

Draft Sustainable Neighbourhood Engagement Framework

Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Sustainable Neighbourhood Engagement Framework?

A: The Sustainable Neighbourhood Engagement Framework, or SNEF, is like a road map for achieving the shared vision of neighbourhood groups within Guelph that is sustainable. It describes what that shared vision is, how neighbourhood groups work towards that vision and a new structure for the Neighbourhood Support Coalition (NSC) that allows it to better support neighbourhood groups and work with partner organizations such as the City.

Q: Why has the City developed the SNEF?

A: Guelph has a unique and impressive neighbourhood group system. Since 1997, the City of Guelph has been working with and providing supports to individual neighbourhood groups as well as the Neighbourhood Support Coalition. In 2009, the City decided to undertake an operational review of that relationship, to look at how that relationship was working and how it could be improved and how it could be funded in an ongoing way.

Q: What has been the process to date?

A: The development of the Framework was guided by an advisory committee made up of representatives from neighbourhood groups, the Neighbourhood Support Coalition, City staff and partner organizations including the Upper Grand District School Board, Family and Children's Services, Guelph Police Services, Volunteer Centre of Guelph Wellington and Guelph Community Health Centre. The process included research into community development practices, other models of neighbourhood group engagement and an environmental scan of key policies and data related to Guelph. Key informant interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders throughout Guelph were conducted. Over 80 individuals participated in the initial consultation process. The information gathered was then used to develop the draft SNEF.

Q: What are the community feedback sessions for?

A: The community feedback sessions provide representatives from stakeholder organizations and community members an opportunity to ask questions about the draft SNEF and share their views and opinions.

Q: What do neighbourhood groups do and how will this change if the SNEF is implemented?

A: Neighbourhood groups in Guelph are led by local residents that come together out of a shared interest in improving their neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood group is unique, as is each neighbourhood in Guelph. Some neighbourhood groups focus on community-building events such as barbecues or picnics. Some groups offer recreational programs to children and youth, families and seniors. Other groups provide social services such as food cupboards and clothing closets.

The SNEF defines the important community-building and neighbourhood engagement work that current and future neighbourhood groups do and helps to distinguish neighbourhood groups from other community groups in Guelph. If the SNEF is implemented, neighbourhood groups will continue to be resident led and continue to undertake activities based on their capacities and neighbourhood need. The SNEF seeks to strengthen the current system through an expanded Neighbourhood Support Coalition that is better able to support neighbourhood groups and provides clarity around the roles of the neighbourhood groups and partners including the City of Guelph.

Q: What is the Neighbourhood Support Coalition and how will it change if the SNEF is implemented?

A: The Neighbourhood Support Coalition is a network of neighbourhood groups, agencies and partners. It serves as a voice for neighbourhood groups in Guelph and, through its finance committee, implements the participatory budgeting process in which neighbourhood groups decide amongst themselves how City and other partner funds will be allocated.

If the SNEF is implemented, the Neighbourhood Support Coalition will grow as an organization and act as a bridge between various partner organizations, including the City and neighbourhood groups. It will have a full-time coordinator. It will also be governed by two panels of representatives: a neighbourhood group panel with representatives from every neighbourhood group and a partner panel with representatives from partner agencies and organizations that work with and support neighbourhood groups. These panels will elect representatives to sit on a Board that advises and works with the Coordinator.

An important function of an expanded Neighbourhood Support Coalition will be to support neighbourhood groups in the work they do and help new neighbourhood groups develop. In addition, the Neighbourhood Support Coalition will work with partner organizations that provide resources to build successful relationships and ensure accountability for resources, including funding to neighbourhood groups. In order ensure that neighbourhood groups are engaged in the NSC, neighbourhood groups will be required to be members of the NSC.

Q: Is the City still going to support Neighbourhood Groups?

A: Yes, the City will still support neighbourhood groups through the NSC. Currently the City provides resources directly to neighbourhood groups. One of the findings of the consultation is that this practice often creates tension for neighbourhood groups and the City. As a formal organization, the City has a number of rules and guidelines that govern how it operates and engages with groups. On the other hand, neighbourhood groups are volunteer-driven, flexible organizations. It's this flexibility that allows them to be so responsive and connected to neighbourhoods. Under the SNEF, the NSC acts as a bridge between the City and neighbourhood groups, coordinates the allocation of City resources among neighbourhood groups at arm's length from the City so that neighbourhood groups can continue to be flexible.

Q: What will happen to the Family and Children's Services Community Development Workers?

A: Throughout the consultation sessions, the important role of Community Development Workers was emphasized by many. If the SNEF is implemented, the NSC will begin to work with the recently formed Community Development Action Group to secure funding from numerous sources for the continuation of these position as NSC employees.

Q: How will the growth of the Neighbourhood Support Coalition occur?

A: The transition will probably take at least a year or two. During the transition, the NSC will have an external organization acting as its trustee. This relationship might mean that the partner organization has full legal responsibility for the NSC. A partner panel and a neighbourhood group panel will elect a transitional Board of Directors to help the organization through this period. The City will chair and host the Partner Panel.

Q: What will the Neighbourhood Support Coalition look like after the transition?

A: The SNEF provides two possible options for the structure of the NSC after the transition period. In Option A, the NSC becomes an independent, incorporated, not-for-profit organization. In Option B, an external organization continues to act as the NSC's trustee, providing resources and support to the NSC. In this option, the NSC would still be governed by a Partner Panel, a Neighbourhood Group Panel and an Advisory Committee, but the partner organization would have ultimate decision-making authority in certain areas.

Q: What are the next steps after the feedback sessions?

A: Once input has been received a revised draft framework will be presented to the Advisory Committee. Once the Advisory Committee endorses it, the framework will be presented to the Emergency Services, Community Services and Operations Committee of Council.