



MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair and Members of the Healthy Environment and Community Committee

FROM: Erin Burger, Community Development Supervisor – Special Events and Neighbourhood Engagement

DATE: February 27, 2025

MEMO NO.: MEM-CSE-2025-002

SUBJECT: Neighbourhood Engagement Initiatives Update

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide the Healthy Environment and Community Committee with an update regarding neighbourhood programming and engagement initiatives that will be occurring throughout 2025.

These initiatives are designed to support the advancement of Council's Strategic Plan priorities, particularly in the areas of Safe and Welcoming Communities, and Natural Areas & Heritage. In 2025, the focus will be on expanding outdoor programming, supporting citizen-led events, and fostering stronger neighbourhood relationships. By enhancing neighbourhood connections, these initiatives aim to promote a thriving, healthy, and welcoming community - where residents feel a sense of belonging, safety, and improved overall well-being.

BACKGROUND:

Council received [Memorandum NO. RP-2020-0004](#), dated November 6, 2020, regarding the Community Development Action Plan. The latter introduced the Community and Neighbourhood Engagement program. This program included actions to support residents in feeling connected and enjoying all aspects of their community and neighbourhood life. Actions included:

- Continue to expand outdoor neighbourhood programming opportunities as introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., ambassadors, pop-up play events).

- Research best practices and establish procedures for supporting neighbour groups in organizing and hosting citizen-led neighbourhood events and programs.

Over the subsequent years, in an effort to deliver on these action items, Community Development staff piloted a variety of initiatives to determine the best way to engage residents and assist in building stronger neighbourhood connections. These initiatives included:

- Expanding the Neighbourhood Park Pop-Up program to 15 neighbourhood parks and later integrating with existing community events where Town staff conducted surveys for residents to share their thoughts and feelings around neighbourhood connections.
- Branding Community Development's neighbourhood work as "Hey Neighbour", with promotions throughout the Town.
- Launching a Neighbourhood *Let's Talk* Survey - connecting residents with concepts of neighbourhood engagement and a goal of creating a resident-led community network.
- Hosting a virtual film screening of *The Great Disconnect*, a popular documentary that discussed the importance of social connections. After the film screening, viewers connected and shared their thoughts around strengthening Halton Hills neighbourhoods.
- Engaging residents through the Town's "*Building Neighbourhood Connections*" initiative and using the free scavenger hunt app, GooseChase. Once registered with the Town, residents could choose their own adventure, collect points, and share their experiences on social media using #hhneighbourhood and tagging the Town.
- Introducing the "*Play Streets*" initiative to provide residents with an opportunity to connect with neighbours on their street. This grassroots initiative was well received and highlighted the goal of having residents connect with others in their neighbourhood.
- Collaborating with the Halton Hills Public Library in the coordinated delivery of the *Neighbourhood and Building Community* library collection, providing a diverse range of perspectives around neighbourhood connections.
- Introducing *Good Neighbour Day* as an opportunity for neighbours to get to know each other better.
- Resuming the *Toys in Parks* program to support imaginative and unstructured play in our parks and to encourage resident connections.

- Continuing the delivery of the *Open Streets* initiative – a shared public space where people of all ages, abilities and economic backgrounds can come together to exercise and play. These free community events coincide with other activities in the community to maximize participation.
- Hiring a part-time (contract) *Neighbourhood Activator* to plan and coordinate all neighbourhood initiatives.
- Rebranding and updating the *Neighbourhood Block Party* program - providing residents with an opportunity to connect and work towards a common goal.

COMMENTS:

1.0| Benefits of Neighbourhood Engagement



Strong neighbourhoods are essential to a thriving, healthy and welcoming community. Residents who live in a connected neighbourhood have a better sense of belonging which leads to feelings of safety, security and better health.

Best practices in neighbourhood programming and engagement highlight several benefits to residents, including:

- Meeting their neighbours
- Learning what is going on in their neighbourhood
- Connecting with resources in their neighbourhood
- Connecting with nature - using park and trail amenities
- Giving back to their community
- Mobilizing and responding in case of an emergency
- Having a unified voice and advocating for their area

There are also several benefits to the Town and community at large, including:

- Developing safer and healthier neighbourhoods
- Creating open communication networks with government officials
- Promoting and celebrating diversity in the community
- Protecting nature
- Protecting youth - supporting and strengthening neighbourhood schools

Overall, Town staff have received an abundance of positive feedback from community residents in response to the Hey Neighbour programming. As an example, a recently received comment from a resident, is included in Appendix A.

2.0| Renewed and Improved Neighbourhood Engagement Programs

With a focus on continuous improvement, growing and enhancing neighbourhood connections, and based on lessons learned with pilot programs (e.g. park pop-ups, library collection, film screening), Community Development staff have revised the program. The goal is to better align future programming with community needs, ensuring that these initiatives maximize community engagement, cultivate a sense of belonging, strengthen local relationships, and contribute to the overall vibrancy of neighbourhoods across Halton Hills.

The 2025 neighbourhood programming and engagement initiatives are designed to advance Council's Strategic Plan priorities of: Safe and Welcoming Communities; and Natural Areas & Heritage. The focus will be on expanding outdoor programming, supporting citizen-led events, and fostering neighbourhood relationships.

Updated program highlights include:

2.1| Play Streets



Play Streets are a great way to create a sense of belonging and create opportunities for residents to become involved in their neighbourhood. Play Streets are short road closures, creating a safe space to play outside together. This program offers increased space for individuals to be physically active by transforming streets into shared spaces and has been in place since 2021. Play Streets typically allow residents to play freely or with organized games or activities.

The Town's Play Streets program will continue to provide residents with quality, free, accessible programming from June through to the end of August. The location of the Play Streets will vary and will maximize the number of neighbourhoods engaged, temporarily increase space for physical activity, expand opportunities to get to know each other, strengthen resident connections, and provide a foundation for the *Block Party* program.

For 2025, Town staff have enhanced Play Streets by adding new equipment (active, passive and sensory) to the program.

2.2| Neighbourhood Block Parties

6 REASONS TO HOST A BLOCK PARTY

- Foster a strong and safe community
- Strengthen and reinforce social bonds
- Start a trend and create a tradition
- Provide support to newcomers
- Build trust
- Encourage fun and happiness

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Leveraging relationships created through the *Play Street* program, neighbours can also work towards a common goal of hosting a *Block Party*. As part of this process, neighbours work together to complete Town requirements, choose which pieces of outdoor play equipment they wish to borrow, and arrange pick-up and drop-off of the equipment. Additionally, they may coordinate activities, food or other entertainment for the block party. Block parties have been available since 2013.

For 2025, the block party fee that was previously charged will be eliminated for all neighbourhood groups looking to host a block party this year to encourage participation.

2.3| Open Streets



Open Streets are closed to vehicle traffic - creating an easy, accessible activity space for people to enjoy outdoor recreation in the community. Town staff are on-site providing equipment and activities such as scavenger hunts, road hockey, crafting and more. Open Streets have been offered since 2017.

These events coincide with and supplement other community events, such as the Georgetown BIA's Farmer's Market or the Acton BIA's Leathertown Festival and bring high energy fun.

Coming out of the pandemic, five Open Streets events held between June 2022 and June 2024, engaged about 1800 people.

2.4| Good Neighbour Day



Good Neighbour Day is recognized annually on September 28 and creates an opportunity for neighbours to get to know each other better. This day celebrates the importance of being a good neighbour. The goal of Good Neighbour Day is to build relationships between neighbours - because knowing your neighbours can help transform neighbourhoods into welcoming, safe and inclusive places to live.

2.5| Toys in Parks



Playgrounds provide an opportunity for free play which allows children to explore according to their natural tendencies, to learn from one another and to interact with a wide range of age groups. The *Toys in Parks* program launched in 2018 with the intention of promoting creativity, cooperative play and human connection.

In previous years, the Toys in Parks program was located at 10 neighbourhood parks throughout Halton Hills. For 2025, the program will expand to an additional 12 parks, with 22 participating parks in total.

3.0| New Neighbourhood Programming for 2025

Based on grassroots neighbourhood work and feedback, Community Development staff have introduced two new initiatives for 2025:

3.1| Fire Pit Pop-Ups

Fire Pit Pop-Ups create a welcoming space where people can connect, chat and relax. The bright blue Muskoka chairs surround the twinkling fire tables to set a perfect scene for neighbours to connect with one another and enjoy a wonderful winter day at one of the local parks.

On Sunday afternoons, between January and March, Town staff host Fire Pit Pop-Ups in a variety of Town parks (weather dependent).

At the time of writing of this memo, Town staff had hosted 6 fire pit pop-ups and engaged about 200 people.



3.2| Community Socials



In 2019, Community Development led a park opening event at West Branch Drive Park in Georgetown. This event included a welcome from the Mayor and Councillors, free ice cream, Active Easy fitness activities, large lawn games, an interactive drumming presentation, a trail walk led by Hillsview Active Living Centre, a scavenger hunt and an obstacle course. It was one of the most successful park events the Town had ever hosted. Residents were excited to make

connections in their own neighbourhood. Newcomers were welcomed and residents shared their thoughts with local Councillors.

Building on the success of this model, staff have designed Ward specific community engagements for roll out this spring. These events will be promoted as *Community Socials*. They will take place on selected Saturdays, from 10am – 12pm. Town staff will collaborate to highlight Town services, engage newcomers, and provide residents with an opportunity to connect with the Mayor and Council members, Town staff and fellow neighbours - in an approachable, fun and friendly environment.

For Council’s consideration and feedback, proposed activities for the Community Social events may include:

Activity	Notes
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Resident Welcome	Greetings brought by the Mayor and/or Ward Councillors (if in attendance).
Active Play	Featuring a variety of activities, including interactive games, scavenger hunts, and captivating story walks, offering fun and engaging experiences for all ages.
“Touch a Truck”	Town vehicles are utilized for educational tours and community viewing, offering residents a unique opportunity to learn more about how they work and what they do.
Civic Village	A dynamic centre featuring Town departments and partners, including Halton Hills Library, HRPS, and Omega Canine Services, where residents can explore the latest services and engage with experts to ask questions.
Music and Refreshments	Recorded music and light refreshments (water, coffee, and cookies).

These free events are open to the public and will take place in each of the four Wards. For Council’s consideration and for event planning purposes, the proposed tentative 2025 dates and locations for these events are:

- Saturday, May 10 Ward 3 – Cedarvale Park
- Saturday, June 7 Ward 4 – Danby Road Park
- Saturday, October 4 Ward 2 – Glen Williams Park
- Saturday, October 18 Ward 1 – Tanners Drive Park

The dates, logistics and activities will be further discussed with and refined, as appropriate, with the Mayor and Councillors of each Ward.

4.0| Looking Beyond 2025

Pending resource availability and staff time, Town staff will continue to refine the neighbourhood engagement workplan to incorporate best practices, with clearly defined priorities, and a vision tailored to Halton Hills. To continue to strengthen neighbourhood connections, staff will explore the feasibility of creating a “Hey Neighborhood Network” in order to collaborate, promote, implement, and sustain community networking opportunities across Halton Hills. This would involve:

- Establishing a clear framework for the group

- Recruiting community stakeholders and partners as necessary
- Raising awareness of the Neighbourhood Networking initiative
- Organizing networking meetings
- Offering technical expertise and sector-specific guidance
- Supporting the sustainability of these programs
- Committing to continuous learning
- Leading and carrying out key action items

CONCLUSION:

The initiatives outlined in this Memorandum represent a comprehensive and evolving effort to continue to strengthen community connections and enhance neighbourhood engagement throughout Halton Hills. By building on past successes and introducing innovative programs, the Town is committed to fostering a sense of belonging, safety, and connection among residents. As these initiatives continue to grow and evolve, they will serve as a foundation for future neighborhood development and a more connected, resilient community. The introduction of new programs underscores the Town's dedication to creating inclusive spaces for residents to engage, collaborate and thrive together.

Reviewed and approved by,

Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks, Community Development & Environment

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer