Creating an Engaged Community

A report by the Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement
April 2010
Mission Statement

Through community consultation and research into best practices, to determine and recommend to the Mayor, Council, and citizenry, those methods the Committee feels will best enable citizens to become more engaged in their communities and empowered to effectively communicate their concerns to the government and other citizens, resulting in more timely citizen involvement in the decision making activities of local government.
Letter from the Co-Chairs

Exceptional people do exceptional work. The people of Shape Burlington who put this report together are exceptional. They are eloquent representatives of the diversity of Burlington's population as well as first-rate interviewers, facilitators, writers, and include a highly competent web master. All their time and personal expenses were contributed freely as caring and concerned Burlington citizens.

We thank you for volunteering and accepting our assignments without reservation. We congratulate all of you on a job well done.

We could not have developed this Report without the guidance and input of consultants Peter MacLeod, Joslyn Trowbridge and Chris Ellis of MASS LBP.

We owe so much to Dr. Joey Edwardh and Ted Hildebrandt of Community Development Halton who provided the administrative services and expertise in community development.

We are honoured that Mayor Cam Jackson had confidence in our integrity and judgment to select a committee and to reach out to Burlington citizens for their views on better and more effective communication and involvement with City Council and Staff. We thank Mayor Jackson for this opportunity to serve our community. We believe we have fulfilled the terms of reference for this advisory committee.

For us, this has been a journey of discovery, which has reinforced our belief that we live in one of the finest communities in Canada.

This Report reflects accurately the views of those people who took the time and opportunity to share their opinions on how we might improve civic engagement and two-way communication with local government. City Council can honour these citizens by considering carefully each and every one of the recommendations. In our opinion, these eight (8) recommendations must all be implemented.

We understand that these recommendations will require City Hall and Burlington residents to re-think how local government communicates and interacts with the community in a more participatory and consensual mode. We believe the implementation of these recommendations will foster more informed deliberation, inspire greater confidence in local government, and build a more caring community.

John Boich, Co-Chair

Walter Mulkewich, Co-Chair
Transforming the culture at City Hall

City Hall must reinvent itself.

As social, technological and demographic trends alter the face of every community, municipal governments are struggling to adapt their long-established practices to meet the challenges of an ever-evolving new world.

Burlington is experiencing a period of rapid growth and change. Citizens are more literate, more educated and more connected than ever before. They are also busier, more distracted and require more from those who represent them, develop the policies and provide the services in their community.

Formed at the request of the Mayor, Shape Burlington was given the freedom to act independently. We spent three months working with Burlington residents and City Hall staff and members of Council to learn more about how the City operates and how it engages with residents.

Shape Burlington is comprised of citizens who live in all areas of the city. They bring a broad mix of experience and expertise to their commitment. We were assisted in our research and procedures by MASS LBP, a public consultation company with expertise in citizen engagement and democratic innovation.

We investigated practices from communities around the world. Who is facing similar challenges? How are they doing it? What can we learn? What best practices are already being implemented, and how can Burlington create its own recommendations?

We conducted interviews with members of current Advisory Committees. We spoke with representatives of cultural and sports groups; representatives of the business community; citizen groups and high school students. We met with City staff at different levels from many different departments. We interviewed Department heads and managers, Councillors and the Mayor. And throughout, we met with many Burlington residents in public forums and listened to them via our website. All expressed their hopes for creating a better City and also their frustrations over how City Hall makes decisions or sometimes fails to listen.

Tasked with recording a broad spectrum of messages and observations, Shape Burlington has delineated 14 specific issues that were constant themes in our investigation. From this, we have identified eight recommendations that can help Burlington navigate the future.

Some are self-evident; some are bold. But all come from the people who live in and work for this City. They call for increased engagement and a clearer vision; for more communication to a recovery of trust; for a sense of belonging and more meaningful participation of all segments of our community.
Recommendations

Engagement: Transform the City Hall culture to promote active citizenship and civic engagement

Promoting active citizen engagement and meaningful public dialogue requires a culture shift at City Hall. A crucial first step is the development of an Engagement Charter — a plain language policy document developed with public involvement that incorporates benchmarks and accountabilities, and describes the value, purpose and opportunities for citizens to influence city policies.

The charter would explain how to navigate City Hall and its services. It should stipulate best practices for various kinds of public consultation and affirm the city’s commitment to inform citizens and respond to their ideas and contributions. It would address the question of reaching out to a diverse population.

The charter would incorporate an early notification system to provide citizens and groups information about meetings, events and issues, and to allow reasonable amounts of time to understand, discuss and develop positions before decisions are made. A guide for its development could be the Edmonton Public Involvement process.

Vision: Shift City Hall processes to greater involvement of all citizens in a shared vision of our city

Citizens should be more fully involved in preparing Burlington's Strategic Plan after each municipal election. It is the single best time for them to influence the City’s long-term direction.

The 2011 strategic planning process is an ideal opportunity to begin implementing the principles set out in this report. Citizens should be involved in writing the plan. In this way, they will participate in developing a vision statement for Burlington, set out with clear and measurable action plans that the community can buy into. Some participants could be chosen through citizen juries or random selection.

The strategic planning process and the municipal election itself should be linked explicitly in the minds of voters. In this way the election and the development of the strategic plan would be twinned democratic processes and act as the principal conduits through which the city renews and resets itself every four years.
Communication: Empower people by overcoming the communications deficit

The City should foster the development of an independent information service, including a web-based community news and information portal through start-up subsidies and encouraging community support.

In addition, the Communications Department at City Hall should be fundamentally transformed into a timely and reliable source of City information free of political bias. It is an essential step in providing more resources to foster information, education and continuous learning.

After a comprehensive review of diverse multimedia communications processes, the transformation would include a revamped and more frequent City Talk, webcasts of committee and Council meetings and a user-friendly, well-written website that incorporates the latest web2.0 and gov2.0 innovations to make government more accessible and interactive.

Members of Council are encouraged to develop their own communication vehicles that are separate from the corporate communications process.

A robust, independent professional media is essential in a functioning democracy. We encourage the local news outlets to develop the business and technological solutions that will allow them to reclaim their proper role in the community.

Trust: Improve the public’s trust and confidence in City government

Staff and members of Council should review their protocols and procedures for dealing with citizens to improve public trust, confidence and respect for citizens. This would include ongoing staff training programs and establishing cross-department and measurable customer service standards.

The delegation process should be overhauled so that is not an obscure or intimidating experience for citizens unfamiliar with City Hall or unaccustomed to public speaking. To make citizens feel more welcome, Council, staff and the public should work together to amend the Procedural Bylaw, develop a new manual and provide staff assistance to delegations as required.

To enhance transparency and access, Council could periodically hold its meetings in different geographical areas across the City, including libraries, community centres and schools where students could participate in the proceedings.
Belonging: Build a caring and inclusive community

The City should reach out to minorities, marginalized groups and all of Burlington’s geographical areas. This would include building greater social cohesion through strategic promotion of Burlington’s opportunities and celebrating each others’ success.

In partnership with the community, the City should establish a policy of inclusivity measurements to ensure that City policies, programs and services reflect our changing population. This includes the needs associated with changing population groups, such as seniors and people from diverse backgrounds, and the social, economic and cultural contributions of these groups. The goal is to forge a city where all participate in building the infrastructure for caring and the opportunities to belong.

As society moves faster and individuals become more mobile, creating a sense of place and marking important milestones become more significant. This can be accomplished through pageants and fairs, special occasions and events – a cycle of distinctive annual events that have widespread appeal and draw the community together.

An inclusive community is one that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. All members of the community gain from social inclusion - those who are vulnerable for reasons of poverty, racism, or fear of difference - as well as the broader community that benefits when everyone is able to participate as a valued and contributing member of the community.

Participation: Empower committees and community organizations that work for people

An Office of Engagement should be established to foster and implement recommendations contained in this report.

The Director of the Office, reporting to the City Manager, would implement the Engagement Charter, working with municipal departments to review their policies and design more effective forms of consultation and engagement. This would include a program to support different levels of citizen access and providing meeting space for community/neighbourhood councils and other community-based groups organized around specific issues.

The Director should consider initiating discussions with community groups to develop a template for independent community or neighbourhood councils such as developed in Quebec City, Portland (Oregon) and Los Angeles.

The Director would provide support for Burlington’s Citizen Advisory Committees, important local institutions whose potential has not yet been fully realized because of variation in their
operation, constitution and purpose. Council needs to rethink the structure, responsibilities, standards and accountabilities of future advisory committees. One option is to establish committees that cut across different issue areas.

**Youth: Reach out to the next generation**

In cooperation with the school boards, Council should invest in meaningful initiatives at different grade levels. Members of Council and staff should be made available to speak to students in their schools.

A specific proposal is involvement in the **Grade 10 Civics program**, already in place. Initial meetings with the Director of the Halton District School Board have produced enthusiastic interest in augmenting this program with a module that could be created with input from the City, the school boards and a committee with experience in both these fields.

Using their volunteer hours as currency, students should be brought into the planning process in ways that they help define: creating a website and social networks that allow them to engage with issues that are important to them: transit, sports facilities, bicycle paths, cultural events, festivals, environmental issues, education and diversity.

There is a genuine need, and value, to reach out to Burlington’s youth. Lifelong civic engagement begins here.

**Governance: Define roles and responsibilities**

A **governance review** should be undertaken to clearly define and differentiate the roles and responsibilities of Council and staff.

Workshops, conducted after each election, would help ensure that Council members make effective decisions and spend their time appropriately and effectively at the policy-making level. They will also ensure that staff is empowered to do their job of administration, providing advice and implementing Council policies and decisions.
Messages & Observations

Burlington is using traditional models in a new age

The City of Burlington public involvement processes and methods of engaging the public for both decision- and policy-making are based on traditional models that belong to the past.

Significant social and demographic changes, population growth, increased urbanization, and new technology in the past 30+ years mean that changes in the modes of civic engagement and communication between citizens and government are necessary to relate to a changing society. In recent years, a wide variety of innovations in civic engagement and democratic inclusion have been developed in municipalities and communities in Canada, U.S. and globally.

Burlington is not on the cutting edge of these developments to match its leading edge economy and above average literacy and education rates.

Everyone recognizes the need for improvement

There appears to be as a broad consensus among the public, City staff and members of Council that the processes of public involvement should be improved. However, there are many different viewpoints on what and how extensive these improvements should be.

The public wants more extensive change than City Hall does

While staff and members of Council generally agree that improvements are needed, most believe that the City is doing a better job in communicating and promoting and civic engagement than does the public. Further, the public appears to favour greater changes than those suggested by Council or staff.

Many believe that City Hall is not listening

There is a broad consensus among representatives of citizens who deal with City Hall as well as the public at large that City Council and staff is not listening. Citizens want to see that their input is taken seriously and has a meaningful impact on outcomes.

Citizen confidence in local democracy is declining

There is a broad consensus that public confidence and trust of the City and its democratic processes have declined, especially in the past few years. Most members of Council agree.
**Tomorrow’s major transformative issues will require a new form of leadership**

Burlington will face a number of significant transformative issues over the next decade: greater urbanization and intensification, the impact of build-out on taxes, an aging population, and the need to adjust services for seniors and youth, low income groups and those from diverse backgrounds.

These issues will require leadership at all levels of City Hall to enhance civic engagement. If there is not effective public involvement in the decisions and policy-making processes, the community could become even more distressingly polarized.

**Good citizenship means citizen responsibility**

Good citizenship is a two-way street. Citizens have a responsibility to help make a better community and take part in decision and policy making in an appropriate manner and with mutual respect. The public involvement process should give citizens the greatest opportunities to exercise those responsibilities.
Issues

Governance - the roles of Council and staff

Some citizens suggested that a lack of unified direction and leadership from City Council made it more difficult for staff members to do their job and, further, that staff members were not sufficiently empowered and trusted. Others suggested that staff had undue influence over Council and its decisions. These questions of leadership and respective roles are governance issues, but they have a significant impact on the ability of City Hall to establish a high level of trust for effective public engagement. Some citizens suggested that staff members are frustrating to deal with because they do not have a sense of Council’s direction or goals. The public has difficulty putting issues into their strategic context when they do not understand Council’s goals or feel Council’s directions do not represent a community consensus.

Governance - size of Council

There was a widespread view that the size of Council should be re-visited. Many citizens felt that Council members were too overburdened to make good policy decisions or be able to respond as well as they should to public demands for input and service. However, Council has been the same size for 13 years and it appears that only in the past few years has the concern about its size become a major factor. So are other factors at play? There were some suggestions that the issue is not so much size as one of establishing better standards, measurements, and process for accountability. There were some suggestions that Council members need not spend as much time on service issues and they should restrict their time and efforts to focus on policy directions and major issues, and show greater trust in City staff to do their job.

Service quality and process

Many citizens thought that the quality of service, response time and staff attitude has declined. Interestingly, several members of Council agreed. Citizens’ experience with City Hall is a major determinant in creating trust in municipal government and the democratic process. Citizens have a right to be well treated, as customers and as citizens. The City does not appear to have a clear quality service policy, although one is in early stages of development.
Not all citizens feel included or respected

Some citizens felt business groups and other organizations have a better relationship with City Hall than those involved in activities such as social justice and the environment. They believe that the City should do more to reach out to all citizens and sectors of society.

A number of citizens said they felt intimidated and faced an adversarial attitude on the part of Council when they attended Council or committee meetings as delegates.

Staff reports and presentations

A specific suggestion, repeated several times, was that staff reports should, as often as possible, include options for Council and public to consider so that there is a greater ability to evaluate the best possible direction. Further, the suggestion was made that staff presentations at public meetings should be clear, succinct and relevant to the audience. And, the suggestion was made that the Chairs of public meetings, whether they are Councillors or staff, should be trained in conducting meetings.

The need for more and better information

While we live in an information-based society, communications about the local community, local government and local issues have declined. To have information is to have power. The local information deficit is significant and is a major deterrent to public involvement. There was agreement among all participants that the decline of traditional media as a source of information and platform for debate is a major issue. Fewer professional journalists cover City Hall. Council and committee meetings are often unreported. Compared to 15 years ago when Burlington had three newspapers and frequent radio and television coverage, fewer pages are devoted to City news and there is no radio or television coverage to speak of. Cable TV is still present but competes in a multi channel and multimedia universe. There was some feeling that the media often shows bias. City Talk received mixed reviews, with a large number of people perceiving it as more of a political document than an information provider. Citizens, especially those involved with various organizations, expressed a desire to receive information before issues are discussed.

The need for more education

A common comment was that many residents do not understand City Hall’s procedures and policies and therefore require some basic education so they can navigate the system better and have more confidence to engage.
Importance of early citizen engagement

There was wide agreement among the public, Council and staff that it is important to involve citizens as early as possible in the decision-making process, especially for major issues. Citizens felt that they are consulted too late, after the staff report is already in a final or semi final form. The timeline after a final report is publicly tabled is often only a few days before a committee meeting, leaving citizens little time to adequately prepare if they wish to express their views effectively.

The need for meaningful dialogue

Public information sessions and many public meetings do not allow citizens to become engaged in dialogue with each other to arrive at a consensus. We heard from some members of Council that meetings and processes where residents have dialogue and help frame solutions result in better buy-in because citizens feel they have had an impact.

The influence of single-issue groups

The influence of single-issue groups received mixed reviews. Some citizens considered them to be a major barrier to allowing the opinions of the large spread of citizens to be heard effectively. Several members of Council indicated that this was an issue. Other citizens believed single-issue groups are positive and effective.

More effective use of digital communications

Digital communication and new information technologies are enabling improved interactivity, information-sharing and collaboration as well as a range of social media services, wikis and blogs. They are substantially changing how we communicate and use information. With some exceptions, most people have access to this digital world, particularly young people whose civic involvement is so important. The City should be prepared for the next wave of wireless technology. The City’s website has come in for criticism because it is not user friendly and does not contain useful information. The City has not yet entered the web 2.0 stage. So the City’s proposed website revisions and social media considerations are timely. Some have suggested that web-based communication tools can complement and even replace many traditional meetings. Burlington’s knowledge base could be expanded by a Burlington Wikipedia, a repository of public-sourced information on a range of local subjects.
The importance of public involvement in major policy plans of the city

The Strategic Plan, Official Plan, Capital and Operating Budgets, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the Transit Plan are all policy blueprints. Typically, they are the most difficult for the public to provide critical input. There is a need to develop processes to obtain better and more effective public input at the earliest stages. Further, there was a strong feeling that the Strategic Plan does not include sufficiently specific and measurable goals to be effective.

The need to make more effective use of Citizens Advisory Committees

There is a public perception that the Citizen Advisory Committees are not listened to sufficiently. The City is not taking full advantage of this important resource. Representatives of Advisory Councils have mixed reports on the effectiveness of their activities in terms of influencing City Council decisions and the community’s quality of life. A common issue is that the committees often have difficulty meeting timelines to provide advice.

North versus South, new versus established

It was noted that different geographical areas in the City, particularly new neighbourhoods in the northern and eastern areas, do not feel part of the Burlington community. Some residents of these areas may feel closer to neighbouring municipalities in terms of entertainment and shopping.
Appendices

The research, the procedures and the background that helped form Shape Burlington’s Final Report.

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Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement

Committee Terms of Reference

Excellence in government

One of the best measures of a city’s quality of life is the successful engagement of its citizens with their elected local government. This has been an ongoing issue for Burlington for many years. Citizen engagement is a broad and complex issue, which, ultimately, has its roots in the state of social cohesion in the community. One aspect of citizen engagement is the effectiveness of the communications between the local elected government and the citizens they serve.

In 1997, the City of Burlington hosted a citizens’ workshop on community-based government. Subsequently, City Council appointed a Citizens’ Community-Based Government Committee, which presented a report to City Council in October 1997 with recommendations to improve citizen engagement and communications. After 1997, City Council changed from seventeen elected members to a smaller size of seven members including the Mayor, all of who also served on Halton Regional Council. Other dramatic changes since 1997 include the diminished role of the local media, the use of digital and web based technology, and rapid population growth.

Mayor Cam Jackson has expressed his belief that the City’s communications with its citizens needs to be enhanced to achieve higher levels of awareness and civic engagement. Others have expressed similar concerns. Encouraging broader citizen engagement and improving the way local government communicates with its citizens is a commitment that should involve ongoing, two-way community dialogue. Mayor Jackson has announced the creation of a “Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement”.

He has asked respected community activists John Boich and Walter Mulkewich to co-chair the committee and select the committee members ensuring a broad range of representation, including gender equity, diversity and geographic representation from across the city. This committee will prepare a report for the Mayor. Their recommendations will be shared with the public and council. John Boich is the former Chair of the Rambo Creek Ratepayers Association, a local citizens group advocating for the citizens in the greater downtown area. Walter Mulkewich is a former Mayor of Burlington and was a member of the 1997 Community-Based Government Committee.
Terms of Reference

1. Review the 1997 report on Community-Based Government (*Report of the Community-Based government Committee*, October 29, 1997; City File: 130) and other relevant information on citizen engagement.

2. Review civic engagement with local municipal government through research of current modes of communications between the City and its citizens, as well as the type and level of citizen engagement with the City through Advisory Committees and other means.

3. Develop a work plan, including a communications plan and a budget to meet the mandate of the committee.

4. Solicit information and ideas from members of City Council, City Staff, ratepayer and citizen groups, community organizations, high school students and the general public.

5. Review best practices in communication in the public and private sectors as well as civil society.

6. Consider the culture required to incubate and nurture the engagement of the public, in the public decision making process.

7. Hold focus groups in different areas of the City, which will include invited participants representing a broad cross section of Burlington life, as well as being open to the public.

8. Prepare a final report on its findings and recommendations by March 31, 2010. This committee will present this report for the Mayor and share their recommendations with the public.

Purpose

The Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement is established to move us closer to realizing our Future Focus Seven goals to be “customer focused where residents are part of City Council’s decision-making process” and “striving to keep residents informed and engaged so that all members of Burlington community have the opportunity to have their voices heard.” This Committee will provide ideas and recommendations that could be helpful to implement this Council’s approved goals and strategic actions of the Future Focus Seven strategic plan:
Future Focus Seven: Excellence in government

12.2 Engage citizens more effectively in city Council’s decision-making processes by: 12.2.A Exploring every opportunity to raise awareness of city services through different forms of communications technology and offer additional opportunities for citizens to provide their views to council; and, 12.2.B Develop framework and protocol which council may consider for undertaking enhanced public consultation.

Committee composition and organization

Committee Members: Voluntary, inclusive citizen representation ensuring balanced gender and geographic representation
Maximum of 10

Administrative Support: Mayor’s staff
Departmental Resource Support: As requested
External Resource: TBA

Recruitment and selection

1. The Committee shall be selected by the Co-chairs.

2. The Committee shall be representative of the social and community fabric of Burlington. Citizens who have had active experience with City Hall as users of services or participants pertaining to City government will be an asset to the committee’s work.

Resources

This committee will be resourced through the Mayor’s office. City staff and Council are asked to be available to provide information and input to the Committee’s work, as requested by the Committee.
Acknowledgements

This Shape Burlington Report is only possible because of the huge commitment, hard work, and outstanding contributions of many people in a short period of time from November 2009 to April 2010. Therefore it is important to not only acknowledge them, but also thank them.

Our citizen volunteers

We thank an incredible group of committed citizens from every geographic area of Burlington representing the diversity of our population who attended many committee meetings and consultations with the public as well as doing individual research.

- The Co-Chairs: John Boich and Walter Mulkewich
- The Steering Committee: Doug Brown, Leslie Bullock, Amy Collard, Ken Edwards, Hussein Hamdani, Blair Lancaster, Paul Sharman, Lorraine Sommerfeld, John Searles
- Sub-Committees (Research, Communications, Community Dialogue, Writing): Marilyn Abraham, David Auger, Kale Black, Neil Bryson, David Conrath, Joey Edwardh, Larissa Fenn, Mark Gregory, Mark Henderson, Tim Lindsay, Paul Mitchell, Rennie Mohammed, Roland Tanner, Chris Walker.
- Other participants: A number of citizens were only able to attend some meetings. Carolyn Forbes, Kurt Koster, Anisa Mirza, John Morrison, Yaw Obeng, Karen Parmenter, Andy Rotsma, Judi Smith, Bob Wood, Ken Woodruff, Pat Wright.

Mayor Cam Jackson

The project was initiated by Mayor Cam Jackson who appointed the Co-Chairs and approved the Terms of Reference. We appreciate his support and commitment without input or interference from his office or City Hall, allowing our committee and report to be independent. We also appreciate his support by providing the resources of his office. Finally, we appreciate the contribution from the Mayor’s Pride in Our Community Fund (within the Burlington Community Foundation) and financial support from the Mayor’s budget.
The public

We thank people in the Burlington community who responded to our request for input.
- Citizens who attended our three public roundtable workshops.
- Representatives of community organizations who attended three small group conversations
- Representatives of the City of Burlington Citizen Advisory Committees.
- Students at Corpus Christi and Central High Schools.
- Citizens who participated in our on-line survey and dialogue on our website.

Council and City staff

We thank all the members of Council and staff who gave us their time to openly share their experience, skill, knowledge, and vision.

Burlington Community Foundation

Shape Burlington is extremely thankful for the $15,000 grant received from the Burlington Community Foundation (BCF) through its Mayor’s Pride in Our Community Fund. This grant made it possible for Shape Burlington to enter into a partnership with Community Development Halton (CDH) and to engage MASS LBP as consultants to our project. We are also thankful for the interest shown by BCF in our process and for the input of representatives of BCF at several Shape Burlington meetings.

Community Development Halton

Community Development Halton (CDH) is a community-based organization providing Burlington with social planning and community development capability. We were pleased to have CDH as full partners as advisors and participants. CDH assisted the Co-Chairs in the supervision of our consultant, MASS LBP. Joey Edwardh, Executive Director, and Ted Hildebrandt, Director of Social Planning, participated in many of our Shape Burlington committee meetings and public conversations as well as being full participants in our Research Committee. We thank them for their knowledge and skills, as well as meeting space for several meetings.

MASS LBP

MASS LBP is a new kind of company that works with visionary governments and organizations to deepen and improve their efforts to engage and consult with citizens. We were pleased to have Peter MacLeod, Joslyn Trowbridge and Chris Ellis work with us throughout this project. MASS LBP helped establish a context and direction for our work plan and final report. They provided us with two important papers, a reflection paper on the trends in local democracy and an environmental scan of trends in innovation in civic engagement in local municipalities. They attended a number of meetings of our Committee
and sub-committees, and they facilitated the conversations with City Staff and two of the public roundtables. They also helped facilitate our conversation with the representatives of the Citizen Advisory Committees. Finally, they summarized all our research, conversations, interviews, and meetings and gave us their analysis of the process and its findings to help us shape our final report.

**Website (www.shapeburlington.ca)**

We are grateful for the many hours of volunteer time of our Webmaster, Roland Tanner, who created and maintained the website. We also thank for the members of the Communication Committee who provided advice.

**TVCogeco Cable**

TVCogeco Cable, community channel 23, was helpful and cooperative in hosting a special panel discussion and phone in program to connect with the public. We thank Frank Myers and his staff at TVCogeco for making this possible.
# Summary of the Process

**November 4, 2009, to April 26, 2010**

## Summary of meetings

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## Summary of conversations

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## Summary of committee participants

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<th>Number of citizen participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steering committee members</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-committee members</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants in some committee meetings</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Partners:** Community Development Halton, Burlington Community Foundation  
**Consultants:** MASS LBP  
**Total Volunteer Hours:** 2000+
Research – Gathering and Procedures

From Mass LBP

General Managers

Three General Managers met with MASS LBP and the Shape Burlington Co-chairs for a candid conversation on the role of citizens in municipal governance. The General Managers perceive a shift in municipal governance that is moving to a more upstream process of citizen engagement and public consultation, doing more engagement earlier in the policy making process. They see staff and Council working more cooperatively with citizens now than ever before, making an effort to be transparent and more open about the constraints facing the City and the changes that are in Burlington’s future. This shift to a more robust process of citizen engagement is still in its early stages, the General Managers say, and thus the implications are still ill defined. Nevertheless, they feel there is a consistent effort being made at City Hall to improve the public’s awareness of new cost containment policies and the impacts this has on the City’s services.

Internally, City Hall faces several challenges to engaging citizens more effectively. The first is a lack of clear measurement of which departments are working collaboratively. This is related to a lack of standards for public consultation and engagement across the departments – while some departments, such as Planning, must adhere to Provincial standards in notification and consultation, others do not. Not measuring what departments are doing in terms of consultation, and not having best practices and standards to adhere to give the feeling, in the words of one General Manager, of being in a pinball machine, with many consultation activities happening across departments. Without the time and resources to benchmark engagement practices, effective public consultation will be harder.

Other internal challenges include the lack of diversity in City Hall staff, which detracts from the City accurately reflecting the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of Burlington’s community. This lack of diversity can present challenges for customer service and engagement activities. Finally, General Managers expressed concern over the formal rules of Standing Committees and delegations to Council meetings, which can prevent some citizens from communicating their views in a way that makes sense to them.

External challenges to effective public consultation and engagement identified by General Managers include the lack of public trust in democratic institutions and the high expectations and volume of demands placed by citizens on staff and elected officials. The lack of public trust makes positive messaging of the City’s activities difficult – General Managers feel that the public assumes staff is not very involved or caring and not on the public’s “side.” At the same time, citizens are demanding more from staff and elected officials, expecting quick turnaround times to their questions or concerns. These factors combine to make communication, messaging, and consultation resource-intensive.
Speaking about the process of public meetings in particular, General Managers identified two problems. First, they feel that citizens only come out to a meeting if they are upset or unhappy with a situation. This means that broad and inclusive representation is hard to achieve, as only vocal individuals with a stake in the outcome attend. It also compounds efforts to get high levels of participation in priority-setting and visioning meetings, as these meetings do not offer a point of contention for participants to engage on.

For example, consultation on the City’s budget traditionally sees low participation, but offers citizens the greatest opportunity to affect change for the future. Second, an increasingly mobile population means high turnover for neighbourhoods, and thus a different slate of participants show up at each public meeting. This erodes the consensus and knowledge built through previous consultations, placing more constraints on moving forward through an issue during a series of consultations.

Based on these internal and external challenges, General Managers identified opportunities for improvement to the City’s public consultation and engagement practices. These opportunities are as follows:

- Set standards of engagement and consultation across departments and embed them as aspects of performance management to help change the culture at City Hall
  - Look at best practices within City departments and establish corporate consistency
  - Establish measurements and benchmarks to respond to citizens in an appropriate manner and time frame, especially when considering vocal groups and contentious issues
  - Promote a culture in which staff recognize citizen knowledge as complementary to their own professional expertise
  - Help the next Council term to look at expectations and roles around communication and engagement

- Work towards a “one window” service approach where all staff are ambassadors for all City programs and services to break down “professional silos”

- Improve communication with and messaging to citizens by:
  - Being clear about expectations and how cost containment strategies will affect programs and services
  - Encourage broad conversations on the City’s future rather than just ‘hot button’ issues
  - Use new technology better and begin a social media strategy to reach out to the public in a variety of ways

- Improve citizens’ knowledge of how city government works, potentially by offering educational sessions on and offline
Department Directors

MASS LBP and the Shape Burlington Co-Chairs met with seven department directors, representing the Traffic and Transit, Parks and Recreation, Roads and Parks Maintenance, Engineering, Corporate Strategic Initiatives, Finance and Environment departments. The Directors agreed that the rapid pace of technological change require their departments be able to adapt their modes of communication. In light of technological advancements, increased resources and staff time need to be dedicated to learning, using, and sharing new technologies. They noted that the main internal challenge lies in determining the priorities for devoting money and training time to keep pace with new technologies for internal and external communication.

When asked about their views on the role citizens have to play in municipal governance, City Directors felt that overall citizens are deeply engaged. This engagement contributes to high citizen expectations of interaction with Burlington municipal government, especially in comparison to other municipalities. Directors perceive pressure from citizens to provide increased transparency and accountability, and for government to present a sound rationale for its decision-making. The challenge in responding to that pressure lies in providing information that is succinct while using a convenient mechanism for input and feedback.

Directors note that their staff has trouble determining what and how much information they should provide to the public, as well as the amount of resources to dedicate to this task. They also said that while certain segments of the population, particularly retired or older citizens and those who oppose an issue, can regularly attend and be vocal at public meetings, other demographics such as commuters and younger citizens with families are harder to get feedback from. However, the consistent positive responses to the City’s Quality of Services survey leads Directors to believe that the majority of citizens are satisfied with City Hall.

When asked what they thought was working well in terms of public consultation, Directors expressed pride in a “commitment to excellence in governance at the top” in City Hall culture, including engaging and consulting with citizens to incorporate citizen input into decision-making. Council was particularly praised for its efforts in this regard. Directors identified the ability to make materials such as reports available to citizens online as greatly facilitating City Hall’s ability to provide citizens with an abundance of real-time information. They were also pleased with the interest citizens demonstrated in providing feedback. As noted above, the Quality of Services Survey consistently results in a high rate of return and positive comments. Opportunities for interest groups and special focus groups to make presentations to Council also garner a high level of participation.
Building on these successes and responding to the challenges identified, Directors discussed opportunities to improve the City’s public consultation and citizen engagement activities. These opportunities are as follows:

- Better communicate the existing opportunities for engagement and consultation
- Use more web-based media to counteract the decline in local print media
  - For example, use web-casting for sessions on the budget
- Involve commuter citizens and those without young families/lack of time
- Modify the Quality of Services survey to include more questions on engagement
- Consult citizens on improving the website to identify what types and how much information the public wants

Finally, the Directors expressed the need to communicate to citizens that their job, as staff, is to bring many different perspectives of an issue to the conversations that interest groups and citizens are involved in, but not to advocate for any particular perspective. Their challenge is to remain neutral during consultations and allow all options to stay on the table throughout the duration of public input, which can conflict with citizen demand for direction, guidance, and the elimination of unpopular options.

**Other Staff**

Thirteen staff, including Clerk’s department and communications staff, Councillors’ Assistants, customer service and accessibility coordinators, IT and business staff and graphic designers, met with MASS LBP and Shape Burlington to discuss their perspective as frontline staff who communicate with Burlington residents often, if not daily. Many of the challenges they identified related to customer service and the transactions that occur between citizens and City Hall. Internally, staff recognized that they had limited capacity in serving citizens and other customers with different linguistic backgrounds, and that the elderly may not find their services accessible.

The counters on the first floor of City Hall are often the first point of contact for many citizens, and the staff recognized the need to constantly strive for improvement in customer service. In addition, staff identified difficulty in using plain, simple language to inform citizens about an issue. One participant remarked that some reports produced were even difficult for Councillors to understand.
On communications, staff felt that there was a lack of strategic and standard marketing across departments, and expressed concern that some official City communications looked like advertisements for Councillors, instead of focusing on City information and activities. Finally, staff echoed the concerns of General Managers and Directors that the formal rules for presenting to Council and the language used in Council meetings could alienate and discourage citizen participation.

External challenges to effective public consultation and engagement identified by staff included only receiving negative feedback from citizens and thus not being able to identify what staff was doing right, and the lack of initiative from citizens to inform themselves about the issues. Staff felt that they were doing a good job of getting information out to citizens, and expressed frustration when citizens emerged at the end of a public consultation process to claim they had not been informed. It is often too late to consider public input at the stage in which citizens start to provide input. This “not in my back yard” impetus for getting involved is frustrating to staff who feel that they have provided avenues for input early in the decision-making stage.

Finally, staff felt that there was a low level of awareness of the division of responsibilities between Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels of government, remarking that citizens often asked staff to change services that the City does not provide.

Other external challenges identified by staff echoed what we heard in conversations with General Managers and Directors, as well as in departments. The public perception that government employees do not work very hard, the need for staff to remain politically neutral throughout the consultation process, and the difficulty in engaging young citizens were mentioned as factors preventing effective engagement.

While staff felt that their role in customer service, particularly having a live answer switchboard, was making a positive impact on how citizens perceive municipal government, they were concerned that one “hot button” issue that receives negative press can be detrimental to citizens’ positive perceptions.

Opportunities for improvement identified by staff include:

- Break down issues to show how they impact citizens and localize meetings to increase engagement
  - For example, show how the Official Plan or other planning/visioning documents can affect citizens

- Involve the public earlier on issues and keep them involved throughout the decision making process

- Mail and communication from the City should reflect City business and be politically neutral
• Citizen participation in Council meetings should be less formal, more modern and “real”

• Implement standards and training for customer service for frontline staff
  ○ This is currently being reviewed

• Measure how departments are faring on customer service, implement a system for following-up with complaints

• Market the City better to increase a sense of pride, use strategic marketing

• Advertise outside of City facilities (we go to them instead of expecting citizens to come to us)

Clerks and Communications Department

We spoke with five Department staff responsible for community relations, council services, committee services and communications. This session addressed current practices to interact with and respond to citizens as well as the successes and challenges staff have experienced when connecting with citizens. The department faces several internal challenges to effective consultation and engagement. Citizens are demanding more information and expecting quicker response times. This places pressure on staff to balance completing their daily tasks and core work while responding to this demand.

Taking on new staff and using new technology to increase department capacity is a potential solution, but these both take time and resources for training and management. Staff struggle with reporting back to the public on how public input will be used to make changes, and have difficulty communicating operational plans in plain language. Communication costs, such as marketing, branding, and ensuring consistency across departments, can be high, and the public is usually at odds over this spending, as it competes with spending on core services. Thus staff face increased demand for clear, fast and effective communication, but there is a lack of public will to spend money to obtain this kind of communication.

The Clerks and Communications staff also identified the difficulty in staying neutral during public consultation on a contentious issue, and are often asked by citizens for information on the “best option”, which City staff cannot give. Finally, staff identified a “work squeeze” in the middle of a Council’s four year term, where pressure for results mounts as the lead-up to the next election begins. They felt that the “City sees customers, but Council sees voters.”
A main external challenge Clerks and Communications staff face is “private sector demands” on the public sector. In the private sector, niche marketing, customized experience, and access to information and technology raise customer service expectations. These are often replicated in the expectations citizens place on elected officials and public servants. However, the process by which the public sector gathers, interprets, and weighs competing demands and remains neutral and open to all opinions prevents them from offering customized services to each citizen. For example, many staff noted that citizens demand an unrealistic response time to emails (usually two hours). Many citizens send a second email if they do not receive a reply within two hours or so, placing demands on staff that staff simply cannot meet.

Other external challenges echo the conversations with other City staff - the public misconception that staff do not work hard or long hours, a changing audience at public meetings does not allow staff time to keep up with input and demand for changes to plans, and the lack of public awareness of the division of services between the City and the Province. Despite these difficulties, Clerks and Communications staff felt that they did provide excellent customer service and that considering the volume of requests, their response times were adequate. They pride themselves in working to be information providers and to get the right information to the right person, and hold their internal communications to a high standard. They identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- Need research that establishes:
  - What does the public think of us?
  - What information do you want to hear?
  - How do you want to hear it?

- Consistent public notification and consultation process prior to the drafting of reports
  - Find a best practice that works with the legislative requirements

- Dedicate more staff and more staff time to the Citizens’ Advisory Committees

- Expand the department’s arsenal of communication methods, including the use of social media and new information technologies

**Planning Department**

Six staff from the Planning Department responsible for Policy, Development, Planning, Site Plans and Urban Design met with MASS LBP and the Shape Burlington Co-Chairs to identify challenges their department faces when consulting with the public. They identified a shift in the planning and development field towards more public input and consultation, but noted that this takes time and resources to do effectively. The complicated nature of planning
presents staff with a significant challenge when communicating with the public. Specifically, documents and reports, such as the Official Plan, contain information that is imperative for citizens to understand, but are often written “by bureaucrats for bureaucrats.”

This makes it difficult for staff to help people make an informed contribution, and significant resources are required to communicate both the big picture vision associated with planning and the specific tradeoffs associated with a particular project. In particular, staff noted the lack of citizen understanding of the legislative requirements around city planning, which means citizens are asking to change plans that are not always up for negotiation.

Staff feels that the public is only engaged on a topic when it affects them personally, and that citizens do not understand nor respect the stages of consultation associated with planning. They noted that citizens have the greatest opportunity for input during the policy, visioning, and budgeting stages, but usually participate in public meetings that happen after these stages and are mostly meant to inform the public of what is happening. This results in frustration on both sides. Staff also find that citizens come to a public meeting misinformed, thus forcing time to be dedicated to educating and informing citizens on the project rather than providing input or feedback. In addition, the length of time between consultations presents a challenge, as neighbourhoods change and different people show up to different stages of the consultation.

This makes Planning Department staff feel as if they are “speaking to a parade” and erodes the knowledge and consensus built in previous public meetings. Staff also noted that participation rates in rural areas are low, contributing to uneven consultation across the city. Finally, staff felt that citizens are generally adverse to land-use change, and have difficulty communicating the demographic necessity of these changes for Burlington.

Despite these difficulties, the Planning Department prides themselves on their public engagement efforts, noting that they often go above and beyond the legislative requirements for consultation. They try to use public consultation activities as “teachable moments” to help educate the public on how the planning and development process works, and note that of 2000 Customer Service Questionnaires distributed last year, less than 2% had negative comments.

Opportunities for improvements identified by Planning Department staff are:

- Implement a more streamlined, continuous process of engagement that focuses on the positive implications of development
- Dedicate more staff and more time to innovations in public consultation
- Explore ways to cope with the changing audience in public meetings
- Fill in gaps left by the decline of the local media
  - Use website to better communicate planning and development projects in a more timely manner
City Talk

The five conversations with City Hall Staff included a short discussion on City Talk, the City of Burlington’s corporate newsletter. Many staff agreed that the newsletter is in need of redesign, and that this is in fact underway (City Talk was previously outsourced and is now being brought back in house). They agree that City Talk is an important source of information for citizens who are not online, but feel that it has “lost its way” over the past few years. Staff would like to see City Talk include more information on what is happening in the City and less space devoted to Councillors’ activities. One staff member suggested a survey or inquiry into how the public uses City Talk and what they would like to see it contain.

Shape Burlington Members’ Meeting

About 25 members of the Steering, Research, Communications, and Community Dialogue Committees and representatives from the Burlington Community Foundation (BCF) met to provide input into successful engagement strategies and discuss the two research papers produced in early February. First, in small groups, Shape Burlington members discussed what they felt were the top issues and trends facing Burlington in the next ten years. Together, the group identified the following top issues:

- Intensification
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Challenges to Official Plan
- Ability of developers to use the Ontario Municipal Board to override citizen priorities
- Traffic and transportation

Next, they discussed what elements were needed for a successful engagement strategy. The top elements were identified as:

- A clear sense of purpose
- Constructive conflict
- Building alignment on a vision
Other elements were identified as follows:

Communication

- Open communication whereby Councillors let citizens know what other interest or lobby groups are saying about an issue
- Need to communicate engagement opportunities with a ‘sales hook’ that engages people on issues important to them
- Involve people early, give adequate notice, make meeting accessible
- Invitations to participate show that you value people’s thoughts, people will come out – ‘it is very powerful to be given the opportunity’

Format

- Need facilitation – can’t have ‘free-for-all’ conversations
- Use both physical and online meetings
- Succinct and candid conversations
- Work from the personal to the broader context
- Use smaller work groups

Representation

- A balance of viewpoints/inclusive
- Think about involving commuters who spend little time in Burlington

Agenda/Focus

- Room for citizens to set agendas and goals, both short and long term, and allow for learning
- A mix of issue-based and vision-based consultations
- Address a clear, manageable and published agenda
- Help people understand the tradeoffs of the issue at hand
- Citizens need some autonomy in decision-making
- Community-building and power sharing need respect to move upstream as well
- Internal culture change at City Hall

Measurement

- Need to involve people in the Strategic Plan so they have a vision and a measure for other issues
- Measure if we are obtaining our goal.
Overall, Shape Burlington members called for an approach to citizen engagement and public consultation that was proactive, not reactive. A proactive approach would mean institutionalizing engagement as a regular practice of City government. For example, Shape Burlington members talked about an advisory or consultative system at the Ward level, akin to the Citizens’ Advisory Committees. These ward-level bodies would supply feedback from residents and, as long as they had reasonable turnover to ensure a diversity of voices, would help Councillors listen to citizen perspectives. The regularity of engagement provided by these bodies would ensure a continuous and open stream of communication between citizens who “know their neighbourhood best” and the Councillors that represent them.

Public Roundtable Meetings

Three public roundtable meetings were held in East, West and North-Centre Burlington, involving close to 100 Burlington residents. The top issues facing Burlington’s future, identified by participants, were similar across all three public meetings.

Roundtable Top Values

East

1. Intensification
2. Fiscal planning/vision for the future
3. Health services/money for hospital
4. Opening up communication

West

1. Intensification and sustainable development
2. Transit
3. Community input in health care
4. Poverty and affordable housing

North-Centre

1. Civic engagement
2. Environment, sustainable development
3. Transit
4. Poverty and affordable housing
Factors for successful engagement strategies were also similar. The main factors identified were:

**Transparency and access to information**
- Truthful facts
- Clarity of issue
- Financial implication of the issue
- Identification of staff responsible for acting on the issue

**Goal-oriented**
- Clear goals
- Meaningful
- Action and results oriented

**Building trust/confidence**
- In elected officials
- In City Staff
- In community decision-making

**Balance of interests**
- Stakeholders
- Vocal individuals
- Community interests

**Respectful**
- Truly listening and responsive
- Listening as well as speaking
- Sensitivity to public concerns
- Sense of community while respecting rights of individuals
- Value volunteer time

**Empowering**
- Effecting change and degree of power-sharing
- Sense of ownership
- Inspiring
- Accessible
- Collaborative

**Other**
- Timely
- Localized
- Proactive
Next, participants moved to tables dedicated to one of the identified top issues facing Burlington in the future, and devised steps for public consultation and engagement strategies by issue, looking at a short, medium and long-term time frame.

**Short-term – focus on communication:**

- Early notification through varied means
- Raise awareness of the issue through a communication campaign
- Communicate the issue in plain language and make it relevant to people’s lives
- Use interesting ways to present information (e.g. graphic representation of intensification or demographic changes)
- Information and awareness of groups that exist for citizens to join on the issue outside of City public meetings

**Medium-term – focus on education and creating a shared vision:**

- Find out how public currently thinks about the issue
  - Send organizers or facilitators into a community to find out what people want
  - Councillors to visit neighbourhoods to see subsidized housing and social supports so they talk to the people who need/use these services
  - Look for people in community and train them to be ambassadors for issue
- Help people understand funding, division of responsibility, demographics, financial implications, facts, jobs, in a simple manner
- Educate on the roles of Municipal, Provincial and Federal governments
- Identify current and future needs
- Full disclosure on how information/input gathered will be used, both public and stakeholder, with regular updates
- Show the public the “big picture benefits” of the issue, help create a shared vision and goals
- Establish methods to measure goal attainment
- Establish a time frame for moving forward

**Long-term – focus on continuous engagement and learning:**

- Engage public in long-term planning
- Bring diverse groups together for regular, localized meetings
- Link to Citizens Committees on the topic at hand
- Form advice to council, connect with City Hall staff
- Allow staff to work collaboratively/not in silos
- Record lessons from past successful engagement processes
- Adjust to needs of community as community evolves
Interviews with the Mayor, Councillors & City Manager

The conversations with the Mayor, Councillors and City Manager centred on the role of citizen and Councillor, the role of municipal government, current practices at City Hall and future advice. Below is a brief summary of the information gathered on each of these issues.

Role of Citizen and Councillor

In summary, our elected officials want citizens to be better informed and involved. They want citizens to use the processes now in place to become more actively involved in the decision-making process.

Councillors are receptive to making necessary changes to ensure that there are realistic opportunities for citizen engagement.

Role of Municipal Government

In summary, the role of municipal government is as much the responsibility of elected and appointed officials to assist citizens in understanding the issues as it is of citizens to organize their presentations and bring forward their recommendations in a respectful manner.

Current Practices – Newsletters

- e-mails
- website pages
- direct mailing on specific neighbourhood issues
- open houses for development issues
- e-mail blasts on specific issues
- ward drop-in meetings
- lobbying by special interest groups
- City Talk
- City Update on the city website and the Burlington Post
- informal conversations in the neighbourhood
- ward meetings for visionary exercises on specific significant issues
- Public Information Centres
- columns in the print media
- cable shows
- monthly Advisory committees meetings which are open to the public to observe
- Councillor attendance at a myriad neighbourhood meetings and events
Future Advice/Avenues of Engagement

- involving themselves in community activities and events;
- listening seriously to all points of view and not doing it through a filter;
- working actively with neighbourhood, city-wide and regional organizations;
- thinking independently after weighing all opinions whether by staff, citizens or other venues;
- managing the information overload to focus on the most pertinent and relevant information;
- acknowledging that a problem exists and dealing with it up front and visible;
- avoiding the “culture of coziness” or group think which is endemic to all organizations;
- practicing the culture of inclusivity when seeking out opinions of “other voices”;
- having the empathy and capacity to deal with the public demands for cultural shifts in processes and attitudes to deliver programs and services;
- placing all decision-making in a larger context rather than an expedient one.

Citizen Advisory Committees

Because Citizens’ Advisory Committees are created by Council and offer a direct opportunity for citizens to provide advice to Council, the Shape Burlington committee built questions on these committees into their conversations, and also organized a separate meeting of representatives from several different committees. In conversations with City staff, we learned that many feel favourable towards the committees. They are successful when citizens are involved for long terms and address specific issues that are linked to one of the City’s Future Focus strategic goals. Citizens’ Advisory Committees are less successful if they lack dedicated volunteers or are created out of a political motivation. While staff does their best to make the relationship between the committees and municipal government a positive one, including helping to draft mandates, Terms of Reference, and reports, there are currently no consistent requirements for staff involvement.

To improve the effectiveness of Citizen Advisory Committees, staff recommends:
- Clarifying expectations for members
- Limiting one Councilor representative per committee
- Engage Council and Standing Committee in better communication with these committees
- Training for committee members
- Increasing public awareness of these committees and the opportunities to get involved
- Focusing committees on vision-building and long-term planning work
In the conversation with representatives from Citizen Advisory Committees, the results were mixed when asked if representatives thought their committees was effective at providing input to Council. Some committee members felt that their role was more than a citizen “rubber-stamp” and that they get good, clear information from staff and are able to put forward citizen-centred priorities on the issue to Council.

Others noted that in some instances they are not taken seriously by Council and are at times shut out of the decision-making process. All representatives agreed that having a dedicated staff member as a liaison between the committee and Council was key to their committees’ success. They also felt that while Council may have set the Terms of Reference, committees were able to adapt them enough to create a focus comfortable for all members. However, some representatives felt that too much time spent revising the terms of reference would detract from the core work of the committee.

All representatives noted personal interest in the committee issue and wanting to give back to the community as reasons for joining, and there was consensus that Citizens Advisory Committees do offer a real opportunity for engaging with municipal government.

To improve the effectiveness of their committees, representatives recommend:

- Direct dialogue at meetings with staff from the department closest to the committee’s issue
- Continuous communication and feedback from staff and councilors so that committee members know if and how their input will be used
- Better scheduling and notification times by Council to committees on when reports are being prepared and require input and when decisions will be made
  - Many committees would like to review early drafts of reports for feedback, rather than one opportunity to comment on a final report
  - Allow more time for committee to read and consider all reports before asking for feedback
- Dedicated more staff time to committee meetings
  - Representatives emphasized the importance of having a Clerk or dedicated staff to oversee committees as their composition changes. They talked about the difficulties communicating with the City through different staff members, as staff is rotated through committees as part of their cross-department training.
- Dedicate more Councillor time to committees
- Connect committees together in Joint Committees to increase communication between volunteers working on connected issues
- Advertise committees better to increase diversity in membership
- Streamline the application process and make it more accessible/less formal
- No “one-size-fits-all” approach to committees, each one requires a different design to achieve its objectives
Conversations with Youth

Over 125 Grade 10 students at Corpus Christie Catholic High School and Burlington Central
High School met with Shape Burlington Communications and Steering Committee members
to talk about their relationship with municipal government. Below are excerpts from the
Shape Burlington member’s notes on those conversations.

Summary

- All agreed that there should be more activities and venues targeting their
  age group, including concerts, sports, skateboard parks, dances,
  volunteering venues, etc.
- Transit is a huge issue with nearly all of these students. From how
  frequently the buses run to how costly transit is factored into every
  discussion. They need to get to school and part time jobs, and they need
  to be able to do it safely, reliably and affordably.
- About half of the students did not understand the mandate and
  responsibilities of municipal governments, but many indicated that they
  would like to know more.
- While many students are active in sports, all expressed a frustration with
  the ineffectiveness of existing facilities. They expressed a keen desire for
  a multi-sports facility – a sports mall housing multiple disciplines.
- Some indicated that they would like to be more involved with a say in
  issues that affect their age group and did state that many of the decisions
  made by the local politicians do affect them. - The City should reach out
to the teens, and they in turn may respond accordingly. Politicians are
more concerned about adult issues and are not interested in their age
  group. No one has approached them before for their thoughts,
  consequently, they feel disconnected.
- They feel that the City should take a more proactive approach towards
  their age group, and could improve communication by publishing matters
  that are of interest to them on a website, Facebook (mentioned a lot),
  and/or bulletin boards in each school ( a couple of persons suggesting
  electronic ones). The city should consider a student advisory group to
  council that could deliver its perspective on current issues and those that
  will affect their future.
- Some felt that they might influence council through making a video
  presentation about their issues, and to conduct a survey of their issues.
  They feel that they might have more sway through the gathering numbers
  of students together to present their views.
- many indicated they would be more likely to participate in and help create
  programs and events they had a say in crafting, like a winter carnival,
  music shows or volunteer programs
• Through their Civics Program, they would like to hear from people who work at City Hall, in various capacities, to gain a better understanding of how their City works. This could include politicians, but ‘not during an election year’.
• Many thought a program that enabled them to do their mandated volunteer hours in a capacity involving municipal government would be interesting, especially if it involved developing events or communications geared to youth.
• Most are keenly aware that while they may not be of voting age, their parents and older siblings are, and they remarked that they can influence votes from that perspective.
• None of the students we spoke to were aware of an existing Mayor’s Youth Advisory Committee.
Research Committee Report: Community Conversations

Three community conversations were held on February 22 and 23 with representatives of business, community organizations, and sport and cultural organizations.

The following questions were asked of the participants to draw out their opinions on city issues, civic engagement, and their own experiences with the city.

From your perspective/As representatives of the business/arts/sports/citizen advocacy:
- What are the main issues facing Burlington in the next five to ten years?
- Is there a role for your group/organization in planning or making decisions on these issues?
- What role can your group/organization play getting citizens to participate, get more involved, in municipal government?
- What kinds of municipal information do you think your group/organization needs or would benefit from accessing?
- Please describe the most constructive meeting or event that you have attended that made you feel your organization's perspective was heard.
- Please describe the least constructive meeting or event that you have attended.
- What advice would you give to future Councillors and City officials concerning their relationships with your group/organization?

Participants were also asked to comment on any other issues that they felt were important and were invited to speak frankly as the comments would not be ascribed to specific individuals. Detailed notes on the three community conversations are provided in Appendix A. The initial grouping of concerns and recommendations is provided in Appendix B.

The following is the Research Committee’s summary of the comments and discussions from the three community conversations.

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES

Information was collected from three community conversations—business, community, and culture and sport.

The summary that follows is shared across the groups but very clearly the business community had easy access and high social capital with members of Council. Business felt their relationship with city hall is “stellar” while community groups did not feel that they were valued or respected and as a result had limited access to City Hall tables. Sports and cultural groups had better relationships with the City than community ups, felt frustrated their relations with the City had deteriorated the past few years.
The following trends and issues were identified during the community conversations and are listed below. These issues are highly interconnected and there was no attempt made to prioritize.

### 1. Living Conditions/Quality of Life
- Transit
- Affordable housing
- Poverty
- Jobs
- Homecare
- Accessible services
- Balance among the social, economic, recreational and cultural services and activities
- Services across the life cycle
- Green spaces
- Environmental sustainability
- Vulnerable population groups
  - Youth
  - Single moms with children
  - Seniors
  - Newcomers-new immigrants

### 2. Population Growth and Increasing Diversity
- Inclusion
- Respect and understanding

### 3. Invest in Social and Economic and Cultural Infrastructure
- Social, cultural and recreational and physical infrastructure to sustain social and economic development
- To support a prosperous age friendly community

### 4. Intensification and Infill
   a. Land use planning
   b. Implications for the physical and social infrastructure

### 5. Tax base—Federal/Provincial/ Municipal Fiscal Arrangements
- Long term changes to funding model
6. Two Burlingtons —North vs South
   - Geography, history and development patterns

7. Vision—Make Local Democracy Work: Promote Civic Citizenship
   - Build civic engagement and respect citizenship
   - Strategic thinking over the long term —50 years
   - Innovative policy development
   - Beyond municipal cycle
   - Embrace complexity
   - Weave together economic, social, recreational and cultural
   - Participatory decision making

8. Civic Engagement
   - Concept of citizen and active engagement
   - Concept of citizen rights and responsibility

9. Good Governance
   - Respectful
   - Listening
   - Resolve size of council/population of Burlington adequate representation and balanced workload
   - Regional/municipal representation—is their a conflict of interest?
   - Creates real mechanisms of advice and consultation
   - Communication—evidence based, accurate and clear—multiple communication strategies

10. Leadership
    - Vision
    - Consultative
    - Evidence based information for decision making
    - Shared decision making
    - Courage to make good decisions
SUMMARY: BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

1. Culture of Distrust and Disrespect

- Citizens cast as special interest groups, consumers or clients
- Citizen delegations treated with disrespect, patronized
- Citizen delegations, their efforts and input, not valued
- Citizens are intimidated
- Council adversarial towards delegations
- Blame the victim stance
- No evidence that citizens’ comments are considered or incorporated
- Whose voice is legitimate and whose is not—what voices are not included
- Whose voices are heard and whose voices are not and why
- Community spaces that are accessible to community and are safe spaces
to nurture dialogue
- Independent community information and research

2. Advisory Committees

- Ineffective
- Not listened to
- Lack authority to advise
- Work in silos
- Legitimize Council activities
- Rubber stamp
- Emerging citizens groups are reaction to powerlessness of advisory committees

3. City Hall Processes

- Timing for consultation and input is too late, decisions already made
- Language technical and exclusive
- Processes of consultation are confusing and often controlled
- Transparent interaction with citizens is needed
- Staff not clear on Council direction, difficult to act, not empowered

4. Communications as community building-- need for multiple strategies to reach all

- Local newspaper, (The Burlington Post), uninformative—not a vehicle of community building
- Poor information on municipal and community affairs
- No critical journalism, no analysis of issues, no community dialogue in print
5. Citizen Education/Citizen Dialogue

- access to good evidence based information
- citizen cynicism and apathy shaping participation
- no spin, clear non-technical language
- Learning spaces, participatory decision making
- Citizen to citizen dialogue—all voices included

6. Bumping Responsibility—It’s a Regional Issue

- City councillors are regional councillors
- Lived experience of people is in their municipality
Going local: A survey of recent trends in municipal democracy

An environmental scan prepared for the Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement
Burlington, Ontario
February 2010
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**Introduction**

Over the course of the past fifteen years we have witnessed a pronounced shift among mature western democracies towards “more horizontal modes of governance and towards a more organized, diverse and empowered society.”¹ These innovations are not always visible to citizens busy with their daily lives and summoned every four years to the ballot box. Nevertheless, rapid advances in communication technologies are creating new ways to involve citizens in politics and public life. New social technologies — methods for convening and working with small as well as large groups of citizens — increasingly focus on creating a more informed electorate and creating public consensus, while providing citizens with a seat among decision-makers. Moreover, new approaches to more collaborative forms of government can be seen to be changing the relationship between different orders of government.

This might not be a time of strident activism or public protest, but our politics are becoming increasingly ‘people-powered’ as pressure builds to create new ‘citizen-centred’ processes of policy-making and public discussion. This report attempts to summarize some of the most recent trends and catalogues examples of recent municipal democratic innovation here in Canada and abroad.

These efforts fall largely into four categories:
1. Temporary initiatives by community or citizens’ groups
2. Temporary initiatives by elected officials or other policy makers
3. Permanent, power-sharing structures
4. Online consultation and communication

While each type of engagement effort has strengths and weaknesses, the examples reviewed below are considered successful because they have the capacity to “foster informed deliberation and to inspire confidence, both in the electoral process and in local governance.”² They do this by providing opportunities for democratic skill building for citizens and public sector employees, using mechanisms for two-way communication and power sharing. They also may offer a basis for working towards structured, long-term changes in the way citizens and government interact.

¹ This paper was prepared to assist in the research and community consultation process in February and March of 2010 led by Shape Burlington. Shape Burlington is the public name for the Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement (MCACCE) initiated by Mayor Cam Jackson. The Co-Chairs John Boich and Walter Mulkewich have selected its members and the Committee is working independently to achieve its mission of more effective civic engagement in Burlington. Information about the Committee and its Terms of Reference is at [www.shapeburlington.ca](http://www.shapeburlington.ca) and [www.burlington.ca](http://www.burlington.ca)
Temporary initiatives by community or citizens’ groups

- National Issues Forums
- 21st Century Town Meetings
- Think City
- Action for Neighbourhood Change

Temporary engagement efforts are aimed at helping citizens address a specific issue. They can take place in a single day or entail sessions spread over several weeks, and can involve a broad coalition of non-profit organizations, community groups, and active citizens. These initiatives are able to recruit diverse and large numbers of participants, and often involve the highly skilled facilitation, issue framing, and action planning techniques that come with experience in community building and activism. On the other hand, their temporary nature means that even when they produce tangible, well-supported recommendations, they don’t lead to institutional change, and their lack of formal links to policy making can hamper their ability to turn recommendations into action.

National Issues Forums (United States)

National Issues Forums (NIF) is a non-partisan, nationwide network of organizations and individuals who sponsor public forums for deliberation. The network provides help with process, activities, facilitation techniques and recruitment strategies to community colleges, neighbourhood associations, and other community organizations interested in convening a public dialogue on a particular issue. NIF also has over 70 “issue books” that provide baseline facts and background information, as well as an overview of different approaches to the issue. Issue books can be used as a basis for discussions on juvenile violence, the role of money in politics, gambling, dealing with racial and ethnic tensions etc.

The size and setting of community NIFs differ from city to city, but often involve a coalition of community groups, and can be daylong dialogues or multiple sessions. Generally, these forums produce summary reports that are given to local or national officials to inform policy making. The adoption of recommendations by government officials varies, but the argument that “people are more likely to agree with decisions that they participate in making, as opposed to decisions others make for them” is strong. NIFs help citizens form the habit of public deliberation and build the skills and confidence that communities can respond effectively when problems arise.

Resources:
National Issues Forums: [http://www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org)
21st Century Town Meeting

AmericaSpeaks, a national non-profit organization, convenes 21st Century Town Meetings with local sponsor organizations to address a critical issue facing a community. They bring together a large number of diverse citizens for a daylong meeting in which dialogue and deliberation activities and roundtable discussions play a large roll. Some of these meetings involve a voting procedure to determine citizen-centred priorities and recommendations, which are collected in a report and given to local officials. Some meetings are officially sponsored by public officials, such as the Washington, DC, citizen summits, where residents join the mayor to create the district’s budget and strategic plan. Other examples of meetings include land use planning by regional planning agencies in Chicago and Cincinnati, creating priorities for the rebuilding of New Orleans, and formulating recommendations to memorialize and rebuild the World Trade Centre site in New York.

Resources:
http://www.americaspeaks.org/_data/n_0001/resources/live/takingdemocracy.pdf

Vancouver’s Think City

Think City is a non-profit organization created in 2002 to involve citizens in discussions on the challenges facing the City of Vancouver and to develop practical solutions. Think City hosts forums, conferences, deliberative surveys and online discussions on a variety of issues, including democracy and democratic reform, environmental sustainability during the preparations for the 2010 Olympics, and citizen priorities for the City budget. In 2004, with the support of Simon Fraser University’s Institute of Governance studies, the organization undertook a deliberative survey of 400 participants as part of a citywide public consultation that focused on developing a citizens’ report on the Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission.

Resources:
Think City: http://www.thinkcity.ca/
Action for Neighbourhood Change/Toronto’s Strong Neighbourhood Task Force

Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) was a two-year strategic research initiative to explore approaches to locally driven neighbourhood revitalization. From 2005-2007, local residents, not-for profit agencies, and public and private sector partners developed locally based solutions for sustainable community development in Surrey, Regina, Thunder Bay, Toronto, and Halifax.

Engaging the local community was a key factor in each city initiative, although the methods of engagement varied. In Toronto, Scarborough Village was chosen as an inner suburb for locally based revitalization. This project built on the work of Toronto’s Strong Neighbourhood Task Force, which was a joint initiative by the City of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto. The Task Force recommended, “a new neighbourhood structure be established to evaluate and reshape government policies, programs and funding mechanisms to better respond to the changing face of Toronto neighbourhoods. This structure includes a neighbourhood-based partnership to engage local residents and an investment board that brings together the resources of the private, public and voluntary sectors.”

ANC Staff opened a project office in Scarborough Village and held numerous one-on-one conversations and small group discussions, leading up to a community forum to explain the ANC process. The engagement process continued with newsletters and community conversations in English, Tamil and Urdu. ANC staff also worked with youth from social housing developments. This process led to the establishment of an Agency Table, where service providers from the surrounding area met to determine a central neighbourhood service access point, and the self-organizing of volunteers into a neighbourhood steering committee and structure, including writing and adopting a constitution.

Resources:
Action for Neighbourhood Change: http://www.anccommunity.ca
Strong Neighbourhood Task Force: http://www.strongneighbourhoods.ca
ANC in Scarborough Village Sets a Good Example for Toronto Neighbourhoods (2007)
The Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa, ON.
http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/627ENG.pdf
Temporary initiatives by elected officials or other policy-makers

- Citizens’ Juries
- Consensus Conferences
- Planning Cells
- Voluntary Planning
- Philadelphia Waterfront Revitalization

These efforts are also issue-focused, and are usually used by elected officials or other public employees to solve a particular problem. They have a strong connection to the policy making process, enabling participants to feel that their recommendations are taken seriously. If they are successful in producing strong public mandates, public officials might come back to the community again on another issue in the future, prompting an ongoing commitment to work with the public. However, engagement efforts on the part of policy makers can also subside after a decision has been made. These initiatives have also been criticized for focusing too narrowly on policy questions of the moment rather than encouraging citizens to devote their time and energy to solving broader public problems and thinking about the health of local democracy in the longterm.

Citizens’ Juries

Citizens’ juries generally convene 12-24 citizens to deliberate over 3-4 days. Using stratified random sampling, citizens’ juries ensure a diversity of participants. Citizens hear presentations by experts on the issue at hand, ask questions, and deliberate after the experts have left. Citizens’ juries are sponsored by a public authority, but are convened and run by an independent organization to ensure fair proceedings. The resulting recommendations are given to the sponsoring public official to be included in the policy making process. Generally, a contract exists to ensure that the public authority responds to the recommendations, either accepting them or explaining why they will not be implemented. Citizens’ juries have been used in the US since the 1970s and in the UK since the mid 1990s.

Resources:
People and Participation.net:
http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Citizens+Jury
Consensus Conferences

Originating in Denmark in the 1980s, consensus conferences involve a two-stage procedure that engages 10-25 randomly selected citizens in eight days of deliberation over approximately three months. Designed to incorporate the perspectives of the public in policy on new scientific and technological developments, the first stage focuses on learning about the issue at hand, developing questions to address, and selecting a list of conference presenters from experts and interest groups. The second stage involves a four-day conference, in which the selected citizens listen to presentations from experts and interest groups on all sides of the issue. On the third and fourth day, citizens create a report outlining their recommendations, and present their findings to the decision-makers that sponsor the conference, as well as an audience of interested members of the public.

Resources:
The Danish Board of Technology, “Consensus Conferences”: http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=468&tippic=kategori12&language=uk

Planning Cells

Planning cells are similar to citizens’ juries, but are larger, involving a number of similarly-structured ‘cells’ containing 25 citizens each. On average, processes use six to ten planning cells that last for four days. Each four-day planning cell is divided into sixteen work units involving a mix of information sessions, presentations by experts, site visits, and small group discussions. When all planning cells have been completed, the independent organization that runs the process collates and synthesizes the outputs into a citizens’ report. Drafts are circulated and approved by a group of citizens nominated from each planning cell, and this same group presents the final report to the decision-makers that initiated the planning cell process. Planning cells have been used in Germany since the 1970s. The largest process involved eighteen separate planning cells with 425 citizens in five different locations across Bavaria, to help the Bavarian minister for health, nutrition, and consumer protection respond to the ‘mad cow’ outbreak in 2001-2002.

Resources:
Voluntary Planning

The Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning Board is a semi-independent, arm’s length government agency that reports to the Treasury and Policy Board. Originating in 1963 as a series of committees considering provincial economic policy, it was expanded in 1972 to include a wider range of public issues. The Voluntary Planning Board now approaches issues on an ad hoc rather than committee basis, forming volunteer task forces to consider specific issues. Although it is a provincial initiative, projects have major implications at the municipal level. The government recruits volunteers to lead engagement efforts with citizens on planning projects and policy. It is an iterative process that helps the public become more knowledgeable on a topic through meetings, discussions papers, expert presentations, and then contribute by creating solutions and suggestions for improvement to the policy problem at hand. Most projects run for one to two years. The Volunteer Planning group presents findings and recommendations both to the public and the appropriate level of government.

Resources:

Philadelphia Waterfront Revitalization

After six waterfront development proposals failed to receive adequate public support in 2002, the Mayor of Philadelphia initiated 50 days of public dialogue about the future of the waterfront. With the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, the editorial board of the region’s largest daily newspaper, the Center for School Study Councils and a design advocacy group, the Mayor convened four meetings of dialogue, alternating between expert and citizen driven conversations. The design community helped drive innovative design ideas and the newspaper helped convene public gatherings, spread news on the results and recommendations, and link the broader public with the issue of waterfront revitalization. Over 800 people participated, developing the Penn’s Landing Principles, which were community values that any future development projects must honour.

Resources:
Permanent, power-sharing structures

- Neighbourhood Councils/Associations/Coalitions
- Participatory Budgeting
- Local Governance Strategies

These efforts involve setting up structures that are permanent vehicles or mechanisms to tie citizen voices and priorities into policy making. They give citizens regular opportunities to solve problems and make decisions over the long term. Although many permanent structures arose out of controversies over local issues such as land use and city budgets, they allow citizens and governments to consider the general health of local democracy in addition to specific municipal problems. The danger in these structures is that they can devolve into groups of ‘professional citizens’ if they don’t recruit regularly to bring diverse voices together.

Neighbourhood Councils/Associations/Coalitions

A neighbourhood council, association, or coalition is a “mode of citizen engagement that is neighbourhood-based, formed with the support of, and formal relationship with, municipal government, and formed for the purpose of building social inclusion and civic engagement.”4 This structure requires power sharing and trust in neighbourhood intelligence, and should be a long-term endeavour, designed to “elicit ongoing participation in civic affairs and build community capacity for civic engagement.”5 Neighbourhood councils do not address a specific issue, but meet regularly to discuss all issues pertaining to a neighbourhood and the wider city. Their strengths lie in their ability to convene a broad array of voices and provide “on ramps” to participation for people who might not otherwise see themselves involved in governance.

Their legitimacy as formally empowered entities helps produce informed and tangible recommendations. Neighbourhood councils can change the culture of communities, making dialogue and collaboration a public habit. The danger lies in neighbourhood councils that replicate the limitations of city councils and devolve into groups of “professional citizens” that fail to engage the diversity of the community.

United States - Portland, Minneapolis, Los Angeles

In the US, compelling examples of cities with neighbourhood council structures include Portland, Oregon, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Los Angeles, California. Portland has 95 formally recognized, independent neighbourhood associations that are divided into seven coalition areas. District coalition offices provide technical and community organizing assistance to the neighbourhood associations in their area. The City of Portland provides funding (about $1.2 million per year), and the city’s Office of Neighbourhood Involvement provides support services to district coalitions.
In 1990, Minneapolis created the Neighbourhood Revitalization Program, which provided millions of dollars to seventy-two neighbourhood organizations. Residents created Neighbourhood Action Plans that encompass their vision for the neighbourhood and city’s future, and their goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving their vision. The Revitalization Program expired in 2009, and City Council has voted to replace it with a new Department of Neighbourhood and Community Relations. Los Angeles has the largest neighbourhood council system in the US, established in the 1999 City Charter.

The Department of Neighbourhood Empowerment supports and guides eighty-nine independent neighbourhood councils that are official city entities, providing advice to the mayor, city council and city departments. They are each managed by a governing body of people from the neighbourhood, who meet regularly to gather wider public input, select their own boundaries, chose leaders, set their own agendas and prioritize their needs. A Congress of Neighbourhoods meets twice per year for networking and sharing.

Resources:

Canada – Quebec City

Quebec City has twelve neighbourhood councils, each covering an area of between nine and fifteen thousand residents. Originally conceptualized by a small political party in opposition to development projects and perceived corruption at the municipal level, neighbourhood councils are the result of petitions to City Hall. Each council receives a small amount of funding (between $2,000-5,000) from the City, and are legally obligated to present annual financial reports. Neighbourhood councils meet regularly to give their opinion on City Hall proposals and organize community projects.

They have nine members who are elected for two-year terms, and local city councillors act as non-voting members. A consultation organizer is associated with each neighbourhood council to help set the agenda and run the meetings. In addition to the regular meetings of the council members, neighbourhood councils also hold public meetings that are open to all residents of the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood council positions on City Hall proposals are recorded and communicated to City Hall via the non-voting City Councillor. According to the Mayor of Quebec, the City’s executive approves ninety-three percent of neighbourhood council recommendations.

Resources:
Participatory Budgeting

Established in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989, participatory budgeting involves a series of neighbourhood or regional assemblies where citizens can generate investment priorities for their neighbourhood or city. During these assemblies, delegates are elected to serve on Regional Budget Forums where citizens meet with municipal officials to decide on spending priorities. Participatory budgeting makes the budgetary process more transparent and often leads to a transfer of resources and investment to parts of the city where it is most needed. Citizens witness an immediate return on their participation when resources are transferred, giving them the confidence and incentive to continue their involvement in local governance. These processes have spread to many other cities in Brazil and around the world.

Guelph and Toronto

Guelph’s Neighbourhood Support Coalition and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s Tenant Participation System are the first North American experiments with participatory budgeting. In Guelph in the early 1990s, informal neighbourhood groups formed in low-income communities to organize for social change. In 1997, these groups partnered with City Hall to found the Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition, with the aim of enabling residents, city staff and partner organizations to collectively allocate community funding. Eventually the funds from the Coalition became a line in the City’s Community Services budget and reached $1 million by 2005.

The Coalition, comprised of fifteen neighbourhood groups (approximately 1,100 residents), implemented a participatory budgeting process to allocate funding to community services and small capital infrastructure projects. There are five phases to the yearlong process. First, the Coalition discusses citywide priorities for the year ahead. Next, residents meet in their neighbourhood groups to discuss both citywide and neighbourhood spending priorities, and prepare project proposals that include a “needs” and a “wants” budget. Each group elects two delegates to represent them in the Coalition. Third, these delegates meet to share their proposals, and city staff and Coalition funders outline what funds are available. After this meeting, neighbourhood groups have a chance to re-evaluate their needs and wants. Fourth, delegates meet to decide on allocations, negotiating until they reach consensus. Finally, neighbourhood groups implement and monitor their projects on a yearlong funding cycle. This process allows a wide collaboration of city residents, neighbourhood groups, partner organizations and city staff and funds priority community projects.
In Toronto, public housing tenants have used participatory budgeting since 2001. Approximately thirteen percent of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation’s budget, or $9 million per year, is allocated through this process. It differs from Guelph in that the budget cycle is every three years, and money is allocated to physical infrastructure projects only. First, tenants and staff in each building hold meetings to identify their top five priorities, and elect delegates to represent their building in further deliberations. District forums then bring delegates together to share and rank priorities.

District delegates are elected to the citywide Tenant Budget Council. Toronto Community Housing staff drafts a budget and district delegates decide on guidelines for their deliberations. This draft budget is presented to the Budget Council, and delegates deliberate on how to allocate funding, negotiating between tenant and staff priorities. The Budget Council submits its recommendations to the Toronto Community Housing Chief Executive Officer, who finalizes the list of projects for funding and submits it to the Board of Directors for approval. Once approved, staff and tenants implement and monitor budget projects. This process allows tenants to decide on building, district, and citywide spending priorities.

Resources:
Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition: http://guelph.ca/living.cfm?subCatID=1243&smocid=1827
Toronto Community Housing Corporation: www.torontohousing.ca

Local Governance Strategies

United Kingdom: Communities in Control: Real people, real power

Citizen participation in local governance is an official priority for the UK government. Two white papers in 2006 and 2008 set the context for the devolution of power to local governments. The 2008 paper, Communities in control: Real people, real power set measures to ensure that power was passed to local communities. Simultaneously, a discussion paper set out a constitutional framework for the use of a number of engagement mechanisms at the national level.
These reforms are designed to “shift power, influence and responsibility away from existing centres of power and into the hands of communities and citizens”. The Communities in Control strategy is extensive, covering a wide array of local government topics, including institutional design. First, the local governance strategy introduces a “duty to promote democracy” to help councils promote involvement through clearer information, better trained staff and more visible councillors in the community. Next, it extends the existing “duty to involve” local people in key decisions, already in place for many local officials, to other services including police authorities, arts, sporting, cultural and environmental organizations, and helps support frontline staff in responding to individual needs.

Third, the strategy aims to make all local councils implement participatory budgeting by 2010. Finally, the strategy builds on the 8,900 neighbourhood and parish councils currently operating, aiming to garner more, particularly in urban areas. Communities in control recognize that “strong social networks, good community spirit and a local sense of belonging and place, are foundations for confident and healthy communities.”

Resources:

City of Guelph Public Involvement Strategy

The City of Guelph is often referenced as a successful example of citizen engagement in local governance. The City’s website boasts guiding principles for public involvement and lists roles and responsibilities for Council, City staff, and participants of engagement processes. In 2002, City Council initiated a community consultation process that involved twelve hundred people, twenty-seven workshops and focus groups, two community forums, a mobile input centre, a web site, three Mayor’s tours, a speaker’s panel and a call for briefs.

Called SmartGuelph, this process sought to identify what citizens want their City to be in 25 years and what steps are needed to achieve this vision. SmartGuelph resulted in eight citizen-identified principles for Guelph’s future. These principles inform all city initiatives. For example, during the creation of the 2007 Strategic Plan, an eight-month collaborative process took place, engaging citizens in all stages from preparation to approval. This process used community focus groups, telephone interviews, a youth art challenge and surveys to gather citizens’ ideas. Council and the senior management team drafted a plan that included these ideas, and this draft was given back to the community for review.
After the feedback and revision stages, the final plan was validated by the public and endorsed by council. The 2007 Strategic Plan includes a section on “Government and community involvement” that states the goal of “community focused, responsive and accountable government” and lays out seven strategic objectives to achieve this goal.

When the Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure’s 2005 Places to Grow Act identified Guelph as a growth plan area, Guelph Council launched a Growth Management Strategy Public Consultation. It aimed to begin the dialogue on policy choices to manage growth and identify the community’s preferred options. First, a random telephone survey and facilitated focus groups with community stakeholders identified key issues and concerns.

Next, the City held a Community By Design Symposium, a Saturday afternoon of speakers and public discussion. The third stage involved twenty-one workshops over three months, Using GuelphQuest, a land use scenario software, citizens input current plans and trends in growth to estimate the effects of policy and land use changes on urban form. These workshops were aimed towards capacity building, getting participants to think about planning tradeoffs rather than finding the ‘right answer’ to future growth.

The workshops incorporated the use of GuelphQuest, which allows users to answer ten questions about new housing, job location, energy choices, etc. Answers are grouped into scenarios and then compared to each other. Participants can also see the change over time their results would incur. In addition, fifteen hundred people who could not make the GuelphQuest workshop tried the software online.

The final stage of the consultation process involved six workshops on Building Guelph’s Future, where citizens worked with examples of potential intensification developed by urban design consultants to complete exercises on key considerations for neighbourhood change.

Resources:
Guelph City Hall:  
http://guelph.ca/cityhall.cfm?smocid=2622  
http://guelph.ca/living.cfm?subCatID=1380&smocid=1963  
http://guelph.ca/cityhall.cfm?subCatID=1611&smocid=2189

Guelph Growth Management Strategy:  
Edmonton Office of Public Involvement

The City of Edmonton created an Office of Public Involvement in 2005 to reshape the dynamics of municipal politics. Responding to community sentiment that too much time and energy was being spent in debate on the lack of public consultation processes rather than on project issues, the Office published “Involving Edmonton: A Public Involvement Framework” in 2008.

This framework helped the municipality build internal capacity to conduct consistent public involvement processes that reliably produce credible data. In 2009, the City of Edmonton partnered with the University of Alberta to pilot a Citizens’ Panel to gain input into public spending priorities. Forty-nine randomly recruited citizens met for six Saturdays to learn about and discuss City spending priorities.

The Panel’s recommendations were accepted by City Council in June 2009, and councillors committed to allocating the 2010-2011 budget with citizens’ priorities in mind. Also in 2009, Edmonton launched a six-month public involvement project on the City Centre Airport Lands current and future land use challenges and possibilities. This project used Citizen Advisory Groups, online consultation, Community Conversation Forums, and workbooks and training for community members interested in hosting their own conversations on the topic. An engagement review group made up of three public engagement practitioners convened an open public session to review the information collected throughout the project and develop and refine options related to the City Centre Airport Lands.

At three open houses, the general public reviewed the options and voted via electronic keypad for those that best reflected their views. The results of the public involvement project were presented to the Executive Committee of Council in June 2009, where they are currently under review.

Resources:
Edmonton City Hall:
http://www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/public-involvement.aspx
Edmonton City Centre Airport Lands Public Involvement Strategy:
http://www.eccalandspublicinvolvement.ca/
ITWorldCanada.
Online consultation and communication

- Deliberative Polling by Bristol City Council
- Minnesota E-Democracy
- Vancouver Open Data

Both governments and citizens are increasingly using online technologies for political consultation and engagement. In the US, the Obama campaign raised $750 million (USD) from four million contributors, mostly through small online donations. In Canada, a recent search of a content-based search engine focusing on discussion forums using the words “Canadian politics and news” returned nine thousand results. A subsequent search for “Canadian democratic engagement” returned fifteen hundred results. Online communications technologies create a ‘virtual public square’ that allows citizens to participate in public life. These ‘e-democracy’ technologies are transforming representative governance to participatory democracy.

However, the quality of online engagement can vary widely – becoming more connected does not necessarily mean becoming more democratic. While online engagement can facilitate the political voice and knowledge of citizens and the competency, transparency, and legitimacy of government, insufficient attention to online forums, debates, etc. can open governments up to wide and fast-spreading criticism. In addition, citizen access to technology and confidence in using online engagement mechanisms can vary, with consequences for equitable and diverse engagement.

Deliberative Polling by Bristol City Council

In Bristol, UK, the City Council used edecide, an online deliberation poll to find out what citizens thought about issues such as cycling in the city centre and whether to introduce legislation on controlling the seagull population. The online poll allows users to answer a set of questions similar to a traditional poll, but then sends counter-arguments and feedback to the user to elicit more in-depth conversations. At the end of the process, users are asked their final opinion on a topic, and this is the opinion that is represented in the final results.

Resources:
Edecide - www.edecide.net
Minnesota E-Democracy

Established in 1994, Minnesota E-democracy is a non-partisan independent organization that hosts internet-based dialogues between citizens and groups in Minnesota. It allows for announcements, state political discussions, and national and world affairs discussions, each of which is moderated by a list manager. The list manager ensures basic rules and guidelines of engagement are followed. Minnesota E-democracy has influenced local political agendas and debates, but it mainly serves as a forum for the expression of citizens’ viewpoints and opinions that traditional media sources do not cover.

Resources:
Minnesota E-Democracy – www.e-democracy.com

Vancouver Open Data

In May of 2009 the City Council of Vancouver passed a motion called Open Data, Open Standards and Open Source to provide more data to Vancouver citizens. The result of this motion is the Open Data Catalogue, which presents information in an accessible, free, and downloadable format. The second version of the beta site was launched on January 20, 2010 and will be updated with more data in the future. The site also features a feedback mechanism for citizens to request types of data they would like to see added.

Resource:
Vancouver Open Data: http://data.vancouver.ca/index.htm

Notes:

5 Ibid., p. 11
8 Ibid., p. 21.
An emerging ‘citizen agenda’: The context for democratic innovation in Canadian municipalities

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Introduction

Many municipal governments in Canada are rethinking how they work and communicate with their constituents. Their goal is to heighten public confidence and solicit public expertise. Increasingly we can see the outlines of an emerging ‘citizen agenda’ that will change how citizens and their municipal governments interact.

The task for municipal governments is challenging, as new complexities are entering the picture. Increasingly, more current and new Canadians are choosing to live in cities, but city governments are getting smaller. The globalized nature of the production of goods and services is forcing a major shift towards a high-tech and knowledge-based economy. New communications technologies ensure a more connected, literate, and mobile citizenry, but the decline of local press and traditional news media makes it harder for governments to communicate information to their constituents.

The growing ‘information deficit’ impairs the public’s view of government and services, which, when combined with the growing distrust of government, creates demand for proactive disclosure, open data initiatives, and increased involvement of citizens in public decisions. Traditional consultation methods have come under fire as being too little, too late. Encouraging signs from municipal officials of a growing appetite for meaningful citizen engagement have emerged lately, but the challenge remains to find realistic and consistent approaches and effective forms of communication that inspire confidence in local governance.

1 This paper was prepared to assist in the research and community consultation process in February and March of 2010 led by Shape Burlington. Shape Burlington is the public name for the Mayor’s Citizen Advisory Committee on Civic Engagement (MCACCE) initiated by Mayor Cam Jackson. The Co-Chairs John Boich and Walter Mulkewich have selected its members and the Committee is working independently to achieve its mission of more effective civic engagement in Burlington. Information about the Committee and its Terms of Reference is at www.shapeburlington.ca and www.burlington.ca
Trend 1: Urbanization and immigration

Canada is increasingly urban. In 2006, 80% of Canadians lived in an area classified as urban, with 68% living in one of 33 designated Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA’s). Six urban areas (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau, Edmonton and Calgary) are home to almost half of Canada’s population, and account for two-thirds of population growth in the past five years. Five million Canadians live in one of 84 smaller Metropolitan areas, defined as having a population range of 50,000 to 500,000 residents.

Canada is also increasingly diverse. In 2007, Canada welcomed 236,800 new immigrants, with 47% of them choosing to settle in Ontario. This represents an immigration rate of 7.2 new arrivals per 1,000 people, down slightly from 7.7 in 2006. The 2007 net immigration rate was almost double that of the United States, and higher than many other G8 countries.

Questions for reflection:

• How can cities accommodate a larger number of voices in decisions?
• How can consultation reflect the increasing diversity of Canadians?

Trend 2: The effect of globalization on cities

The historical economic cleavage in Canada has been between the “industrial heartland” and the “resource-based hinterland.” The forces of globalization over the past twenty years have changed this cleavage considerably. Explains Michigan State University’s Laura A. Reese,

“The increasingly global nature of economic production drives the shift from manufacturing to knowledge employment, challenges the sustainability of urban regions, stimulates immigration flows, divides cities and workers into haves and have-nots depending on their readiness to embrace economic change, and intensifies the competition between cities and regions for workers, residents, and capital investment.”

With a few large “have” cities and many smaller “have not” cities, Canada is in critical need for effective and thoughtful urban policy making. Based on the theory of ‘creative cities’, which posits that cities can be economically viable if they become diverse, high-tech, and amenity-rich, new models of urban development are emphasizing mobile factors such as knowledge, creativity, and social character. However, it is increasingly clear that “livable, sustainable, and governable cities” will be those that allow the active participation of both citizens and local governments to address and shape change.
Questions for reflection:
- How can citizens’ priorities be reflected in municipal governments’ response to a changing economy?
- What can municipal governments do to help citizens become more involved in the sustainability of municipal services?

Trend 3: Local governance reform

At the federal level in Canada, and in other institutionalized democracies, the governing process has shifted significantly from a top-down model of government to horizontal governance, which involves a network of public, private, and voluntary sector actors. A traditional top-down approach emphasizes control and uniformity, whereas horizontal governance emphasizes collaboration and coordination. In addition, the New Public Management philosophy, which encourages the privatization of some public goods and the contracting out of service delivery to the private sector, emerged in the late 1980s and has experienced significant expansion in the Canadian government.8

These trends have implications for the relationship between governments and citizens, and between governments and civil society. Policy capacity and institutional memory are reduced as the size of the public service dwindles, and the knowledge accrued through direct service provision is lost, making governments rely on the input of “both expert and experiential knowledge”9 from citizens, voluntary sector organizations, and other stakeholders. Generally, to obtain this input, governments rely on a standard template of public consultation that elicits comments on proposed policies, or they privately commission public opinion research to get a sense of the public’s mood. Traditional public consultation mechanisms are often criticized for allowing governments to control the agenda, providing unidirectional information flows, and being ad hoc and temporary.

In addition to the shift from government to governance and New Public Management reforms at the federal level, two trends in local governance have emerged over the past fifteen years. First, reform initiated at the provincial level to improve the governance capacity and intergovernmental relations of municipalities has increased. These reforms include greater power and wider jurisdictions for municipalities, but often coincide with a reduction in provincial funding and few new revenue sources. In addition, the reduction and consolidation of municipalities has been initiated in several provinces, aiming to provide greater governing efficiency. Amalgamation in Ontario reduced the number of municipalities from 815 to 444 between 1996 and 2008.10

Elected municipal representatives decreased from 158 to 42. Ontario municipalities, and many others across Canada, became more reliant on revenue from their own sources as provincial transfers decreased. Responsibility for services was realigned to give municipalities greater autonomy, a new system for property taxes was introduced, and two-tier governance systems became one-tier. The overall purpose of municipal reform in Ontario was to reduce the size of government, thereby reducing expenditure, streamlining
bureaucracy, and realizing economies of scale. Municipalities were expected to maintain accessible representation and preserve community identity with fewer politicians.

The relationship between accessible and effective representation and government size/number of elected officials has long occupied the literature on democracy, citizen engagement, cities and local governance. Over thirty years ago, architects Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein wrote “Today the distance between people and the centers of power that govern them is vast – both psychologically and geographically.” They argued that the larger the community, the greater the distance between the average citizen and their elected representatives. Smaller units of government were thought to be more accessible because they promote direct citizen involvement in decision-making. However, smaller units might also be more prone to “capture by a passionate minority” that would sacrifice the public good for minority interest. In addition, access to elected officials declines as the number of residents per city councilor rises. This trend is a major force behind government and third-sector exploration of innovation in consultation and engagement, as new methods of public input are required to balance the loss of accessible representation in municipal politics.

Questions for reflection:
• How can municipalities maintain accessible representation with fewer city councilors?
• What are the implications for cities of involving diverse networks of actors from the private and non-profit sectors in decision-making and service delivery?
• How can municipal governments make sure they are hearing from all perspectives and foster discussion between the public sector, private sector, and other stakeholders?
• How can consultation and engagement mechanisms mitigate vocal minorities and ensure that all voices get the chance to be heard?

Trend 4: Growing ‘democratic deficit’

The 1980s saw much academic inquiry into the ‘crisis’ of democracy evidenced by low voter turnouts and the lack of citizen participation in civil society organizations. Still today there is “a growing sense that politics is a pursuit conducted by ‘someone else’ and that politicians are in it for what they can get out of it, not what they can contribute.” Moneyed interests and political elites are at the head of the game. Characterized as “infotainment,” politics is increasingly about polarised debates, campaign contributions, and the latest persuasive sound bite that politicians were using to sway votes in their favour.

Ordinary citizens are thought to be lazy and unwilling to vote, and apathetic or ignorant about political issues. Colin Crouch describes this state as ‘postdemocracy’, explaining, “While elections certainly exist and can change governments, public debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professional experts in techniques of persuasion, and considers a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given
to them. Behind this spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites.”

It is becoming widely acknowledged, “traditional notions of consultation and centrally managed community input into the policy process are no longer sufficient.” Traditional consultation encourages citizens through a strategy of ‘maximal level of minimal participation.’ As more information emerged regarding democratic decline, so did experiments in citizen engagement processes. The 1990s are credited with the “rebirth of urban democracy” as ideas of “community, social capital, and localism as the foundations of political activity” took hold and experiments in dialogue, deliberation, and participatory governance swelled in institutionalized democracies around the world.

Today, we are witnessing unprecedented levels of citizen action across the globe, but the distance between this action and traditional consultation and policymaking remains vast. Most recently captured in the three-million-strong force garnered during the 2008 United States presidential election, today’s citizen action focuses on local democratic organizing, usually without sponsorship from elected officials. There has been a fundamental shift in citizen expectations, capacities, and attitudes towards government. Citizens bring more knowledge and skills to the table. They feel more entitled to government services, but have less faith that government will be able to deliver. They are more literate, mobile and connected and demand more transparency in public decisions, but are often shut out of the decision making process. Citizen patience is wearing thin.

Questions for reflection:
- What can municipal governments do to help citizens be more informed?
- How can active citizens team up with government to promote wider citizen engagement?
- How are new technologies affecting the relationship between municipal government and the public?

Implications for Municipal Democratic Innovation

Significant implications for democratic innovation result from the combination of increasing urbanization, the shift to a knowledge-based economy, horizontal modes of governance that rely on the private provision of services, smaller governments, and a more demanding citizenry that has distanced itself from traditional modes of political participation. Governments now face the challenge of contending with apathy towards traditional politics and the provision of public goods while responding to a more sophisticated and demanding public. In addition, governments are looking for ways to capture and capitalize upon the energy of citizen-initiated local democratic organizing.

There are two directions for possible responses. One is to deepen citizen engagement through innovative consultation processes, and the other is to alter the culture and institutions of government to make them more flexible and responsive to citizens’ needs.
Both need to happen, and are indeed happening, in cities in Canada and around the world. Graham Smith chronicled fifty-seven democratic innovations around the world, featuring the Citizens’ Assemblies of British Columbia and Ontario as case studies.22

These innovations create opportunities for structured, long-term changes in the way citizens and government interact. They show that politics is increasingly seen as an act of learning; the intent of participation is “not to advocate for a particular cause or policy proposal, but to allow citizens to learn about the issue, listen to other perspectives, and decide for themselves what they think.”23 Consultation and engagement processes are moving away from “managing” citizens towards participation that privileges listening, building community perspectives and joint consensus and mandates. Past decision-making styles are criticized for “deciding then defending” or “telling then selling”; new methods focus on bringing citizens into the process before the agenda is even set. The idea of “passing more and more political power to more and more people”24 drives these democratic innovations, aiming to deepen the engagement and commitment of citizens to the civic cause.

Institutional change is the other response governments need to consider. Generally,

“There is a powerful tendency for traditional policy approaches to be both overly prescriptive and descriptive, resulting in an uncritical consensus of issues and interests. The sustainability of more innovative and inclusive policy frameworks, in the context of the inherently deterministic inclination of traditional methods of policy-making, is a critical concern. Innovative policy making based on citizen engagement cannot be isolated from the realities of political systems, the pervasiveness of rationalist policy design and the embedded nature of hierarchical and market forms of public administration, which fosters largely passive notions of consultation and agency coordination.”25

Training in democratic organizing skills, such as recruiting diverse voices, facilitating meetings, planning collaboratively and framing issues in an accessible and unbiased manner can help leaders make inclusive policy choices.26 Citizens and public employees need the opportunity to learn and hone these skills together. Changing the culture of government, flattening hierarchies and working across silos will ensure that governments are agile enough to respond to and partner with citizens.27

Questions for reflection:
• What are the attributes that are common to successful public meetings?
• How can municipal governments involve citizens in agenda setting?
• How can municipal governments balance voices from the general public and from advocacy groups, businesses, and other stakeholders?
• What internal institutional changes will help change the culture of government?
Democratic Innovation in Burlington

The City of Burlington is well positioned to move forward on creating innovative and meaningful consultation and engagement mechanisms. The elements for a successful start exist – knowledge of the social make-up of the City, information on how residents view City Council and local politics, and a prior attempt to invigorate local democracy in City Hall that resulted in strategic recommendations.

The 2009 Social Profile of Burlington identified that the city’s population grew from 151,000 to 164,500 between 2001 and 2006, which represents a 9% increase. This exceeds national and provincial averages at 5.4% and 6.6% respectively. Projections estimate a 10.7% growth (from 164,500 persons to 182,000) by 2021. In 2006, over one in five Burlington residents were born outside Canada. The number of recent immigrants moving to Burlington between 2001-2006 is 43% higher than for the 1996-2001 period. The number of seniors in the 2001-2006 period grew by 19%, with women accounting for two-thirds of seniors over 85.

The changing nature of Burlington’s residents and economy will require a reassessment of current services and service levels. Innovative public consultation and engagement mechanisms could benefit the reassessment process. The 1997 Community-Based Government Committee created a report to provide Council with advice on implementing ten areas of broad agreement that were identified through a workshop on challenges to local governance. These areas of agreement reflected much of the challenges identified in the above outlined trends. Informing citizens about issues and opportunities about the City, using a variety of communication strategies and decision-making approaches, allowing for informal opportunities for input and watching for vocal minorities that might override broad community viewpoints were listed, among others.

The Committee’s report contained the worry that asking the public to provide comments at the mid or end points of a policy process was “too late...and not effective.” They recommended that citizen participation should occur throughout the decision-making process, in particular in the “front end.” In addition, the report called for the establishment of a Public Information Office, integrating citizens into Standing Committees as non-voting members, establishing Ward or Neighbourhood Committees, and providing training to staff and Council members on governance, leadership and management and to citizens on how municipal government works.

Almost ten years later, some of the same issues were reflected in the Inclusive Cities Canada 2005 study of Burlington. This study, which integrates the perspectives of 244 community members who participated in focus groups, local soundings and a survey, found that residents believe that City Council functions well, that it is highly respected, and is more accessible and probably more trusted than other levels of government. Residents praised the efforts of Councillors to hold regular meetings, and community organizations acknowledged the integral role City Council plays in helping them achieve their mandates and making Burlington a better place to live.
Key strengths of City Hall, as perceived by focus group participants, were identified: Advisory Committees, access to Council and Councillors, community meetings held by Councillors, attempts to engage youth, and the support Council displays for Pride Week and community organizations were highlighted. The study also gathered important information on what citizens see as the weaknesses of local governance. These included the small size of Council, citizen apathy and lack of knowledge of the roles and functions of City Hall, the promotion, application process and effectiveness of the Advisory Committees, lack of a diversity committee or policy, lack of involvement of less engaged/hard to reach youth and neighbourhoods, the lack of services in languages other than English, and the lack of awareness of City staff of dealing with disabilities and diversity. Suggestions for positive change included educating the community about issues of poverty, diversity, and seniors, taking real action on community issues and attracting a diversity of participants in Council proceedings.

Questions for reflection:
• What are the main issues facing the City of Burlington in the next 5-10 years? Do they provide entry-points for citizen engagement?
• What are long-term changes that City staff and Burlington residents can work towards?
• Do education opportunities exist that allow citizens and City Councillors and staff to learn together and learn from one another?
• Do the recommendations of the 1997 Community-Based Government Committee still make sense today? What barriers exist to acting on these recommendations?
• How can City officials anticipate the challenges and changes of a more diverse and aging population?

Conclusion

Burlington is not alone in facing the challenge of creating a sustainable citizen engagement agenda. Cities and governments across Canada, the US, the UK, and other institutional democracies are conducting experiments in citizen engagement. While these experiments are relatively new, important lessons have emerged. Current engagement practices move away from consultation as a way to “manage” citizens towards participatory governance and building consensus and mandates. Successful cities are promoting true engagement, defined as “a transformative process, one that deepens understanding of the community; fosters attitudes that recognize and appreciate the benefits of working together for community problem-solving; and develops the skills needed to engage in community dialogue and decision making.” These practices lead to long-term changes in the way citizens and governments interact, and have “the capacity to foster informed deliberation and to inspire confidence, both in the electoral process and in local governance.”
Notes:

5 Ibid.
6 Lewis and Donald (2009).
9 Ibid, p. 5. (Italics in original).
21 Leighninger, Matt (2009) Funding and Fostering Local Democracy: What philanthropy should know about the emerging field of deliberation and democratic governance.
Denver, CO: Philanthropy for Active Citizen Engagement, p. 4.
24 Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (2008), p. 2.
29 Ibid, p. 27.
30 Report of the Community-Based Government Committee, October 29, 1997, City of Burlington, ON.
32 Ibid, p. 5.