

City of Guelph Brant Community Hub consultations — May to June 2016

August 5, 2016

In the early stages of the potential development of a community hub in the Brant neighbourhood, the City organized two consultation meetings—hearing from more than 60 individuals. The consultations centered on **the City’s purchasing of** two acres of additional parkland to support the development of a community hub that would serve all neighbourhood residents.

Overall, we heard that a **community hub** made up of programs, services, and shared space, **would be a benefit and is needed in the neighbourhood**. However, we also heard concern that while there are benefits to a hub, **it should not go on existing green space**. There was concern that in addition to the reduction of green space in the neighbourhood, a hub might **decrease property values and increase crime, drug use, and loitering in the park**. For these reasons, many people who were consulted suggested that the City should explore all options for a hub location in the neighbourhood before moving forward with a hub in the Brant Avenue Park.

Prior to the purchase of land from the school board in 2016, **the City explored a number of locations for the community hub**, to expand Brant Avenue Park, including at the former **St. David’s Church, attached to Brant Avenue Public School**, St. Patrick Catholic School, commercial property at Victoria and Speedvale roads, social and private housing units in the neighbourhood, and new developments in the neighbourhood. However, none were considered viable options. See pages 4 and 5 for additional information on challenges relating to the development of those locations.

A hub in Brant Park has a number of advantages including being central to the neighbourhood, in close proximity to the school, promote increased use of the park through park activation, and land was available for purchase for \$85,000 without the use of tax dollars.

Only a fraction of the green space would be used for a hub and parking lot. The largest estimates for a community hub size are at 11,000 square feet with a 30,000 square foot parking lot. However, the hub could end up being smaller with less parking. At the high estimate, a hub and parking represents an estimated 12 per cent of the entire green space behind Brant Avenue Public School, leaving up to 88 per cent of the green space intact.

What’s next for the Brant hub? City staff has direction from City Council to continue on the current path, which is to anticipate a development application coming forward in 2017. If a development application is filed with the City, there would be additional engagement opportunities through the **City’s** planning process. Only after this would City Council then make a final decision on whether to recommend approval of a development application.

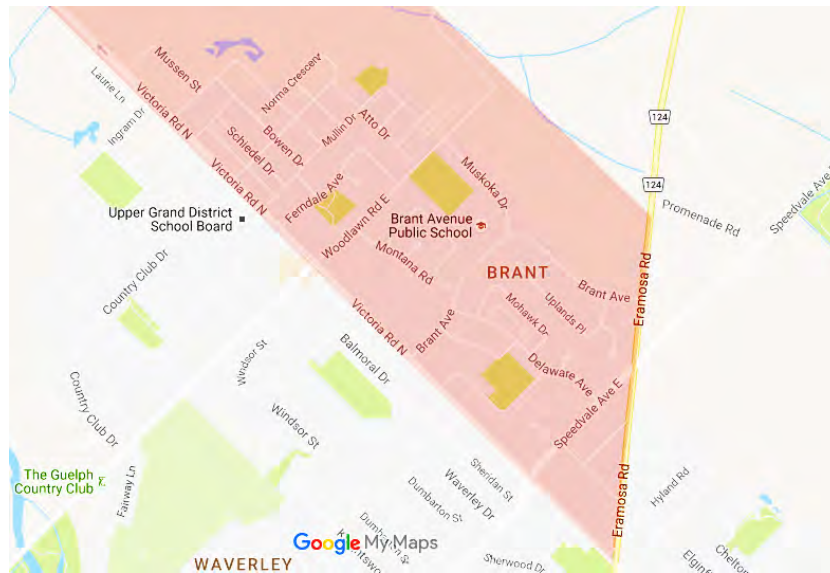
Responses to questions received

The following are questions we received from residents during the consultation process, and our responses:

Background

Where is the Brant neighbourhood?

The Brant neighbourhood is the area located east of Victoria Road and north of Eramosa Road in the northeast corner of Guelph city limits.



In general, what is a community hub?

A community hub is a building that is a central access point for a range of community identified programs and services along with cultural, recreational, and green spaces to nourish community life. Community hubs respond to the unique needs of a community and are typically located in neighbourhood settings. Community hubs are spaces accessible to all residents of a neighbourhood.

Why is a hub beneficial in the Brant neighbourhood?

The Brant neighbourhood is an area of Guelph that is deficient of employment opportunities, access to food and grocery stores, and local services and programs that improve community well-being. A community hub in the Brant neighbourhood would make it easier for area residents to access programs and services, and shared space within walking distance of where residents live in an effort to enhance community wellness and prosperity.

What is the City's role?

The City owns the land and has a vested interest in supporting the development of a hub and ensuring it meets the community's needs. Should a community hub be built, the City would lease the land to the developer of the hub.

Is the City following Provincial guidelines for hub development?

The City is being guided by the Province of Ontario's report 'Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan', and a proposed Provincial Growth Plan that includes Guelph. While the City is looking to these documents for guidance, the ultimate goal is to create supports that respond to neighbourhood needs. These documents highlight the importance of creating mixed-use neighbourhoods and to support opportunities for residents to conveniently access needed programs and services. They also highlight the role of municipalities in exploring options for use of public lands or buildings in the development of community hubs.

Need for a hub

If you don't know what kind of services the area needs, how do you know you need the hub?

The 2013 Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health Report "Addressing Social Determinants of Health in the City of Guelph: A public health perspective on local health, policy and program needs Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph" shows that the Brant neighbourhood is deficient of employment opportunities, access to food/grocery stores, and local services and program that improve community well-being. Significant transportation barriers have been identified which prevents people from accessing needed supports and services. A community hub would help address these issues and barriers.

People who would use the hub live on city bus routes, and they can use buses for personal purposes, why can't they use buses to get to a hub of services elsewhere?

A community hub would be for everyone living in the neighbourhood and would be within walking distance of the entire neighbourhood. Studies have shown that people who rely on public transit to get access to needed programs and health services are nearly twice as likely to miss and be late for appointments due to cost of transportation, and delays in transit schedules. A hub in the neighbourhood could make programs and services more accessible therefore improve the health and well-being of residents.

Who the hub is for

Would only people in need be able to use the hub and everyone else restricted?

A Brant Community Hub would be for everyone in the neighbourhood. There would be a number of programs and services available in the hub and some programs may have specific eligibility requirements. As a hypothetical example, if the hub were to include a support group for people living with diabetes, then only people diagnosed with diabetes may be eligible for that specific program.

How many people are actually going to use the facility and how many actually need it?

A community hub would be accessible to everyone. The 2011 National Household Survey shows 965 families (3,570 individuals) living in the Brant neighbourhood.

Who will decide what services will go in a hub?

A community hub would respond to identified gaps in supports and services. It is not known what exact services would be included in a hub as that will partly be up to the non-profit developer to put forward as part of a development application around the allowable uses of land. The services included in the hub would be partly determined by needs identified by the community through surveys and the development of a shared vision for the hub with the community. All community members will have the opportunity to participate and have a say in the kinds of programs, services, and spaces desired. This engagement is being led by the Brant Community Hub Committee (a group of residents and non-profit organizations that want to see a hub in the neighbourhood) and will be carried out in the summer/fall of 2016. This engagement is focused on what to include in a community hub and is not dependent on a development application going forward.

Location for the hub

Why put a hub in Brant Avenue Park?

The need for a community hub in the Brant neighbourhood has been discussed in the community and by City Council since 2008. Since that time, a number of locations have been explored for the placement of a community hub, but unfortunately development of a hub has been unable to move forward. Brant Avenue Park is **Council's** preferred location for the hub because of its central location in the neighbourhood and its proximity to the school. There may be the opportunity for additional programming for children and families that use the school facility already. Brant Avenue Park is central to the neighbourhood and is within walking distance from communities north of Woodlawn Road, and south down to Speedvale Avenue. The land to expand Brant Avenue Park was able to be purchased by the City without use of tax dollars for \$85,000 in May 2016.

What other sites were considered and researched for this project by the City, and are they being considered?

The need for a hub was identified by the Brant Avenue Neighbourhood Group and community members in 2008. There was a study done by the University of Guelph in 2009 to explore potential sites in the **Brant neighbourhood including St. David's** Church, subsidized housing units, and private property, but the search came up empty. No opportunities came up over the past eight years until conversations opened up with the Upper Grand District School Board around the sale of land for the development of a hub. Based on the review of the locations below, the City considers Brant Avenue Park to be the preferred location.

Location	Challenges for hub development
Brant Avenue Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would lead to a reduction in shared green space between the City and school properties
Dakota Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park not big enough for development • Location is not central to the neighbourhood • Would lead to a reduction in green space
St. David's Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated cost of property purchase prohibitive at approximately 10 times amount spent on Brant Avenue Park purchase • Building on site would have to be removed and new building constructed • Location is not central to the neighbourhood • Location is not close to the school
Commercial Property at corner of Victoria and Speedvale roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated cost of property purchase prohibitive at approximately 15-20 times amount spent on Brant Avenue Park purchase • Significant renovations would be needed • Building is outside of the neighbourhood • Location is not close to the school • No access to green space on or adjacent to the property
Attached to Brant Avenue Public School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brant Avenue PS property has a very narrow frontage on Brant Avenue which already limits the school's parking and access. Adding another use with its associated traffic, parking and building access requirements would be very problematic. • Having a hub on school property would restrict the types of programs and services available to the community. Typically access to school property is limited to students and staff during the school day. • Would lead to a reduction in green space
Attached to St. Patrick's School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a hub on school property would restrict the types of programs and services available to the community. Typically access to school property is limited to students and staff during the school day. • Would lead to a reduction in green space
Subsidized housing units on Algonquin Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a shortage of subsidized and affordable housing in Guelph and owner is not able to sell or convert housing units for another purpose • Potential of stigma for a hub which is intended to be accessible by all residents in the neighbourhood • Location is not as central to the neighbourhood
New development northeast of Algoma Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land is owned by developer and cost would be prohibitive • Location is not as central to the neighbourhood • Potential reduction of green space
Other private property in neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private homes in the neighbourhood explored were both too costly to purchase and renovate, and too small to accommodate the hub

Use of green space to develop a hub

The Brant Park green space belongs not only to those around it, but to all of the people of Guelph, and why was this not recognized?

Green space is highly valued by the City of Guelph. The preference of location of a potential hub in the Brant Avenue Park is a matter of balancing priorities. Green space is important, as is access to important programs, services, and spaces that benefit the health and wellbeing of all neighbourhood residents. For the reasons mentioned above, a hub in Brant Avenue Park will benefit residents more than in other locations and is the preferred option. A hub in the park will absorb an estimated 12 per cent of the green space behind Brant Avenue Public School leaving much of the green space in tact. Furthermore, the remaining park would be enhanced with improved community services potentially including a ball diamond, updated accessible playgrounds, and green space.

Was the availability of green space considered when selecting the park for the hub?

Yes. As mentioned above, a hub would take up an estimated 12 per cent of green space behind Brant Avenue Public School, leaving 88 per cent for use by the neighbourhood. The Brant neighbourhood currently has approximately 61.55 hectares (Ha) of parkland within the neighbourhood (this includes Guelph Lake Sports Fields). The available parkland in the community exceeds both the **City of Guelph's Official Plan** and the Parks, Recreation and Culture Strategic Plan (draft report) targets for parkland allocation per 1,000 population. The Brant Avenue neighbourhood is currently achieving 17.24 Ha of parkland/1,000 population.

Has the City taken away green space to put in a community hub before, and are there plans to do this with the 14 other neighbourhood groups in the City?

The answer is no to both of these questions. The concept of a hub in the Brant neighbourhood came about from eight years of discussion in the community. There are currently no other neighbourhoods where this level of discussion and work by community members has taken place to create a hub for the benefit of their neighbourhood. There are no plans for the City to support the creation of community hubs in other neighbourhoods at this time.

Impact on the park

Will Brant Avenue Park switch from a 'neighbourhood park' to a 'community park'?

No, the building of a hub will not impact the designation of Brant Avenue Park as a neighbourhood park.

What will happen to the remaining parkland at Brant Avenue Park?

If a community hub moves forward, the City-owned Brant Avenue Park would increase by approximately an additional acre, from a 2.74 acre park to a 3.80 acre park (not including the green space still owned by the Upper Grand District School Board and the portion of city

land that the hub would be built on). With the proposed changes to the parkland, the City Parks & Recreation Department have identified the need for a park master plan to be initiated in 2017 (pending Council approval of budget). The park master plan would include a community engagement process where the neighbourhood would be invited at a future date, to help the City create a unified vision for Brant Avenue Park—a vision that connects the outdoor space with the indoor community hub. If a hub is not built, the existing parkland will increase by two acres and a master plan would be completed to design the space.

Impact on property value

People purchased properties in this green space area because of the park itself. Why were these plans not disclosed to these people before they bought?

Although the idea of a hub in the Brant neighbourhood has been in discussion for eight years, the City only purchased the land in May 2016. Before that point a hub in Brant Avenue Park was not a possibility.

Will property values drop as a result of a hub?

Property values are highly complex and impacted by a number of factors. We are looking into specific data on housing values in areas where community hubs are located, but have not yet been able to find this specific information. Real estate agents listing properties in proximity to other hubs, including the Shelldale Centre and Langs in Cambridge, often list the proximity to the hub, park, and schools as amenities in the neighbourhood as a selling feature. The Province of Ontario has also said that the provision of additional programs, services, and spaces found in the neighbourhood hubs have been shown to increase property values. Properties around a Brant hub would be able to boast proximity to the hub as well as the significant amount of remaining park and green space.

Why compare this area to Shelldale? It's in an industrial area and not residential.

The Shelldale Centre is one of the only other community hubs in Guelph. It is a hub that is adjacent to both green space and residential neighbourhoods.

Impact on community safety

Will there be a methadone clinic in the hub?

Community hubs are designed to respond to the specific needs and gaps in support of the neighbourhood. There is already a methadone clinic serving the neighbourhood. If a development application comes forward, it will include conditions for re-zoning the land and allowable uses of space. In the meantime, the intention of the hub is to provide support to primarily families, children, and youth. The hub will need to be a space that is safe and welcoming to those populations.

Will a hub lead to an increase in crime and loitering?

Community hubs create a sense of pride and ownership in the neighbourhood. Community hubs have been shown by the Province of Ontario to reduce crime by building community capacity, supporting children, youth, and seniors, and responding to local needs and opportunities.

Importance of being close to the school

Why is it important to have a hub close to a school? Why did the school board decide to sell the property?

Schools are natural gathering places in the community and familiar to children from across the entire neighbourhood. A hub being close to the Brant Avenue Public School and park will allow for programs and activities to supplement work being done in the school (for example, after school programs for children) and ensure additional supports and services for families and students. The Upper Grand District School Board's decision to support the sale of land to the City was based on years of discussions in the community about the need for a hub.

What's enrollment at the school? Is it shutting down?

According to the Upper Grand District School Board, the enrollment for Brant Avenue Public School is projected to be 230 students in 2016/17 and is forecasted to increase over the next 10 years. Residential development is planned or occurring in the school's boundary and will contribute to enrolment growth. There are no plans to close the school.

Engagement process

Why were so few notices mailed to residents of this community?

Since there is no development application, the City wanted to engage early with residents living adjacent to the park in order to hear their concerns. Two public meetings were held, which were promoted in the *Guelph Mercury-Tribune* and through the City's social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). The notice was posted to guelph.ca and a media release was sent to the local media. In total, 60 notices were mailed directly to residents adjacent to the park to ensure that their voices were heard in these early stages. Should a development application come forward, a broader community engagement process would begin and notification would be provided in accordance with the Ontario Planning Act.

Why was the community not invited to a Council meeting in 2013 about the Brant Hub in the park to have their voices heard by Mayor and Council?

Anyone is welcome to delegate and present to City Council. City Council agendas are made public prior to the meeting on the City of Guelph website. While the City welcomes presentations from community members, the City does not have a role in promoting those presentations to other potential stakeholders.

Why was the community not consulted prior to purchasing the property from the school board?

Typically, land acquisition with the City of Guelph happens in closed session of Council to ensure that the City's negotiating position is protected. The City of Guelph does not typically consult around land acquisition, and in this case, the land was purchased with the purpose of supporting the potential development of a community hub, but with the knowledge that if a hub was not able to move forward, the City would own an additional two acres of parkland.

Cost for taxpayers

How much did the City pay for the school property?

The purchase of the land was at no cost to taxpayers. The City purchased two acres of land from the Upper Grand District School Board for \$85,000. This was purchased without the use of tax dollars through a reserve fund paid into by developers as part of new development across the city.

What might a hub look like?

Can the hub be placed on the property closer to the school rather than on Woodlawn?

The exact location of a hub is unknown at this point but would come forward with a development application. From a planning perspective, there are advantages to placing the hub closer to Woodlawn Road given the potential need for servicing, higher visibility, accessibility and maintenance.

Are there blueprints for the community to look at?

No, there are no blueprints at this point. This would be part of the development application process, which has not begun but is anticipated to commence in 2017.

Can there be less parking than what has been talked about so far?

The amount of parking estimated is the standard amount of parking for the approximate size and use of the building based on current City zoning regulations. Given that the hub is located centrally in the neighbourhood may mean the amount of parking could be reduced. This would again come through the development application process and would be open to public consultation.

Do we still have a say?

Is this a done deal?

No. The City and a potential developer are in initial stages of speaking with residents about the concept of developing a hub. If a development application comes forward in 2017, there would be additional engagement opportunities through the City's planning process. Council would then make a decision on whether to approve a development application.

Has the City already leased the property to a developer?

No, there is no lease agreement with a developer. A lease agreement would not be signed until after a development application is completed and approved by City Council.

Next steps

What are the next steps in the process?

City staff has direction from Council to continue to see Brant Avenue Park as the preferred location for the hub. That being said, there is no development application that has come forward or likely to come forward in 2016. The next step in this process from the City perspective is to wait and see whether a development application will come forward. In the meantime, community members will have the opportunity to participate and have a say in the kinds of programs, services, and spaces desired. This engagement is being led by the Brant Community Hub Committee (a group of residents and non-profit organizations that want to see a hub in the neighbourhood) and will be carried out in the summer/fall of 2016. This engagement is focused on what to include in a community hub and is not dependent on a development application going forward.

What are the next decisions and who will make them?

The anticipated next decision on whether a community hub will be developed would be at a public City Council meeting around development application approval. This meeting would follow the submission of a development application and a public consultation process. Timelines are unknown at this time as a development application has not been submitted.

Will the city take a petition into consideration?

City Council takes all input from residents into consideration when making decisions about future development of our communities.

Feedback summary

The following are specific comments we received through consultation and through phone and email communications between May and July 2016:

Concern about putting a hub in the park

- No hub in the park
- I love the community and want the hub to go elsewhere
- Not opposed to the hub, opposed to it in the park
- The park is to stay and there is to be no Hub, city made a bad decision

Concern about the reduction of green space

- Would like to see the park saved
- This community has been losing green space and it is not appropriate to remove the last remaining space

- Parks facilitate social interactions that are critical to maintaining community cohesion and pride. Save our school park.
- This is about green space, if putting it in Dakota Park would be fighting it too
- I would rather see the development of soccer fields and a better baseball diamond.
- Perception has always been that purchased land was already a City park

Concern about having a hub in the neighbourhood

- Put the hub in Dakota Park instead
- We were here first
- A hub will increase traffic along Woodlawn Road
- A hub will bring more low income people into the neighbourhood
- People who will use the hub are lazy, smoke **dope, and don't pay taxes.**
- Only unemployed and welfare bums will access the hub.
- Not in our neighbourhood.
- **I don't want this in my backyard—we don't need it.**
- Have no problems helping people in need, many people in this neighbourhood **volunteer, just don't** want those people in the backyard

Concern about property value

- I invested in my property to be close to a park, now the property value is going to drop
- City Hall bought the parkland for building on it
- Shelldale, no one wants to live there. No residents are around it

Concern about accessibility of the hub

- People pay to use the Neighbourhood Group programs
- I have never heard from the Neighbourhood Group in seven years
- The community concern is that they will have no say in what goes in the hub
- The neighbourhood is made up of many distinct voices.
- If people get upset over this, how much interest and support will they have for the neighbourhood group
- **I won't be eligible to use the services that would go in a hub.**

Concern about the hub and safety

- There is a fear of what the hub will bring, people hanging around, drugs, safety, and house values will go down
- I do not want drugs to be disbursed.
- The hub will turn into a hang out
- You can never guarantee that the hub would not be rented out to a tenant for drug disbursement.
- When it comes to needle disbursement, Guelph Police told me that you need to worry about two blocks out from the hub as methadone users will not be messing up

their immediate area that gives them the needs, but two blocks away is where the safety concern is.

- There already is a methadone clinic in this area
- Concern about safety of kids crossing a parking lot
- A hub will increase crime in my backyard
- **It will become a hangout for many kids in an unsupervised situation and I don't think** it will serve well for all the little children who have to walk by it every day to go to school.
- Don't want the noise, fires, smoking and drinking that will come along with a hub

Other concerns and suggestions

- The City should communicate more about the value of the hub
- Maybe the hub could be built in stages with a smaller building to start and see if there's more demand for more space

For more information

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