to the economic health of the region. Magnet factors typically include a healthy and well-educated workforce, clean environment, vibrant business climate, and solid social and cultural infrastructure.

She notes, however, that communities also need ‘glue’ to hold them together. In addition to the physical infrastructure that supports daily life and work – roads, sewers, electricity and communications systems – communities require social networks and programs to solve problems and promote the economic and social well-being of all their members. A ‘world class’ city is achievable only by addressing the needs of people at home. This means that it is not possible to create the magnets unless attention is paid to securing the glue.

Many cities in Canada have suffered significant job losses similar to the Hamilton experience. Like other communities, the region has seen a rise in ‘nonstandard employment’ – jobs that may be less than full time and that do not provide benefits like pensions, or health or dental coverage.

Throughout the country, and indeed the world, there has been a shrinkage of work in the middle-earnings range. The shift is partly the result of changing technology, with silicon chips replacing countless middle managers. Many middle-level positions also have been shed through downsizing. Job security may be a relic of the past but it is clearly having an impact upon families in the present.

The labour market has moved to extremes in yet another way: the growth of both long and short hours of work. Hours of work are increasing for some full-time workers who tend to have high incomes. At the same time, there is more part-time work, much of it involuntary and most producing low wages. Many workers find themselves on the good side or the bad side of this ‘hour and earnings divide.’

As a result of profound changes to the labour market, most families now need two incomes in order to make ends meet. Many households cannot find enough hours of work to generate the income required to house and feed their families adequately. Most families are also experiencing a

time crunch – which means less time for personal needs and interests, notably spending time with children and volunteering in the community.

All cities in Canada and indeed, throughout the world, have seen these changes. In this regard, the City of Hamilton is not alone. Nor is it alone in the fact that far too many citizens have low and unstable incomes or are at risk of falling into poverty or homelessness. Many single-parent families struggle to meet their needs without the appropriate supports. Far too many children are being removed from families because of abuse or neglect and are being taken into the care of child welfare agencies.

The signs of strain are evident across the country. For seven consecutive years, Canada was ranked first in the world according to the United Nations' Human Development Index; in 2001, it fell to third. In 1989, one of every seven children in the country was poor. The House of Commons passed a unanimous resolution to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. Ten years later, one in five – or 18.5 percent of all children – still lived in poverty.

Unfortunately, the child poverty rates for the City of Hamilton surpass the national average. At last count in 1995, the poverty rate for children aged 0-14 was 27 percent (25,400 children). Twenty-six percent of young people (or 15,310 individuals) between the ages of 15 and 24 were poor in that year.

The City of Hamilton has a higher rate of teen pregnancy than that for the province overall. While the City's Aboriginal community is relatively small with only several thousand members, nearly half are poor.

Forty-one percent of visible minority members lived in poverty in 1995. Although Hamilton has the fourth largest immigrant population in the country, the federal government has not designated the City as a major receptor site. New Canadians clearly are welcome because of their invaluable social and economic contributions. But there is often an adjustment period for newcomers and the City receives no federal financial support for the many settlement services it provides.

The City of Hamilton needs a Social Vision to guide its work because these problems are urgent and are ignored at great cost. The City needs a Social Vision because there is currently no overall plan or strategy for advancing a social agenda. A framework is required for tackling these difficult problems in a systematic and systemic way.

But the insight of a Social Vision is especially critical at this time because it has become more difficult in recent years for local governments to confront the varied and complex challenges they now face. In 1996, the federal government dismantled the Canada Assistance Plan, which had been an important source of funding for family and community services. The withdrawal of this legislation has meant fewer dollars for child care and family services, youth programs, and supports that help the elderly and persons with disabilities live independently in the community.

All communities in Ontario also face additional pressures arising from the provincial ‘who does what’ exercise undertaken in 1996. As a result of a shift in responsibility and associated costs, local governments now must pay a greater portion of social assistance (commonly known as ‘welfare’), child care, social housing and home care. Costs for some of these services, such as home care for the elderly, are expected to rise steadily with an aging population.

Moreover, many Hamilton residents were hurt by the deep 21.6 percent cut to social assistance payments that the province of Ontario introduced in 1996. (Social assistance is the program of ‘last resort.’ It provides assistance when individuals have no other source of support and their needs exceed available resources.) The reduction substantially affected welfare recipients’ ability to pay the rent and to feed their children. For many residents, the roots of homelessness can be traced to this drastic change.

On another front, there has been substantial realignment of responsibility for housing combined with lack of investment on the part of senior levels of government. This new scenario means that local governments have had to assume much greater responsibility – both in leadership and finance – to ensure an adequate supply of decent affordable housing.

Finally, local governments are financially constrained in their ability to tackle complex social problems that arise daily in schools, in neighbourhoods and on city streets. They have limited sources of revenue, which derive primarily from a property tax base.

In a nutshell, the City of Hamilton faces some tough social problems. It has had to assume more responsibility for a wide range of services in recent years with no associated financing increases. Like other cities, it has limited sources of revenue to offset greater demands and rising costs.

But the news is not all bad. The difficulties actually have created a window of opportunity for local leadership and more concerted action. And the City is fortunate to have a crucial lever that is fundamental to achieving this Social Vision: local assets. These varied resources should be harnessed in new and unique ways to tackle the serious social problems it faces.

City Council should be prepared to provide leadership and act as champion of this Social Vision. However, it cannot, nor should it, undertake the implementation of this Social Vision on its own. The City needs partners and will require the input of citizens to help guide the development of this work. The City’s partners and engaged citizens are vital assets in this process.

Assets

The City of Hamilton should take pride in the fact that it is a community of great wealth, endowed with a range of invaluable assets. The challenge is to harness the following and other

assets in innovative ways to create new value and new solutions to its social concerns:

- Coherent plans on several fronts including the New City of Hamilton Statement of Mission and Goals, the Economic Development Plan and the Vision 2020 sustainable development framework.
- Visionary leaders in all key sectors.
- High-quality educational institutions, including its public schools, Mohawk College, McMaster University and a teaching hospital.
- Internationally recognized researchers and practitioners in several fields, especially healthy child development.
- A substantial network of nonprofit agencies.
- Myriad studies that explain the scope of social challenges and possible solutions.
- Key community consultations – e.g., the Hamilton Early Years initiative; Connections for Kids conference; Vision 2020 and Action 2020; community consultation on social development; community consultation on child care.
- Major federal investments in such areas as training programs, homelessness and early childhood development.
- Major provincial investments in such areas as homelessness, health, education and early childhood development.
- Exemplary collaborative efforts under way – e.g., Strengthening Hamilton’s Community spearheaded by the Hamilton Community Foundation in association with the United Way of Burlington Hamilton-Wentworth and other organizations.
- Culturally diverse population.
- Arts, culture and recreation recognized as important public goods.
- Highest rates of philanthropy and voluntarism in the country.
- Beautiful natural environment.
- Access to a consumer market base of more than 120 million within a 500 km radius.
- Anticipated skill shortages that are expected to open up employment opportunities.

Key Goals

The City of Hamilton should seek to:

- Pursue new and innovative approaches for enabling more citizens to share their views and help shape City life.
- Increase awareness about, monitor and improve the social well-being of the community and the need for shared responsibility in this area.
- Ensure that basic needs for food, clothing and adequate housing for all citizens are met.
- Promote inclusion by encouraging participation in the City’s social, economic, cultural and recreational life.
- Help create a learning culture that fosters continual improvement.

Core Values

This Social Vision and associated goals are rooted in a set of core values. These have helped shape the development of this framework and should continue to guide the work as it proceeds.

A Social Vision values *democracy* and the right of citizens to associate freely with each other and voice their views.

A Social Vision values *active citizenship* and the worth that the community derives from members expressing a sense of responsibility to each other through political and voluntary engagement.

A Social Vision values *social justice*. It seeks to reduce the disparities between those in the community with resources and those without, and to provide opportunities for all citizens to attain social and economic well-being.

A Social Vision values *inclusion*, which entails the right to speak and be heard – and to participate in all aspects of the community. Inclusion involves a recognition of and respect for diversity. It also implies accessibility – the ability of all citizens to obtain the resources and services needed to share fully in community life.

Operating Principles

The City should:

- Base its work within the Social Vision on a factual understanding of the City.
- Build on successful initiatives undertaken or already under way including the New City of Hamilton Statement of Mission and Goals, the new Economic Development Plan, Vision 2020 and Action 2020, the Vision 2020 Sustainability Indicators project and the Municipal Children’s Strategy.
- Incorporate this Vision into its own employment practices and delivery of services.
- Seek input from citizens and relevant organizations on all aspects of planning and action, and be accountable to the public.
- Achieve the vision, goals and actions through collaborative relationships, coordinated actions and integrated programs involving diverse sectors and community organizations.
- Set clear targets for the desired goals and monitor progress on an ongoing basis.
- Modify and improve performance through continual learning.
- Be prepared to do things differently and afford staff the opportunity to change practices, reinvest resources and make new alliances as required.

- Think big and act through well-planned small steps. This overarching Social Vision should be broken down into manageable and measurable actions set out and reviewed on a regular basis.

The Plan

The City of Hamilton should seek to:

- Provide leadership and act as champion for this Social Vision.
- Create public awareness of the pressing social needs in the community and of the importance of social investment.
- Foster a sense of responsibility for social well-being among all sectors.
- Build relationships among the diverse organizations and sectors that comprise the community.
- Integrate more effectively the services that the City delivers in order to improve the social well-being of Hamilton citizens.
- Undertake several flagship initiatives in collaboration with key partners in order to tackle major social problems.
- Assess progress in meeting identified goals and continually improve upon actions.
- Listen and learn.

The Process

The City should try to ‘think big’ but proceed thoughtfully and carefully. While the following actions are set out as a step-by-step progression, they are not necessarily linear. Building relationships, for example, is a continual process. The work should begin, evolve and begin again by building new relationships. City Council also must monitor progress and continue to listen and learn at *all* stages of its work. The actions to pursue include:

- Create ownership
- Raise awareness
- Build relationships
- Gather information
- Set goals and targets
- Take action
- Monitor progress
- Listen and learn.

Create Ownership

City Council can play several key roles as leader, champion, exemplary employer, investor, convener and partner.

It should make a commitment to championing this Social Vision. In order to create ownership for this vision, City Council should establish a governance structure for coordinating and monitoring the overall effort. Each flagship initiative that is pursued (Appendix A) could have its own governance structure and/or advisory committee.

City Council should be open to new solutions and allow staff to be creative with respect to the interventions in which they engage and the reinvestments they make. It should continue to require clear and regular reporting.

Raise Awareness

There is growing recognition that the improvement of social well-being is not simply the purview of the social sector – or even governments. It is in the interest of every individual and organization in the community to ensure the conditions for healthy, well-educated and engaged citizens – just like a clean environment benefits all individuals and a buoyant economy is positive for the entire community. It is in the common interest, and therefore a shared responsibility, to strengthen all three legs – social, economic and environmental – of the sustainable development stool.

Build Relationships

An essential early step is to build relationships with other sectors and partners. Strong and caring communities start with the citizen as the base. In fact, citizens collectively create the social fabric when they invest their time and resources in the community.

Many of the bonds created in communities arise from informal contacts and relationships formed among neighbours on the same block or parents of children in the same classroom. The process of building relationships means that the community is building its ‘social capital,’ which is created when people come together out of a shared purpose that goes beyond individual benefits. The social capital arising from these relationships adds to the resilience of individuals, families and the entire community.

There is growing recognition of the value of social capital. It has been found to contribute to health and well-being in significant ways. People with strong networks tend to be more successful in their careers and live longer. The same holds for communities and societies in which there are

overlapping networks of formal and informal relationships. Individuals in communities and societies with high social capital tend to be more prosperous, healthier and experience less crime. In the case of safe cities, in particular, Jane Jacobs pointed out in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* the need for many “eyes on the street.”

We are beginning to understand some of the implications of this research. It means that there is a need to create or support opportunities for people to come together for social, educational, recreational or cultural purposes. It also means that there is value in fostering partnerships among various organizations and sectors, particularly among those that may not have worked together in the past.

Local governments can foster social capital by acting as a bridge among neighbourhoods, community organizations and social institutions, and by convening citizens and representatives from diverse sectors in local dialogue. They can encourage the building of a shared vision for the community.

In pursuit of this Social Vision, City Council should work closely with groups and organizations that comprise the social sector and that foster the social well-being of the community. But it also should expand the network of stakeholders involved in social issues to include citizens, business, educational institutions at all levels, health organizations, the arts community, the recreation sector, and the federal and provincial governments. It is essential to bring together the best minds, skills and resources – all the available assets – to tackle complex social challenges.

Gather Information

As this Social Vision becomes translated into action, it will be essential to build the work upon the best available evidence and information. The challenges, possible causes and correlates must be clearly understood along with various models that have worked effectively in addressing these issues. The most informed insight is required into the know-what, know-why and know-how of the concerns to be tackled.

Set Goals and Targets

One of the key tasks in undertaking a Social Vision is to identify clear goals and measurable targets that City Council strives to achieve. A set of indicators also is required to determine if action is being taken in the right direction and, if so, whether it is moving quickly enough.

In pursuit of this Social Vision, City Council should undertake several flagship initiatives, to be determined in collaboration with citizens and community organizations. These flagships are presented as possible examples of places to start and are not intended to provide an exhaustive list of

all possible initiatives. The governing structure created to oversee this Social Vision should ensure that major targets and associated indicators for tracking progress are developed. It should build upon the work currently under way as part of the Vision 2020 Sustainability Indicators project in which many Hamilton citizens have been actively involved.

Take Action

i. On Its Own

There are two kinds of action upon which City Council can embark. It can take action on its own and it can move forward with a variety of partners.

The City of Hamilton can play a lead role by acting as exemplary employer and by ensuring that its policies and practices are responsive to the family needs of its employees. This role is described in Appendix A.

City Council also can make an important difference by delivering more effectively many of the services it currently provides. The new City of Hamilton delivers a range of services including child care, social assistance, public health, arts and culture, and recreational programs. In some areas, the City provides these services directly. In other areas, such as child care, a mix of providers is involved and the City allocates funding to help deliver these services.

There is extensive evidence – much of it developed by Hamilton-based researchers – regarding the value of integrated service models. It is a far more effective means of serving the needs of children and families. It is also more efficient in that it eliminates duplication of assessment procedures.

Other jurisdictions, such as the cities of Edmonton and New York as well as the province of Saskatchewan, are moving in this direction. In Hamilton, some important integration has begun with respect to children's services in the areas of language and speech services. The City also has coordinated a range of services for families on social assistance with young children. Much more could be done in this area – moving together a range of public health, recreational, cultural and social services.

The City of Hamilton can take the lead to promote inclusion. Some groups face barriers that exclude them from participating in the community – both physically and socially. The first step in building an inclusive community is to ensure that all members are able to move freely and engage in its social, economic and cultural life. There is a growing body of evidence that points to the negative effects of exclusion in terms of anti-social behaviour, violence and unsafe neighbourhoods.

The inclusion agenda is broad in scope. It can begin by efforts to open the door – literally.

Barrier-free design is the starting point for inclusion. This design is essential not only for persons with disabilities but for all community members. As the population ages, barrier-free design will become increasingly important. In fact, it should be the norm – not the exception. Ramps and curb cuts are helpful for seniors, for persons who need help walking and for caregivers pushing baby strollers. Low telephones can be accessed not only by persons in wheelchairs but also by young children. Large typeface is accommodating for all – including the growing numbers whose eyesight and hair colour are fading.

But the lens of inclusion checks for more than physical entry. It also checks for the ability to pay. Programs and facilities must ensure participation by all members.

In recent years, the City has charged user fees for many local facilities and services, such as hockey rinks and swimming lessons. It has had to introduce or raise these fees because of cash pressures that all local governments, including the City of Hamilton, face as a result of increased responsibilities for services with no additional financing. These fees make it difficult for many residents to participate in recreational and cultural programs. Entry fees may prevent many families from partaking in community activities, such as arts festivals, music or sports events, or cultural celebrations. Programs billed as ‘community events’ often exclude many members.

There is growing evidence that community events and celebrations – such as festivals, parades and block parties – are important to communities not just because they are fun. These celebrations build social capital. They help keep neighbours in touch with each other and reinforce the networks and associations that make neighbourhoods strong. These events are a vital means of creating community ‘glue,’ which strengthens and secures the social fabric. The citizens of Hamilton should be asked to help resolve this dilemma: the need to pay for these amenities and special events while at the same time ensure access for all.

It is also important to encourage citizens and key organizations to become involved in shaping this Social Vision and in working on selected flagship initiatives. In some ways, the engagement of citizens is easier said than done. Many members of the community have not played an active role in the past and may not believe that they can make a meaningful contribution to this process. In other cases, the time crunch that most families are experiencing these days makes it difficult to squeeze volunteer or community work into their already full schedules. Still others cannot afford to participate in community discussions because of travel or child care costs.

New ways should be sought to engage all citizens of Hamilton in discussing the social issues that concern all families and neighbourhoods. Efforts also should be made to involve young people and new Canadians, in particular, who often do not participate in (or get the opportunity to join) public discussions.

It is also important to reduce barriers to participation – by providing, for example, supervised child care during public consultations or meetings, soup and sandwiches (for the children as well) if these meetings are held at or near meal time, or a small payment to cover travel and child care costs. The possibility of making translators available at designated meetings also might be considered in order to encourage the participation of new Canadians or others who may require interpretation services – e.g., persons with hearing impairments.

While there are significant steps that City Council can take to tackle difficult social issues and improve the well-being of all community members, it cannot implement this Social Vision on its own. The participation of all sectors is essential to its success. Here City Council can play an important role as convener of the players with whom it can collaborate.

ii. With Partners

The second stream of action in respect of this Social Vision involves collaborative work with partners. These efforts are broader in scope than the single projects typically undertaken to tackle social problems. Ideally, these efforts will embody the following features:

- Address a range of issues as opposed to a single focus.
- Embody an holistic rather than compartmentalized approach.
- Involve a multisectoral process.
- Take a long-term perspective.
- Assume a preventive and developmental, rather than remedial, focus.
- Invest in community process as well as outcomes.
- Minimize duplication of effort by integrating and coordinating existing administrative structures wherever possible.

Several possible flagship initiatives are outlined in Appendix A. The initiatives presented are not intended to address all of the important issues related to social development nor to present all of the valuable work currently under way in the City of Hamilton. Rather, they are meant to illustrate the possible ways of tackling social challenges. They include efforts related to children and families, skills development and decent affordable housing. Each flagship initiative will be unique because it will be shaped by citizens and diverse sectors. But generally, the following steps should be taken:

Preparatory Work:

- Identify the broad issues or concerns to be addressed.
- Involve community members in framing the identified issues and exploring possible approaches.

- Convene a multi-organizational or multisectoral steering group to take responsibility for providing leadership and direction, informing the community and coordinating the activity.
- Ensure that there is a strong champion who will stand up for the issue and represent it in all venues, or provide such leadership when it is not otherwise available.
- Ensure that there is a single group or organization (if different from the champion) recognized by all members as the community lead on the issue, assuming that role if circumstances require.

Specific Actions:

- Seek information that helps clarify the identified issue in terms of key correlates and explanatory factors.
- Seek information and expertise on intervention models and initiatives that have been developed in the City of Hamilton and/or tried successfully in other communities.
- Share with citizens and community groups the information gathered and action taken around the creation of a coordinating mechanism.
- Set goals and targets as well as associated indicators to determine progress toward these goals.
- Identify the resources and contributions that each group and organization is prepared to bring to the table – including funds, staff time, space, equipment, knowledge and expertise, networks and publicity. Seek additional resources and raise funds if required.
- Be prepared to do things differently and afford City staff the opportunity to change practice, reinvest resources and make new alliances as needed.
- Identify and seek to reduce or remove policy barriers, such as municipal bylaws that prohibit the establishment of small businesses in certain areas.
- Monitor and assess progress on an ongoing basis.

Monitor Progress

As City Council embarks upon this Social Vision, it should work with the community and selected groups to monitor progress toward the achievement of the overall goals as well as those that comprise the flagship initiatives. The City should identify the desired targets and determine progress on the basis of selected indicators.

It is essential to recognize the substantial work under way in Canada and internationally on the development of indicators. In fact, the City of Hamilton is a world leader in this area; the Vision 2020 Sustainability Indicators project has devised a range of indicators which can be tapped for this Social Vision. The project identifies the actions that citizens, governments, business and the voluntary sector can take to improve the various measures.

The City of Hamilton also should draw upon the Quality of Life work being carried out by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other cities. The Quality of Life Reporting System helps communities, including local governments, see how they are faring on various indicators of economic and social well-being. The Reporting System sets some baseline measures to pinpoint the areas that communities can work to improve.

There are other important monitoring activities under way at the local level. Both the Hamilton District Health Council and the Social and Public Health Services Department assess and report on the health and well-being of the Hamilton community and service delivery system on an annual basis. The Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) and the Regional Office of Human Resources Development Canada produce key data on local issues, such as the SPRC's report on homelessness and its well-being index and HRDC's reports on labour market trends. Discussion is under way regarding the potential for the collaborative production and dissemination of several of these products.

While clear targets in respect of goals should be sought, much of the work involves fostering citizen engagement in tackling common concerns. Ideally, the selected outcomes will include a problem-solving mechanism that mobilizes diverse sectors of the community to tackle complex issues. It is essential to recognize the value of this 'process' work.

Listen and Learn

Learning is far more than an educational process in which individuals and groups acquire new knowledge. It is actually a form of community development in which members engage actively around issues that affect their lives. The problem-solving process set in motion as part of this Social Vision will provide an opportunity for the entire community to learn new ways of tackling its social concerns and improving its social well-being – together.

Next Steps

There are several next steps in this process. First, it is important to secure City Council's commitment to this Social Vision – not simply to its words, but to its spirit. This Social Vision represents a positive and essential investment in the citizens of Hamilton.

Second, meetings should be held in the community to discuss the elements of this Social Vision. The purpose of these meetings is to enable conversation about social investment to move beyond the groups and organizations typically engaged in these discussions. A Social Vision needs to be embraced by the broader community.

Finally, the Human Services Managers Group should identify the priority areas around which it recommends action be taken. It may decide to select one or two flagship initiatives. Alternatively, it could determine that the community is ready to move at a faster pace. The Group should seek community feedback on its decision. It can demonstrate, through its actions, the principle of listening and learning.

Appendix A: Flagship Initiatives

This Social Vision requires the engagement of many players and sectors in order to tackle a range of complex social issues. Three possible flagship initiatives that may be undertaken as part of this Social Vision are described here. The purpose of the flagship initiatives is to present concrete and practical ideas for tackling the complex challenges that the City faces. The proposed initiatives do not represent an exhaustive list of possible actions; they are illustrative examples and are intended as a starting point. While the proposed methods are based on a review of major documents and interviews with key informants, they are by no means a comprehensive environmental scan of all the activities currently taking place in Hamilton.

The three possible flagship initiatives relate to children and families, skills development and affordable housing. While other possible areas of intervention are identified later, these three themes are discussed at length for several reasons.

Key respondents frequently identified these areas as priority issues. The City of Hamilton and other community groups are already involved in these areas and are in an excellent position to pursue them more substantially. Each area in itself is a pivotal ‘entry point’ to addressing a range of related concerns.

There are serious and growing problems in the City of Hamilton with respect to the well-being of children. But a rich and extensive body of research on the early years tells us that many difficulties can be avoided or reversed with effective and early intervention. Investment in the next generation is also the centerpiece of the concept of sustainable development, which has guided much of the City’s strategic planning over the years. The City of Hamilton already has the makings of a blueprint to carry forward in this area.

Skills development was identified as a second flagship initiative because it is intrinsic to the economic success of individual households. It is also crucial to the economic health of the region. The City of Hamilton has just completed an Economic Development Plan which identifies the key clusters that act as the drivers of the economy. The success of these drivers requires skilled workers.

Affordable housing was selected as the third possible flagship area. There is substantial work under way in the City of Hamilton with respect to affordable housing and the associated problem of homelessness. But there is still a lot to do, especially because decent affordable housing is one of the best ways to help low-income households.

But City Council may decide, in collaboration with the citizens of Hamilton and selected partners, that other areas should be pursued as well. These may be undertaken in conjunction with, subsequent to or instead of the three identified areas. Other possible flagship initiatives may focus

upon youth, new Canadians, supports for independent living, crime prevention and neighbourhood improvement.

While there is no single method or formula for undertaking any of these flagship initiatives, some general steps can be identified. The first task is to get City Council's house in order by ensuring that its policies and practices are supportive of the identified effort. It is important to create a coordinating mechanism or some other governance structure to take responsibility for the initiative.

It is also essential to raise awareness among members of the community about the nature of the concern being addressed and the City's desire to tackle the challenge in collaboration with partners. This process actually should be undertaken at several points in any given effort even though it is discussed here as a single discrete action.

Other important steps include gathering information that helps clarify an issue and seeking guidance from models that have been tried successfully in the City of Hamilton or other communities. The members of the governance structure charged with responsibility for the effort must work together, in collaboration with the community, to set goals and targets. They also must identify suitable indicators to help determine progress toward these goals.

The resources and contributions that each group and organization is prepared to bring to the table – including funds, staff time, knowledge and expertise, space, equipment, networks and publicity – should be determined. Additional funds should be raised if required. Accountability is crucial; the progress of any effort must be monitored and assessed on an ongoing basis.

Children and Families

Goal

To ensure that all children have the best possible start in life by meeting their basic needs and by providing a range of opportunities for physical, intellectual, emotional and social development.

Why Do This?

Children are the most precious resource of any community – and must be carefully nurtured. This flagship initiative will focus on the challenges of early childhood development for children ages 0 to 6.

The first few years of life are critical for brain development and affect children's subsequent performance at school and, eventually, in the job market. The conditions of the early childhood years, including prenatal development, influence significantly a person's chances throughout life.

The focus on the early years is not intended to minimize, in any way, the needs of older children. Children and youth require appropriate supports at all phases of their lives. Similar initiatives might well be developed for other age groups.

Children who do not receive the nutrition and stimulation necessary for good development in the earliest months and years of life may have difficulty overcoming deficits later on. Research evidence has found that the effects of disadvantage on children can be reduced by a number of careful interventions, such as good prenatal health and adequate nutrition of the mother; good perinatal health and adequate nutrition of the child; bonding of the child with a nurturing caregiver; positive, encouraging discipline; opportunities for learning experiences in the home and community, especially early childhood education; and positive value being placed on learning and education by the caregiver. Ideally, these would be the experience of all children. Research also has found that high-quality child care can lead to better outcomes such as improved adjustment to school, academic success, higher level of school completed, fewer arrests and fewer people requiring social services and income supports.

In short, investment in early childhood nutrition, stimulation and development is a crucial preventive measure and is essential under even the best of circumstances. But current circumstances unfortunately have not been the best. The 1993-97 infant mortality rate for Hamilton, for example, is higher than that of Ontario and Canada overall. The premature birth rate is on the rise; the singleton premature birth rate rose from 5.7 percent in 1991 to 6.4 percent in 1997.

More low birth weight babies are born in the Hamilton region than the provincial average. Very low birth weight babies experience developmental problems. Difficulties in school, in particular, often continue into adolescence and a large proportion of these babies require special education services in later years.

In 1998, 16.3 percent of households in Hamilton were single-parent families. The number of single parents living in poverty was higher in Hamilton than in Ontario and throughout the country.

There is a serious lack of high-quality affordable child care in the City of Hamilton, especially in rural parts of the region. There are not enough infant spaces, and an inadequate supply of toddler, preschool and school age spaces. There is a lack of licensed child care for shift workers, parents who work on weekends and parents experiencing a short-term emergency. Between the 109 nonprofit programs, 21 commercial operators and three home child care agencies, there are only enough licensed child care spaces for six percent of children under age 12. The services that do exist must reflect more adequately the City of Hamilton's growing ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity as well as the needs of Aboriginal members of the community.

There are major child welfare problems in Hamilton. The number of children taken into care by Children's Aid Societies throughout Ontario used to rise at an annual rate of 3 to 5 percent. But in the past three years, the rate of increase has been growing by 35 percent province-wide (more than 10 percent a year). In the City of Hamilton, the number of children taken into care by the Children's Aid Society jumped by 25 percent in the past 12 months. The removal of children from their homes into the custody of child welfare authorities generally is a last-resort measure after all other interventions have failed. It is a bellwether of deep problems in families and neighbourhoods.

On a less disquieting but equally serious note, there are subtle signs that the community's children may be losing ground. The scores of City of Hamilton Grade 3 students on provincial tests were average relative to overall scores for the province. But by Grade 6, the educational scores of these students had fallen below the provincial average. At last count (1995), Hamilton had a poverty rate of 21.9 percent compared to 17.7 percent for Ontario and 19.7 percent in Canada in that year. This is serious for children, in particular, because of the strong link between poverty and school failure. These signs call not only for vigilance but also for action.

Possible Plan of Action

Review employment policies

The first responsibility is to act as a model for the community. City Council should review its own employment policies to ensure that these are responsive to the family needs of its employees. These include flexible working arrangements, job sharing and unpaid leaves of absence for family reasons. It is essential to recognize that parents may need to take time occasionally for children's medical appointments and for attendance at school events. It is also important to minimize the excessive scheduling of meetings during family time on evenings and weekends.

Create coordinating mechanism

At the current time, no single organization is clearly responsible for organizing efforts to ensure the well-being of all children. Over the past year, the Hamilton Early Years Initiative has begun to address this pressing concern. Established through Order-in-Council by the Ontario Government in the fall of 2001, the Hamilton Early Years Steering Committee was charged with mobilizing the community around early childhood development.

The Committee recently completed an extensive research and consultation process culminating in the release of *Start Smart: The Hamilton Early Years Mobilization Plan*. The report recognizes the diverse initiatives in this area currently under way. It also notes that many groups and organizations are already coordinating their efforts to better serve young children and their families.

What is lacking, however, “is an overall coordinated and integrated approach to the early years – a common vision with agreed-upon strategic directions, broad-based community support, agreed-upon desired outcomes and commitment to work toward achieving them.”

The consultation undertaken as part of the Early Years Initiative proposed that the City of Hamilton take the lead role in coordinating the community response to early childhood development. It should work with other government bodies, such as the provincial ministries responsible for family and children’s services, education and health; social service organizations involved with children and families; and the wider community. The City has the authority and stature required to work with many partners as well as a scope of responsibility in this area not matched by other potential partners.

Any flagship initiative focussed upon the needs of children and families requires a mechanism to take responsibility for identifying and coordinating the actions that comprise the strategy. The group should include the City of Hamilton Social and Public Health Services, and the Division of Culture and Recreation and Parks as well as key community organizations such as school boards, the Children’s Aid Society and Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton, the Centre for the Study of Children at Risk, early childhood development programs, recreation and arts programs, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, the United Way of Burlington Hamilton-Wentworth and the Ontario Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services. Parents and the consumers of services also should be involved.

The various representatives may decide to share responsibility for chairing the initiative. However, one organization ideally should be designated as lead and prime champion.

It is important that any overarching coordinating process fully recognize the collaborative efforts under way in the community. For example, the Regional Task Force on School Age Nourishment, working with the Social and Public Health Services Department and the Hamilton Community Foundation, set a direction for the development of all nourishment programs in the region. The preschool initiative for speech pathology brought together health, education and social services. Some elements of the Children’s Vision Document with its children’s report card, promoted by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth and the Hamilton District Health Council, have been incorporated into Vision 2020, the sustainable development framework for the City.

The Family Resource Centre Coordination Project, with funding support from the City of Hamilton, has enabled family resource centres to work together at expanding services and avoiding duplication of efforts. The Integration Resources Hub project has established a collaborative effort to promote the inclusion of children with special needs in child care settings. This model could be applied to other communities across the province. All of these initiatives serve as strong foundations upon which a comprehensive coordinating process can build.

Engage citizens

Numerous conferences, reports and meetings already have pointed out the importance of investing in all children and tackling more effectively the needs of vulnerable children. But many of these discussions are held among persons who already are aware of the issues. The City should spearhead a public education program that informs other community groups about the importance of preventive action in the early years – for all children.

In addition to raising awareness about the importance of investing in the early years, this Social Vision calls for the active engagement of citizens in proposing actions to improve the well-being of children. One possible method is to set up small discussion groups or study circles to identify the strengths and concerns of the neighbourhood as seen through the eyes of residents. Guidelines are available on how to conduct these kinds of study circles in order to meaningfully engage community members.

These groups ideally would involve a mix of people to share their views and figure out ways to support each other – e.g., through the supervision of safe play. Hamilton residents also may want to organize neighbourhood events such as arts festivals, cultural events, community play days, educational sessions or potluck dinners. These events could have the effect of strengthening the social fabric of the neighbourhood and the context within which community members together help raise ‘their children.’

Gather information on exemplary models

There are countless exemplary programs for children including those run under the auspices of Healthy Babies/Healthy Children (a province-wide program of infant screening and targeted home visiting for high-risk families and children in which the City of Hamilton participates), the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, the Community Action Program for Children and family literacy projects, such as the Family Literacy Advisory Group. Other interesting models are worth noting as well.

The City of London, Ontario, is working in partnership with the federal and provincial governments as well as local school boards and other community organizations to meet the health and learning needs of children. Individual neighbourhoods identify the issues they want to tackle; current projects focus on safety, educational needs, school breakfast programs and family events.

Another exemplary model is ‘Success by 6,’ in place in more than 200 communities throughout North America. Success by 6 focusses upon five objectives in addressing early childhood development: supporting parents, ensuring healthy babies, promoting early learning programs, protecting children from abuse and neglect, and supporting neighbourhoods. Initiated by

the United Way, Success by 6 is not a single program and is neither funded nor owned by a single organization. Rather, the initiative builds partnerships among the public, private and voluntary sectors to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development. It seeks to enhance collaboration among service providers, and raises money over and above United Way campaigns in order to increase investment in services known to make a difference in child development.

Commit to a Municipal Children's Strategy

The City of Hamilton already has embarked on important work in this area, emerging from the *Connections for Kids* report. It should review this strategy and re-commit itself to a Municipal Children's Strategy, a draft of which had been prepared in 1999. The Strategy made reference to the need for coordination, both within and between City departments, in the design, funding and delivery of children's services. The City should take steps to maintain and strengthen partnerships with other levels of government as well as boards of education, service providers, researchers and local businesses.

Integrate services

Another important action that can be taken in the short term is to integrate more effectively the range of programs currently provided for children and families. In recent years, important steps have been taken by the City's Department of Social and Public Health Services. The Department has been restructured to integrate more fully the policies and programs pertaining to child care, public health, social assistance and other social services.

Despite these changes, children's issues still tend to be divided into discrete categories such as public health, primary health, long-term care, schools, child care, social services (both local and provincial), corrections agencies, charities, recreation and leisure, food and shelter, and social assistance. This fragmentation seriously impedes progress in meeting children's needs, and children's networks and programs tend to work in isolation from one another. Inadequate communication and coordination can result in service gaps and the inability of the system to respond effectively to individual and family needs. Continued efforts are needed to integrate services within and among departments at all levels of government, and between governments and community groups.

Important research findings are emerging that identify the value of service integration. Hamilton-based researcher Dr. Gina Browne and colleagues noted in a study entitled *When the Bough Breaks* the positive impact of delivering services in an integrated or holistic way, rather than through the piecemeal approach typically used. Far too many resources are spent in duplicate assessment and administration; resources are wasted through services that work against rather than with each other.

One key step is to identify all the areas in which service delivery can be integrated. The City of Hamilton delivers a range of services and programs through the Social and Public Health Services Department, and through the Division of Culture and Recreation and Parks. The integration can begin incrementally as the community already has done in many instances – e.g., the closer alliance of speech and language services for children and through cooperative work, such as Partners in Nutrition. Closer integration does not mean that the administration of these services must be combined or that organizations must amalgamate. But it does mean that any given household would go through only one intake procedure and that a single coordinating system would have responsibility for helping that family negotiate the system.

Develop preventive supports

City Council should recognize the importance of ensuring access to services for children deemed at risk of developmental delay or emotional problems. These services include prenatal nutrition programs, early screening and home visits by public health nurses to at-risk households. It also should acknowledge the need to assist – through counselling, respite care and additional assistance in the home – families at risk of neglecting or abusing their children. The *Connections for Kids* report recommended that service providers and boards of education pay particular attention to the educational, health and social needs of high-risk groups, such as adolescent mothers.

It should be noted that recreation is emerging as a central piece of the puzzle, particularly for families and children deemed to be ‘at risk.’ Dr. Gina Browne and colleagues found that recreational services alone help psychologically disordered children on social assistance maintain their social, physical and academic competence at a level equal to that of a non-disordered child. Without the services, children’s competence levels actually drop. Recreation appears to pay for itself through reduced use of health and social service, such as child psychology, social work and probation. The impact of providing recreational services alone resulted in a 10 percent greater exit from social assistance compared to the parents of children who did not receive this service.

The significance of Dr. Browne’s research has been recognized in Hamilton since 1999 when a group of youth service agencies proposed that local government subsidize culture and recreation experiences for children and youth whose parents were in receipt of social assistance. This initiative should be expanded to ensure access by all children.

Participation in sports, recreation and other leisure activities is essential for all children because these activities promote inclusion, and are associated with an enhanced quality of life through the acquisition of new skills and improved physical and psychological well-being. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that children who participate in organized activities outside school such as sports, music, the arts or clubs tend to have higher self-esteem, interact better with friends and perform somewhat better in school. Recreation and the arts

are as integral to this Social Vision as are social services. From a health perspective, recreation is especially important in reversing the growing problem of child obesity and diabetes.

Community-based supports for families are essential to help prevent problems and encourage positive development. These include high-quality affordable child care and local resource centres where parents can go for information about child development and programs for families. ‘Mom and tot’ playgroups offer important socialization opportunities for children and informal support for parents. Respite through formal services or informal means, such as babysitting co-operatives, can provide crucial occasional relief for caregivers. Toy and book lending libraries make available important resources for low-income families. The newly announced Ontario Early Years Centres will provide further support to these many positive initiatives.

Promote school as hub

Schools are convenient centres for service provision and awareness because children come to school every day, often accompanied by parents. Many families see the school as a place to get help and schools can share a wide range of facilities. Services for students can be accessed during school hours with little disruption to their studies. The school facilitates the delivery of services in one safe and familiar place rather than having students travel in all directions to seek support. With the joint or adjacent location of services, various agencies are able to communicate and work together, share ideas and resources.

This view is reinforced in the recent *Convergence* report by Dr. Gina Browne and colleagues, who note the central role of schools in ensuring the well-being of children. The researchers propose that education services, in partnership with health, welfare and recreation services, should promote social, emotional and behavioural well-being as part of all children’s healthy development and total education. They further recommend that universal, early intervention and culturally sensitive mental health promotion services be co-located within the educational sector and should include supports for those with intense and long-term needs.

While schools are well situated to act as service hubs, other neighbourhood agencies, such as family resource centres and recreation centres, may play that role in some neighbourhoods. The concept of service hub should be applied flexibly and in ways that build upon existing community capacity.

Help build strong neighbourhoods

Strong neighbourhoods are an important foundation for healthy children and families. One possible focus of a flagship initiative is to build a stronger sense of community in selected neighbourhoods. With most parents involved in paid work and with many adults engaged in caregiving – either of children, aging parents or both – most families face serious time pressures.

Part of this work can focus on encouraging neighbours to make connections so that families feel rooted in a caring and supportive environment. Possible activities may involve the creation of family resource centres, play groups and family reading circles. Other actions include the organization of community events such as cultural festivals, sports activities or theme days to help neighbours get to know one another and collaborate on common projects that create a more healthy environment for all. Neighbours may work together to build a playground for children or organize a community clean-up to ensure a more healthy environment.

The neighbourhood also may decide to focus upon a common concern, such as establishing a community garden or setting up a good food box program to ensure access to high-quality food at affordable prices. They may organize weekly potluck dinners for families to promote neighbourhood ties while providing nutritious and reasonably priced meals.

Neighbourhoods can help one another as well. They can share success stories and provide each other with support in undertaking effective initiatives.

Identify key indicators

The initiative will identify several key indicators to help determine whether any of the selected interventions are having any impact upon children, families, specific neighbourhoods and the broader community. The precise indicators will vary depending upon the interventions that the community ultimately decides to pursue.

There already has been some important work in this area that can serve as a foundation for this choice. A notable example is the ‘Keeping Score on Kids’ project spearheaded by Dr. Dan Offord and colleagues at the Hamilton-based Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk. The School Readiness to Learn Project, undertaken as a partnership between the Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and the City of Hamilton’s Early Years Initiative, also could provide useful indicators of child development. The Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk has received funding from the Ontario government to implement the Early Development Instrument.

Other sources upon which this flagship initiative could draw are the Well-being Index developed by the Hamilton Social Planning and Research Council, the Hamilton-based Vision 2020 Sustainability Indicators project and the national Quality of Life measures developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Possible indicators include, for example, the percentage of lone-parent families, rate of infant mortality, percentage of low birth weight babies, teen fertility rate per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19, measures of school readiness and extent of participation in recreational activities.

Monitor progress

The coordinating mechanism responsible for the initiative should set out a proposed plan of action based on the possible areas of intervention identified above. The plan should be reviewed with selected community groups and modified based on their feedback. The coordinating mechanism also is responsible for developing a strategy to monitor and share information on the progress.

Skills Development

Goals

To ensure that the knowledge and skills of workers match the needs of the core clusters of the Hamilton economy.

To assist workers who have been marginalized from the labour market gain access to opportunities for meaningful employment.

Why Do This?

The City of Hamilton faces high rates of unemployment. This was not always the case. The local economy weathered some profound transitions throughout the 1990s. In 1998, the region had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country and ranked first in employment growth among Ontario's 10 Census Metropolitan Areas.

But since the first quarter of 2001, employment in the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) has contracted. In the first quarter of 2002, there were 334,700 people employed in the Hamilton CMA compared with 352,900 people in the first quarter of 2001, a decline of 18,200 workers. By contrast, employment in Canada grew over the same period by 155,400. Youth participation in the Hamilton labour market has dropped as well. Higher unemployment is reflected in an 11 percent increase in Employment Insurance claims last year (2001).

The City faces problems related not only to the numbers of jobs. It also must deal with concerns around the numbers of available workers. Hamilton's net migration and natural growth rates tend to lag behind other high growth communities such as Peel, York, Waterloo and Halton. The Hamilton labour market reproduces itself just slightly less than on a one-to-one basis. Labour shortages are predicted for coming years.

In its *Environmental Scan 2001*, the Hamilton-Wentworth Training Board found growing evidence of a skills mismatch in the region. The expertise of the current labour force – those currently employed as well as those seeking work – does not match the region’s knowledge and skill requirements in the coming years. Moreover, employment service agencies anticipate shortages in the skilled trades unless greater efforts are made to recruit and train such workers. There is also a skills gap, which refers to the inability to meet current skill requirements in terms of basic math, ‘soft skills,’ language competency and technological skills.

In addition to a skills problem, many groups face higher than average rates of unemployment. Persons with disabilities often find that there is little or no accommodation of their special needs. Many more would be able to work if they could get in the door or if they had access to required equipment or assistance. New Canadians face barriers to work because skills and experience acquired offshore often are not recognized in this country. Workplace discrimination also poses a significant barrier to the efforts of new Canadians to secure employment and advance up the job ladder.

Many young people have problems just getting a toehold in the labour market because they lack work experience – something difficult to gain if they are not hired. Despite current and pending labour shortages, there is still a shortage of employment and training opportunities for youth.

While there are some complex challenges, there are also many strengths in the local economy. The City of Hamilton has adopted a new Economic Development Plan which identifies the key clusters that will act as the engines of local economic development. The challenge is to meet the human resource requirements of these clusters. The Hamilton-Wentworth Training Board has noted that recruitment efforts would be greatly enhanced by building relationships that create collaborative, community-wide recruitment strategies. Here the City has some work to do.

Possible Plan of Action

Review employment policies

The first step that City Council can take to tackle the skills development challenge is to act as exemplary employer. It first must get its ‘own house in order,’ which means examining its own training and employment practices so that it sets an example for other employers in the region. Wages and benefits should be reviewed to ensure that the City itself is not contributing to the ranks of the working poor.

City Council also should seek to provide employment opportunities for those who typically have a hard time breaking into the labour market. It must accommodate the needs of workers with disabilities and afford sufficient employment opportunities to new Canadians. With respect to

young people, in particular, the City can offer mentoring, create internship positions and accept students for co-op placements.

For City employees, it is important to make provisions, such as flexible work hours, that allow them to balance the demands of work and family. In addition, employees should be encouraged to contribute to their community. As an employer, the City can support volunteerism by allowing workers a set number of paid hours per month for community service.

Finally, the knowledge economy requires all employees to engage in training on an ongoing basis. Such training is not simply nice to do; it is essential in a knowledge economy. The City of Hamilton can ensure that it provides opportunities for staff training and upgrading. This investment in human resources is consistent with its newly released Statement of Mission and Goals.

Create coordinating mechanism

As in any flagship initiative upon which the City embarks, it will need to create some form of coordinating mechanism to take responsibility for the issue. Ideally, this mechanism will be a multisectoral group that includes business (individual companies, sectoral councils and umbrella organizations), labour, McMaster University, community colleges, the Social and Public Health Services Department, the federal and provincial governments, the Hamilton-Wentworth Training Board, employment agencies such as the Citizen Action Group, anti-poverty groups, the Settlement and Integration Services Organization and groups representing persons with disabilities. It is clear that many Hamilton-based organizations already are actively involved in this area and have substantial expertise and experience to bring to the table.

One organization among the diverse players must take the lead and agree to act as champion for the issue. For example, in the case of the Partners for Jobs initiative (described below), the City of Ottawa played the role of convener and lead player for the first 18 months of the project.

A recently released report on skills development entitled *HR Matters* details the challenges facing the Hamilton community and sets out proposed actions. A group already has begun to take action in this area and needs to be engaged in any expanded efforts in order to avoid duplication.

Engage citizens

This Social Vision calls for the active engagement of citizens in proposing actions for enhancing skills development. One possible method is to set up small discussion groups or study circles to identify specific gaps related to skills development and ways to address them.

In Ottawa, the Social Services Department formed a Poverty Task Force as a vehicle for low-income residents to identify practical challenges related to poverty. The City provided financial assistance for its operation and engaged community developers associated with neighbourhood centres to support the work of low-income groups. This process resulted in a range of policy and program recommendations, many of which have received support from the City. A modified version of the Task Force became an advisory group to the newly amalgamated local government.

A similar process could be designed to obtain the input of workers, prospective workers and other stakeholders concerned with skills development. Nonprofit agencies, labour unions and business councils could serve as organizers, engaging their respective networks to provide ongoing guidance to the skills development initiative.

Gather data on local labour market

As in other possible flagship initiatives, it is essential to base this work on a solid understanding of key challenges. In the case of the labour market and human resource needs, this task is easier said than done. There are major gaps in knowledge at the local level. This is a problem not only for the City of Hamilton.

At the national level, various labour market surveys provide a picture of the country as well as a breakdown of trends for individual provinces. But it generally is not possible to disaggregate these figures to the local level. If a given city or region wants to know, for example, the extent to which its businesses are engaged in training, national data cannot be used to discern this information. The sample sizes are too small in certain regions and problems of confidentiality often arise with such application.

Yet this profile is required to devise an informed training system responsive to local labour market needs. In order to obtain relevant data, it is necessary to carry out surveys of designated sectors or groups of employers within identified clusters. The local office of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), which has responsibility for the collection, assessment and dissemination of labour market information, already has begun this process. The City, HRDC and its partners should continue this effort.

Raise awareness

City Council will need to raise awareness about the work undertaken as part of this initiative. In some ways, this task will not be difficult because employers typically have a keen interest in ensuring a pool of knowledgeable and highly skilled workers.

But it may be more challenging to persuade employers to hire workers who traditionally have been marginalized from the labour market. While Ontario Works recipients are the primary target of any skills development initiative, there are other individuals – such as Employment Insurance recipients and underemployed workers – who also could benefit from this effort. To encourage employment, it may be necessary to undertake special measures to facilitate their entry into and retention in the labour market. In many communities, links are being formed between nonprofit groups and businesses to create the range of supports that enable successful integration into the workforce.

Gather information on exemplary models

There are literally hundreds of examples of innovative training programs that can guide this work. But many communities have adopted a multisectoral approach to skills development.

One notable example is found in the City of Ottawa. It created Partners for Jobs to help tackle the problem of high unemployment and underemployment in the region. The Regional Chairman (now Mayor of Ottawa) convened a Task Force with representatives from business, labour, anti-poverty groups, education, social services, and the federal and provincial governments.

The Task Force was able to generate new forms of training, apprenticeship and job creation that never before had been tried. The welfare department and business sector worked together to develop short-term, geared-to-market training, known as ‘customized training.’ Special projects also were undertaken to recognize the skills credentials of immigrants.

The Partners for Jobs project has been highly successful in its results to date – nearly 1,300 unemployed workers were trained and in fewer than two years had found employment in various firms that comprise the key clusters of the local economy. Part of the success was due to the fact that the training was highly market-relevant. Partners for Jobs also helped participants with associated problems related to child care as well as lack of funds for transition to work and business startup.

As Partners for Jobs was under way, a major study was being carried out to identify the primary generators of the Ottawa economy, much like the economic development exercise being undertaken in the City of Hamilton. The two Ottawa-based efforts – one focussed on fighting poverty and securing basic needs, and the other concerned with developing the local economic base – subsequently have merged into a program called TalentWorks. It is headed by a high-profile multisectoral group chaired by the business community and implemented by the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation, the umbrella organization for the high-tech sector.

What began as a small project for training the hard-to-employ has evolved into a comprehensive initiative for addressing skill shortages in the major economic clusters including high tech,

biotech and photonics. The model seeks to create a world-class talent pool while meeting the needs of the unemployed and special groups, such as new Canadians and persons with disabilities.

The St. Louis, Missouri, effort in the US is another exemplary model. It created the St. Louis Regional Jobs Initiative, a collaborative effort involving more than 400 agencies, community groups, governments, businesses and unions. The initiative has developed job programs in three growth industries in the St. Louis region: construction, business services and health care.

The Seattle Office of Economic Development created the Seattle Jobs Initiative to improve economic opportunity for all citizens, especially disadvantaged workers. The effort includes customized training programs to prepare machinists for the region's aerospace industry; the 11-week 300-hour program was designed by area employers, educators and community leaders. The City also contracted with the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce to provide a brokerage service between the local workforce and employer needs.

In Philadelphia, a 200-page plan for reforming the local labour market was conceived over a 17-month period with the help of 30 organizations, representing business, public agencies, nonprofit groups and philanthropies. The purpose of the plan was to connect disadvantaged workers to well-paying jobs as well as create new jobs.

It is important to note that these efforts cannot succeed as a whole unless they have strong components. Existing training and employment programs with a solid track record for successful results must play a leading role in these initiatives. In Hamilton, for example, during fiscal years 2000-01 and 2001-02, the Citizen Action Group found work for 1,250 individuals and placed an additional 325 persons in further training and education. These programs form the foundation upon which to build broader community-wide initiatives.

Identify specific projects

The multisectoral coordinating body first should establish a clear understanding of the priority areas within the skills agenda. Each priority area should have associated goals, desired outcomes and targets for measuring progress. The coordinating body then should determine the specific projects to be undertaken in respect of these goals. The appropriate organizations should be engaged around these efforts. The coordinating body likely will want to broaden the scope of groups involved in each project, as appropriate.

The strategic plan ideally would include a variety of customized training projects, measures targeted toward specific groups such as new Canadians and young people, and local business development. Basic education, transitional and ongoing employment supports are also part of an effective skills development program.

To the extent possible, links should be made among the various dimensions of the skills development program. One way to promote these links is to co-locate various services in easy-to-access centres.

Develop customized training approaches

Customized training is a form of skills development that is short term and targeted toward precise job-related needs. In Canada, one exemplary model of customized training has been developed by the Winnipeg-based Opportunities for Employment, a nonprofit organization created in 1996. The program works primarily with social assistance recipients and beneficiaries of Employment Insurance.

Under this program, job vacancies are sought by job developers who foster close working relationships with local employers. The employers for which training programs have been developed include furniture manufacturers, hotels, insurance firms, call centres, food services, and food producers and manufacturers. Training courses are based on the specific needs of the employers. Courses typically are short term, ranging from three days to a maximum six weeks.

The Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF) in Toronto is another example of an organization that employs customized training. It serves an estimated 5,000 clients a year, about half of whom are involved in LEF training programs. The program claims an 80 percent success rate, with participants remaining in their jobs for a minimum six-month period.

The Learning Enrichment Foundation provides an integrated package of services that includes job search, training, business incubation to support the development of small business, job placement and work-related supports, such as child care. Within this broad spectrum of programs, LEF offers customized training in four streams: computer applications, industrial skills, child care and language skills. Training in computer software also is offered to help participants fill administrative positions in a wide range of firms.

There are several successful models of customized training in the US. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a nonprofit organization called 'IndEx Inc.' combines on-site training with work experience in local industrial plants. On a given day, participants spend four hours in the classroom and four hours on the shop floor performing light manufacturing work. Training consists of a 30-day program that teaches basic skills and some educational upgrading, and a 60-day program specializing in electronics and telecommunications. The program has been particularly effective for social assistance recipients with limited schooling and work skills.

Another interesting example is located in Philadelphia. When its Convention Center began development in the 1980s, the authority responsible for the project created a \$10 million, ten-year

Education and Training Fund financed by bonds and hotel tax revenues. The Fund was set up to support short-term, specialized training in the hospitality industry to ensure sufficient numbers of skilled workers for the 4,500 permanent jobs that the Convention Center was slated to create.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security has responsibility for human resource and job training. It established the Arizona Business Initiatives Partnership to help the Department get more detailed information on the skills required in various industries and to develop closer ties with employers. Through the partnership, the Department is able to identify the skills base for designated industries including electronic assembly, health care, restaurant, retail and teleservices. Employers are then engaged to assist the Department develop pre-employment training programs targeted to their industry.

Increasingly in the US, employers representing the banking, electronic assembly, hospitality, retail and restaurant sectors are partnering with public agencies to support pre-employment training programs directed towards a designated industry sector. In addition to the activities of specific sectors, several individual employers have designed their own short-term training programs. The Marriott Hotel, for example, has developed a community training and employment program called 'Pathways to Independence.' United Airlines, Burger King and Borg-Warner Security Corp. are involved in similar initiatives.

Other possible approaches

In some cases, it will be essential to build basic skills prior to job training or paid employment. Programs focussed on language skills help workers learn English or French. Literacy and numeracy skills are also prerequisites to employment.

Job search involves assessing current skills, preparing résumés, self-marketing and acquiring information on job vacancies. Building skills includes academic upgrading and job training – e.g., computer training, data processing and trades, such as carpentry or electronics. Training may lead some participants to immediate jobs; in other cases, they may seek financial or technical assistance to create their own jobs.

Other efforts related to skills development involve a focus on certain population groups such as youth, women and new Canadians. Many young people, in particular, find it difficult to get a decent job. It takes work experience to get work experience.

A recent Hamilton project offers a good model for addressing the skills development needs of youth. With funding support from Human Resources Development Canada, the Labourers International Union set up a program to assist 12 at-risk youth make the link to the labour market. The youth received two weeks of training in soft skills for entry-level workers: communication skills and

industry awareness, health and safety training, craft and trade tending, and job simulation. Participants became union members on a provisional basis and were placed in entry-level jobs with local employers. At the end of their 14-week internship, eight of the 12 youth were working and five had joined the union.

Training businesses are another strategy for helping young people obtain training and work experience in such areas as food service, hospitality, lawn care, recycling, printing and car repair. The youth are paid a wage so that they earn an independent income while they learn about various aspects of running a business and acquire market-relevant skills. Many training businesses report an enhancement in participant self-esteem, leadership, and a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Entrepreneurship training is another approach proven to be particularly effective with young people. This training typically is undertaken by a nonprofit organization or by the economic development arm of local government. It is a model being promoted in Europe through the Europrise International Network of Entrepreneurship Training.

Some communities have set up loan funds to meet capital needs and the costs of space or equipment and stock. These loan funds typically are supported by a variety of sources including private donors, local businesses and community foundations. Business people often are engaged as mentors to help the youth learn the practicalities of running a business.

Job guidance is another means of helping young people find work. In the absence of much or any labour market experience, young people often need help determining where to seek employment or what education or skills training to pursue.

Training businesses also have been effective for women. The Enterprising Kitchen in Chicago, for example, enables women who lack strong employment histories the chance to work in a supportive environment while they prepare for future employment or education. Participants learn essential work habits and job skills while they are paid to assemble, package and market specialty food products.

Recent immigrants to Canada often find that the skills and expertise they acquire offshore are not recognized by Canadian employers. In this case, the solution lies not in acquiring new skills but in recognizing or upgrading the credentials they already have. City Council and the coordinating body for this project should consult with the Settlement and Integration Services Organization when determining the appropriate actions. Immigrant settlement programs can include employment counselling, referral to training and the promotion of self-employment.

The City of Milwaukee set up a training business that focusses upon training and placing (primarily Latino) community members into jobs that pay family-supporting wages. The community-based corporation – Esperanza Unida, Inc. (Spanish for ‘United Hope’) – operates seven training and job placement businesses including an auto repair shop, child care centre, commercial

printing and graphic arts centre, customer call service centre, housing and construction company, metal fabrication shop, and coffee shop and bookstore.

Mentorship programs have had considerable success, particularly for new Canadians involved in professions and skilled trades. The Skills for Change Mentorship Program in Toronto, for example, successfully matched employed engineers with immigrants seeking work in that field. The mentorship pairs met regularly to link prospective employees to job opportunities.

Partners for Jobs undertook several projects focussed upon this group. It provided support for a job fair organized by World Skills, a nonprofit agency that helps skilled immigrants find employment. The opportunity for contact between prospective employers and employees resulted in many successful employment matches. Partners for Jobs also organized a project to facilitate the employment of foreign-trained teachers.

Engagement in one of the many forms of skills development is one way to square the employment equation. Other methods include the creation of work opportunities through the development of small business opportunities and co-operatives, mentoring for entrepreneurship and access to venture capital. These options are discussed below.

Provide transitional supports

Skills alone are not the entire answer to the employment puzzle. Workers who traditionally have been marginalized from the labour market often require additional assistance to make the transition to employment. It costs money to go to work – transportation for job interviews, work clothing, license to drive a vehicle for employment purposes or to operate equipment, professional dues or license fees, and equipment such as tools or protective gear.

One option is to set up a labour force transition fund to offset one-time or temporary costs. Contributions to this fund might be solicited from the voluntary and business sectors. It could be used as well by prospective employers for physical accommodation to the workplace, such as ramps, a wider washroom entrance or visual fire alarm.

A labour force transition fund also could help offset the costs of health- or disability-related special needs for a limited time. The special assistance budget within social assistance provides for these needs in the form of wheelchairs, hearing aids, prosthetic equipment, medications and assistive devices for independent living or work. Because special assistance is intended primarily for social assistance recipients, the provision of this aid virtually ties many individuals to this income program. When recipients try to move off welfare, they may lose access to vital assistance. Ideally, support would continue to be provided during a transitional period in which welfare recipients are establishing themselves in the workplace.

Ensure access to child care

Another crucial employment support is to ensure the availability of subsidized child care spaces to all participants engaged in designated skills development initiatives as well as for a specified period of employment (e.g., up to two years). Most parents – including single parents and those with preschool children – are now in the labour force. But the lack of affordable, high-quality child care has been a major barrier to training and workforce participation.

The Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF), earlier described, recognized that many prospective participants would not be able to participate in its programs – be it language, skills training or job search – unless they had access to affordable, high-quality child care. In response, LEF set up its own network of child care centres and currently operates 13 licensed centres throughout Toronto for about 650 children.

The program also trains participants as early childhood assistants. The course combines practical experience with classroom work in the areas of child development, curriculum planning, and safety and nutrition. Graduates receive a certificate as an early childhood assistant as well as certification in emergency first aid and childhood CPR. Graduates are helped to find employment in child care centres, family resource programs, drop-in centres and private families as nannies.

Identify indicators

As in the case of all flagship initiatives, the precise indicators of progress will depend upon the specific projects undertaken. Possible indicators include number of people trained, number of placements, rate of successful employment matches, rate of job retention (e.g., six-month attachment to the labour market; one-year attachment to the labour market), and changes in source and level of income.

Monitor progress

Regular reporting of evaluation findings is necessary both to maintain the participation of key stakeholders and to make adjustments to the strategies being pursued. Evaluation should be understood as a support for collaborative learning. It should highlight exemplary practices so that these can be applied more widely.

The monitoring process also should acknowledge what has not worked, emphasizing lessons learned from the experience. By sharing findings with stakeholders in a purposeful way, the coordinating mechanism can foster a culture of learning that enhances the long-term effectiveness of the initiative. Monitoring should be a tool for management, planning and network building. It can be linked to events that serve to celebrate the network and renew its efforts.

Affordable Housing

Goal

To increase the supply of affordable housing in the City of Hamilton.

To promote the availability of affordable housing through such measures as rent subsidies, funds for home improvement and assistance with the payment of the first and last months' rents.

To ensure the availability of emergency and shelter arrangements in order to reduce substantially the rate of homelessness in Hamilton.

Why Do This?

The City of Hamilton faces a serious affordable housing crisis – both with respect to the lack of decent affordable housing and high rates of homelessness.

The housing market for middle- and high-income households has been healthy. By contrast, no new rental housing units with below-average market rents have been built in Hamilton since 1996.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation measured a decline in rental vacancy in the City of Hamilton from 3.8 percent in October 1998 to 1.4 percent in October 2001. An ideal vacancy rate for the City is closer to 2 to 3 percent.

Since 1999, 3,827 new housing units have been constructed in the City, only 15 of which were intended for rental. This level falls well short of the 770 rental units required per year to meet the rental housing demand based on the City's housing projections. At the end of June 2001, 3,180 people were on the waiting list of the Community Housing Access Network. There are 450 new applications, on average, per month.

On the affordability front, an estimated 31,000 renter households – representing 47 percent of total renter households – spend 30 percent or more of their income on rental payments. About 15,500 renter households pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent payments. Average rents have increased 13 percent since 1998.

Seniors represent a growing proportion of the City's population, rising from 9 percent in 1971 to 14 percent in 1996. This group is expected to comprise a projected 22 percent of the population by 2028. Many seniors experience problems finding adequate housing and often require

associated supports to live independently. Nearly half of older Canadians experience some form of functional limitation.

As if lack of availability and affordability were not serious enough, another problem presents itself. Many members of the visible minority community face racism and discrimination, making it difficult – if not impossible – to find decent affordable housing.

On a related front, the crisis of homelessness has worsened over the years. The closure of the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital and reduction of mental health supports have exacerbated the homelessness crisis.

The number of residents staying in emergency shelters on a given night increased from 172 in 1998 to 343 in November 2001. Women's shelters turn people away on a nightly basis. Entire families are finding themselves in need of emergency shelter, often being split up in order to access existing services. The demand for emergency youth shelter is overwhelming; many young people leave home because of abuse and violence, and subsequently find themselves on the street without shelter.

Possible Plan of Action

There are three major areas around which action can be taken in pursuit of affordable housing. First, there are many actions to be pursued in respect of decent affordable housing, the cornerstone of a healthy and safe community. Second, there are numerous areas in which action has not yet been completed – or even started – around homelessness. Finally, there are several related efforts which do not focus upon physical housing but which enable independent living in the community.

Review current practices

As in all flagship initiatives, the first step is to examine City policies and practices that directly or indirectly affect the supply of affordable housing. The City already has begun to take action on this front. Its activities are identified in a recent report of the Hamilton Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative (HAHPI), described below.

The City of Hamilton is exploring the creation of a Housing Partnership Fund, intended to stimulate the supply of affordable housing. Other contributions, such as land and administrative resources, will help lever additional housing through the development of new units, the rehabilitation of current dwellings and the conversion of nonresidential buildings into residential dwellings.

Other recent actions include the introduction of the Hamilton Convert-to-Rent Program, also intended to increase the supply of affordable housing. In addition, the new Hamilton Home Emergency Repair Program will help provide emergency loans for lower-income homeowners who require immediate financial assistance for home repair.

The City has established a separate property tax class for newly constructed or converted multi-residential rental buildings of seven units or more. This measure will lower residential property taxes by about one-half for new rental housing structures.

Another important measure is the creation of the City ‘enterprise zone.’ Taxes from the increased assessment resulting from the redevelopment or improvement of properties within the limits of the Downtown Business Improvement Area are returned to the developer in the form of a grant. The City also has adopted an Environmental Remediation and Site Enhancement Community Improvement Plan to make available grants for financial relief to property owners who undertake and complete brownfield redevelopment projects.

Finally, Hamilton City Council is exploring the implementation of a ‘Consider Housing’ policy for the disposition of City-owned lands. Such a policy would mean that first consideration would be given to building housing on any municipal lands deemed surplus. Another possible improvement is a Municipal Capital Facility bylaw, which would enable the City to use property tax exemptions to stimulate the production of affordable housing.

There are other municipal actions to promote affordable housing that are not included in the HAHPI report, but would help increase the supply of affordable housing. For example, City Council might promote opportunities for boarding or might support, in certain areas, the development of secondary suites in primary residential dwellings.

Secondary suites are distinct from accommodation in a rooming house in that they typically are created in homes which the owner occupies. These suites usually are constructed by modifying basements or subdividing the upper floors of existing homes. Secondary suites often are used by seniors who require smaller accommodation or by young persons who typically seek lower-cost housing.

Create coordinating mechanism

As in any flagship initiative upon which the City decides to embark, it needs to ensure the presence of some form of coordinating mechanism to take responsibility for the issue. In the case of affordable housing, there are already two key coordinating mechanisms upon which any future work should build. A coordinating mechanism should foster and help sustain partnerships as well as increase awareness as to the resources and supports that currently exist in Hamilton.

The Hamilton Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative (HAHPI) is the City's response to its housing supply problems. HAHPI's mandate is to coordinate and promote in a comprehensive manner the housing supply efforts currently under way from all levels of government. It also is responsible for developing housing supply initiatives and partnerships in response to new programming and legislative action by senior levels of government.

HAHPI already has consulted with key stakeholders, including the Halton-Hamilton Home Builders' Association, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, the Roomers and Boarders Committee, the Bridge Program, the Settlement and Integration Services Organization, Freedom House and legal aids clinics. In the course of its work, it should maintain close links with the City's Social and Public Health Services Department, which is concerned with the needs of low-income households and the quality of life for all Hamilton residents.

There is also considerable work under way with respect to homelessness. Since 1998, the Regional Advisory Committee on Food and Shelter and the Solutions for Housing Action Committee have worked in collaboration with the Social Planning Council of Hamilton-Wentworth to identify the causes and scope of the homelessness problem. The findings were published in the report, *Our Homes and Our Streets*. A subsequent *Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth* and further *Addendum to the Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth* set out specific recommendations for tackling the problem.

In response to growing pressure to take action on homelessness, the federal government announced in 1999 the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI). It provides funds to cities throughout the country that qualify on the basis of three criteria: their population, extent of poverty and rental vacancy rates. Additional amounts were allocated to address homelessness among Aboriginal people and young persons.

In Hamilton, SCPI funds are disbursed by the City. Funding decisions are made in conjunction with a Community Advisory Board on Homelessness with representatives from the health sector, social sector, business, community agencies, youth, Aboriginal persons, the immigrant community and people who are homeless.

In short, the City of Hamilton already has in place basic coordinating mechanisms around both homelessness and the broader issue of affordable housing. The challenge for future work will be to ensure the coordination of these two streams as well as promote links with related efforts, such as the provision of at-home supports (discussed below).

Engage citizens

In addition to raising awareness about the importance of decent affordable housing, the Social Vision calls for the active engagement of citizens in proposing actions for tackling the imme-

diate problem of homelessness and the longer-term challenge of improving the supply of decent affordable housing. One possible method of engaging citizens is to set up small discussion groups or study circles to identify possible solutions.

These groups ideally would involve a mix of people to share their views on housing and related concerns. Special efforts may be needed to ensure that the voice of homeless people is heard. In Oshawa, Ontario, the nonprofit organization Cornerstone Community Association has worked with homeless and formerly homeless residents to design an interactive popular education program, which promotes awareness of the realities of homelessness. Housing tenure is not the only issue; decent affordable housing must be embedded in safe and healthy communities.

The *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton* issued in April 2002 by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth notes that certain members of the community have been left out of traditional decision-making processes. An effort should be made to provide Aboriginal people, new Canadians, refugees and racial minorities the supports and opportunities they need to participate in making important decisions that affect their lives.

Raise awareness

Investment in both homelessness and affordable housing, more generally, will require substantial financial capital and the City of Hamilton must continue to play a role as major investor. Because of the sizeable funding required in this area, it will be essential to ensure that Hamilton citizens understand the scope of the affordable housing problem as well as its social, economic and health impact. The lack of decent affordable housing affects children's ability to learn and adults' capacity to hold stable employment. It also is linked to poor health outcomes. Households that pay between 50 and 70 percent of their incomes on rent must cut back on food for children and other basic living costs.

In fact, citizens should be made aware of the growing body of research that is identifying the need not only for decent affordable housing. The benefits of homeownership – both for individual households as well as the community – increasingly are being recognized. Positive outcomes include enhanced psychological functioning, higher wealth and savings, increased social participation and improved neighbourhood stability.

Gather information on exemplary models

The Hamilton Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative (HAHPI) already has explored some of the work under way in other municipalities. In its March 2002 report to City Council, it noted that the City of Toronto had launched an affordable housing program, called 'Let's Build,' with an

initial capital commitment of \$10.8 million. In October 2000, Toronto City Council allocated an additional \$11.9 million to the program, for a total \$22.7 million.

The goal of Let's Build is to create partnerships between the public and private sectors in order to encourage the construction of new affordable housing. The City provides both capital and land for this purpose. It also exempts certain fees in the case of nonprofit rental housing.

The initiative was set up subsequent to the Report of the Toronto Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force released in 1999. It called upon all levels of government to invest in affordable housing and set out an associated action plan. Proposals include shelter allowances to ease the affordability problem in the short term; construction of new affordable housing; preservation of existing affordable housing; service planning around the accommodation needs of specific groups such as abused women, Aboriginals, and immigrants and refugees; a homeless services information system; and community economic development.

While the action plan was developed specifically for Toronto, its proposals are applicable to other municipalities. The Task Force called for a 'housing first' policy in which municipalities designate appropriate sites for affordable housing. (The City of Hamilton is considering this proposal for implementation in 2002.)

The Task Force recommended that the shelter component maximum for social assistance recipients be equal to 85 percent of the median market rent for each local housing market. It suggested that a new shelter allowance be created that is targeted to working poor households. It proposed that the City of Toronto pay the first and last months' rent when required.

The City also could fund and administer a 'rent bank' with a \$500,000 annual budget to help low-income households pay for short-term rent arrears. Development charges and other related fees should be waived for housing that meets affordability criteria. The Task Force proposed the appointment of a facilitator for action on homelessness to report regularly on the reduction and prevention of homelessness and to prepare an annual report card gauging the City's performance. (It should be noted that such an appointment already has been made in Hamilton.)

There are also important exemplary models of work in the voluntary sector. The World Vision Canada Aboriginal Council, for example, called a meeting with its members in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario in order to identify their most critical needs. All agreed that the lack of affordable housing was a top priority that required new and creative solutions. World Vision Canada subsequently developed a self-help approach through which community members could construct their own housing using alternative techniques that are both affordable and energy efficient.

Three First Nations communities participated in the project and built several houses using an innovative low-skill method, known as straw-bale construction. The Council also set up a housing co-operative; it raised the initial capital through the construction of two homes using donations of cash, labour, materials and land. The houses then were used as equity for raising additional funds from financial institutions.

The Quint Development Corporation in Saskatoon is another model of innovative voluntary action for affordable housing. Quint came into being in February 1995 to improve the social and economic well-being of five older neighbourhoods in the city core.

Quint's efforts focus upon enabling low-income groups to pool their talents and resources to create ownership, jobs, training opportunities, income, stability and self-worth. It created an Affordable Housing Program geared toward low-income households, including social assistance recipients. The emphasis is upon homeownership through the creation of co-op arrangements.

The program survives as a result of the many partnerships it has created. It relies on the support of several departments in two levels of government: the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and the City of Saskatoon. Quint also involves several credit unions and many local businesses including contractors, architects, a real estate agent, lawyers and insurance co-ops that offer technical support and preferred rates on their goods and services.

Another important dimension is that Quint incorporates an economic development component within its affordable housing work. It set up a home renovation program funded in part by Saskatchewan's Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training Community Works Program, with additional funding from The Co-operators. The renovation crew helps ensure that the homes are attractive and surpass regulated health and safety standards. The on-site renovation work, coupled with sessions in Quint's training shop, give the crew several months of on-the-job experience, which have improved their skills and opportunities for paid employment.

Identify possible initiatives

Any action plan around affordable housing must build upon work already under way in the community. There are many areas of 'unfinished business' that have been identified by both the Hamilton Affordable Housing Partnership Initiative and the recently published *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton*. Only a few possibilities are identified here; other initiatives are identified in the reports on affordable housing and homelessness. With respect to the supply of affordable housing, one option for future action involves the enhancement of the Municipal Fund. But the building of new housing will take some time.

In the short term, subsidies to low-income households could alleviate much of the burden of affordability. One possibility is to raise the housing component of social assistance benefits.

Another short-term measure is to provide rent supplementation to low-income households (not just to social assistance recipients) until the supply of affordable housing improves.

The City of Hamilton also might consider various means to promote homeownership. As noted, positive outcomes of homeownership identified in the literature include enhanced psychological functioning, higher wealth and savings, increased social participation and improved neighbourhood stability.

The City can play a number of roles, including assisting families build assets in order to make an initial down payment on a home. Individual Development Accounts can be used for this purpose; a national pilot project funded by the Department of Human Resources Development Canada is testing their effectiveness. These accounts give low-income households an opportunity to save and accumulate assets over a given period of time. For every dollar that a participating household is able to save, the project deposits a matching amount (typically three dollars for every one dollar saved) into a designated account. When the maximum allowable amount is reached, it may be applied to education, employment or homeownership.

A variant on this approach is being piloted by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Normally, the rent charged to a public housing resident increases as his or her earned income increases. Under the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, such rent increases are foregone if the resident chooses to direct an equivalent sum of money into an asset-building account. After five years, residents receive the accumulated asset to use as they choose.

On the homelessness front, a blueprint for action is clearly laid out in the *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton*. The *Report Card* identifies the 15 areas in which recommended actions in the earlier report *Our Homes and Our Streets* have been achieved, the 18 areas in which actions are in progress and the 10 recommendations around which no action has been taken. The *Report Card* noted the importance of federal financing; the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) funds enabled the successful achievement of 10 recommendations and the partial achievement of another 10 proposals. There will be another report card in 2002 that will reflect the progress in tackling homelessness since 2001.

Actions already undertaken include major repairs to emergency shelters as well as an increase in their capacity and staff. The Housing Emergency Loan Program received funds to expand its services. Health care services for people experiencing homelessness have improved. Outreach services for persons coping with mental health problems or addictions have expanded.

Actions are under way with respect to providing crisis and transition beds for persons being discharged from hospitals or prisons. A settlement house is being developed for immigrants and refugees who are newcomers to Hamilton. Temporary funding has been provided to emergency drop-ins so they can operate on a 24-hour basis.

Of concern are the areas in which no action has been taken to date. Cultural sensitivity and anti-racism training for emergency shelter staff have not yet been undertaken. Neither has stable funding been made available for transitional housing for the women survivors of abuse. There has been no action on recommendations for the City of Hamilton to lower property tax rates for multi-residential buildings or to monitor the conversion of rental housing units to condominiums.

Another possible course of action from a social perspective is to ensure the availability of supports to enable residents, especially low-income citizens, to remain at home if they choose.

Provide supports for living in place

For many Hamilton residents, housing needs go beyond four walls and a roof. They require supports that assist with the activities of daily living, such as technical aids and equipment – e.g., wheelchairs, visual aids, volume control devices and prosthetic appliances.

These supports also include a range of personal services. Attendant services provide assistance with personal needs such as feeding, bathing and dressing. Homemaker services help with household tasks, such as meal preparation and home maintenance. Respite refers to assistance primarily for families caring at home for children with severe disabilities – and aging parents.

These supports currently are provided through a patchwork of arrangements. A child may obtain these supports at school; hospital patients would receive them as part of their care. Those living at home generally must pay sliding-scale fees unless they are recipients of social assistance.

The City of Hamilton should explore a more systematic provision of these supports. One possibility is to detach the supports from the provision of social assistance so that individuals do not have to be on welfare to obtain these essential goods and services.

On a different but related front, the Hamilton District Health Council issued a brief report in October 2001 entitled the “Housing and Support Requirements for Persons with Serious Mental Illness.” An estimated 36 percent of people who experience homelessness have some form of mental illness. The report identifies the need for supportive housing that enables the transition from custodial care to independent living. This form of housing combines affordable housing with appropriate supports.

The report also pointed to the need for greater cooperation among the three organizations responsible for the planning and development of housing and supports: the Hamilton District Health Council, the Regional Psychiatry Program and the City of Hamilton as the major housing provider. The report proposes that the City play a more active role in ensuring access to information about affordable housing and support programs.

Build strong neighbourhoods

Decent affordable housing must be rooted in strong and safe neighbourhoods. Some important work in this area is already under way in the City of Hamilton. City police, for example, have established councils in selected neighbourhoods.

The Hamilton Community Foundation is engaged in a project that is providing modest support for neighbourhood capacity-building projects. It also is involved with the United Way of Burlington Hamilton-Wentworth and other organizations in a Strengthening Civility initiative developed post-September 11.

Identify indicators

Many indicators of progress are already available in this area, including an increase in the number of affordable housing units. Average rents, vacancy rates and waiting lists for affordable housing are also relevant benchmarks. Other indicators include the changes in housing circumstances of members of groups, such as new Canadians, who often experience difficulty finding affordable housing. Progress on the homelessness front may include increases in emergency shelter beds and reductions in the numbers turned away from overnight shelters.

Monitor progress

The coordinating mechanism that will take responsibility for this flagship area should develop a strategy to monitor and share information on the progress of the efforts. The *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton* proposes one possible model.

The *Report Card* reviews the 44 recommendations made in an earlier community report on homelessness. It ranks each proposal on the basis of a green light (the action that has been achieved), yellow light (progress is being made) and red light (no action has been taken). This system tracks the progress of previous recommendations and alerts the community to the areas where attention is still required.

Although several community plans already exist, they should be modified and updated as required. There is also a need to ensure that the work undertaken in respect of these plans and their respective investments are well coordinated and work on parallel, rather than separate, tracks.