

inclusive
cities

CANADA - BURLINGTON

**Community Voices,
Perspectives and Priorities**

MARCH 2005

**Executive Summary
and Recommendations**

Report of
The Burlington Civic Panel

Prepared By
Community Development Halton

A partner of
Inclusive Cities Canada: A Cross-Canada Civic Initiative
<http://www.inclusivecities.ca>



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INCLUSIVE CITIES CANADA - BURLINGTON CIVIC PANEL

Co-Chairs

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Joey Edwardh, Executive Director, Community Development Halton

Members-at-Large

Rick Craven, Councillor, Ward 1, City of Burlington
Deputy Chief Gary Crowell, Halton Regional Police Service
Helen Ferguson, Elderly Services Advisory Committee, Region of Halton
Jeanne Hay, Past Chair, Board of Governors, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital
Peter Hoyle, Inter-Church Council Burlington
Susan Jewett, Burlington Counselling and Family Services
Rick MacDonald, Superintendent, Halton Catholic District School Board
Suzanne Muir, Diversity Co-ordinator, Halton District School Board
Dave Nanderam, Halton Multicultural Council
Walter Mulkewich, Performing Arts Burlington
Elizabeth Rennie, Canadian Federation of University Women
Diana Tuszynski, Burlington Chamber of Commerce
Bob Van Cleef, Oakville and District Labour Council
Paul Wendling, Burlington Community Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An inclusive community is one that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. Social inclusion is key to individual and collective well-being. 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. Inclusive cities and communities are recognized as critical not only to the well-being of individuals, but also to the social and economic health of nations.

Inclusive Cities Canada: A Cross-Canada Civic Initiative (ICC) is an innovative and timely project to examine and enhance social inclusion in cities and communities across Canada. The aim of *Inclusive Cities Canada* is to strengthen the capacity of cities to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people.

Inclusive Cities Canada is a collaborative venture of five social planning organizations across Canada and the social infrastructure sub-committee of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). In each participating city, municipal and community leaders have come together to form a Civic Panel, to provide leadership and direction to the initiative locally. Local research, analysis and reporting by each of the five social planning partners is based on a common framework and methodology.

Inclusive Cities Canada – Burlington: Community Voices, Perspectives and Priorities reports on the first phase of the project in Burlington, and includes both qualitative and supplementary quantitative research. The report integrates the perceptions of 244 community members who participated in focus groups, local soundings and a survey. Statistical information pertaining to inclusion in Burlington has been added. The report contains several sections:

The Changing Face Of Burlington provides a statistical profile of the community.

Common Areas of Inquiry summarizes participants' observations and suggestions for change regarding the areas of inquiry discussed in all the participating cities: health care; crisis services; publicly funded education; early childhood development; recreation, arts and culture; transportation and mobility; local government; policing and justice; income and employment; housing; community safety; public spaces; and community capacities.

Local Soundings report on additional small-group discussions and interviews conducted with newcomers, seniors and youth, in order to clarify, and make more profound, the understandings gathered in focus groups.

Barriers To Social Inclusion. During this study, participants were asked to identify both what is being done well and what areas need improvement. They found that there are many strengths supporting inclusion in our community. However, certain broad themes arose in discussions on diverse areas of inquiry and local soundings, which have assisted in the identification of underlying barriers to social inclusion in our community, and have been useful to the Civic Panel in developing its recommendations. They are:

Underfunding Of Social Infrastructure

Despite services of generally good quality, participants believe that access and quality, particularly in health care, home care and education, have declined significantly over the past decade or more, due to underfunding. Major issues identified include:

- Shortage of family physicians, specialists and psychiatric professionals and services
- Insufficient range of, and access to, home care services for the frail elderly and those living with disabilities, attributed in part to a funding shift toward long term care
- Ongoing erosion in overall quality of education, in programs which nourish the whole person and in special education and student services
- Shortage of affordable and appropriate child care

Poverty And Housing

One or both are raised in most areas of inquiry. Participants observe:

- That poverty compromises social inclusion in the community and has impacts on health care; crisis services; early childhood development; opportunities in education; housing; transportation and mobility; access to recreation, arts and cultural activities; civic engagement; and access to public spaces
- That there is a severe shortage of affordable housing, accessible housing and affordable supportive housing
- That the impact of poverty is exacerbated by living in an affluent community
- That there are insufficient financial and social supports for low-income families and individuals
- That family poverty compromises child development
- That, despite some shelter space, there are shelter gaps for youth, seniors and those with mental illness

Income and Employment

Certain issues arise in the discussions:

- Barriers to newcomers in achieving recognition of foreign credentials
- Low social assistance rates and low minimum wage
- Barriers to getting off Ontario Works
- Shortage of secure employment with adequate wages and working conditions

Transportation

In almost every area of inquiry, participants express concerns that inadequate public transportation, both within the community and to areas outside the community, compromises social inclusion. The major issues include:

- Cost
- Inadequate routes and hours of local service
- Deficiencies in transportation to other parts of the Region of Halton

Physical Planning And Accessibility

Despite some positive initiatives in city planning, participants express concerns about:

- “Car-based planning” and “building big”
- Loss of neighbourhood amenities, and concentration of amenities in larger facilities on major thoroughfares
- Insufficient sidewalks and bicycle paths
- Need for improvement in sidewalk design for those with disabilities
- Physical barriers to mobility in public spaces, public and private buildings and residences

Being “Priced Out”

Participants express support for free programs and festivals, and believe that social inclusion is compromised by:

- Decline of free activities in schools
- Insufficient free and low-cost activities in the community
- Shortage of subsidies; attitudinal, capacity or awareness barriers to applying for subsidies; subsidies which are not sufficient to ensure affordability

Policing and Justice

Participants believe there are “two realities of policing.” They observe:

- Generally high level of respect for police in the community
- Police efforts to reach out to youth, seniors and diverse cultural and racial groups
- Commitment to outreach and antiracism at the highest levels of the police service.

Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that:

- Youth are over-policed, both by the public police force and by private security
- Both youth and some cultural and racial groups may be targeted by police and are disadvantaged in the courts.

Communication And Awareness

Three aspects of communication and awareness are raised in nearly every area of inquiry:

- Gaps in the public’s awareness of available programs and services
- Gaps in providers’ awareness of needs (diversity competence)
- Gaps in the public’s awareness of important issues, such as poverty and the lack of affordable housing

Certain specific issues are frequently mentioned:

- Weak media coverage of local issues
- Lack of information on diversity in official publications
- Lack of orientation for newcomers
- Shortage of information and services in languages other than English
- Over-reliance on automated telephone attendant systems and Internet

Community Attitudes

Participants observe several attitudes they believe are widespread among community members and that work against social inclusion:

- Lack of awareness and concern about poverty; reluctance to accept the realities of poverty
- Viewing low-income individuals as either “deserving” or “undeserving”
- Lack of awareness and concern about the shortage of affordable housing, accessible housing and affordable supportive housing
- Reluctance to accept differences, primarily those of income
- Fear of youth
- NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome

Civic Engagement

Despite noting some strengths, such as an approachable City Council, advisory committees, free festivals, parks and public spaces, participants articulate concerns that social cohesion and civic engagement are compromised by numerous factors, including:

- Voter apathy and lack of time in a “commuter community”
- Insufficient civics education in schools
- Selection processes for membership of City committees
- Few free and low-cost activities
- Unwelcoming attitudes toward youth
- Deficiencies in transportation
- Erosion of community members’ commitment and sense of control over local issues, due to the presence and powers of the Ontario Municipal Board

Recommendations have been developed by the Burlington Civic Panel to contribute to building social inclusion, and are addressed to all levels of government, community agencies and organizations.



RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BURLINGTON CIVIC PANEL

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION

- 1. The Civic Panel recommends the continuation of its work through the establishment of an Inclusive Burlington Civic Panel. Membership should include the City of Burlington, Regional Municipality of Halton, human service agencies¹, community groups² and others which represent the various diversities³ of Burlington. Its mandate is to monitor and evaluate the state of social inclusion and to recommend and advocate policies and practices, to all levels of government and to the public, that continue to ensure a socially inclusive Burlington.**

COMMUNICATION, AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

- 2. In order that the City of Burlington, local authorities⁴, human service agencies and the community develop an institutional capacity to embrace the growing diversity of our community – an asset that enriches us all – the Civic Panel recommends:**
 - a. that the City of Burlington commission a social profile of Burlington to enhance awareness of the city's growth and changing socio-demographic characteristics. This will be available to businesses, human service agencies, community groups, residents and local media as a tool for understanding and change.
 - b. that local authorities integrate or continue to integrate diversity-competence training into existing continuing learning programs for their staff in order to understand better how to include the various diversities of the community.
 - c. that the Ministry of Education review and revise the 1993 Ethno-cultural Equity Policy to reflect the diverse Canadian community (class, sexual orientation, as well as culture/faith) and that the Ministry create a department to support diversity in education issues and initiatives and provide support and funding to school boards specific to staff training in diversity competency.
 - d. that the City of Burlington, in recognition that newcomers bring skills and knowledge that enrich our community, work to establish ongoing partnerships among local authorities, human service agencies and community groups to orient and assist newcomers to Burlington.

Potential considerations of these partnerships are:

- i. awareness of and access to settlement, housing, health care, education, crisis services, social services and City services.
- ii. access to information in various languages about local services, programs and government functions and processes
- iii. awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government, and how to contact them
- iv. support in attaining recognition of foreign credentials
- v. appropriate English language training and skills upgrading to enable newcomers to work in their chosen field
- vi. support for Investor Class immigrants in researching and finding appropriate investment opportunities in the community
- vii. support for newcomers in their job search

3. The Civic Panel recommends that Citizenship and Immigration Canada review and change current immigration policies and practices to ensure that immigrants and refugees become part of our community by:

- a. providing appropriate and comprehensive information and contacts in all Canadian diplomatic missions abroad and at all points of entry regarding settlement and employment in Canada including, where possible, information specific to individual communities.
- b. providing comprehensive information on its website and in printed matter to fully inform immigrants about significant challenges to employment for immigrants and the complexities of investment opportunities in Canada.
- c. pursuing a partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to acquire and provide information and contacts regarding settlement services for individual municipalities.
- d. providing funding to human service agencies and other levels of government to provide social supports for newcomers.

4. In recognition that knowledge and understanding of the purpose, roles and functions of all levels of government is one of the pillars of active participation in civic affairs, the Civic Panel recommends:

- a. that the City of Burlington, local authorities and community organizations partner to develop and disseminate educational materials and programs to enable civic knowledge for action.
- b. that the Ministry of Education for Ontario in conjunction with Boards of Education and the partners of Inclusive Cities Canada:

- i. evaluate the level of student awareness of the functions of all levels of government, and the processes by which young citizens can be engaged
- ii. evaluate the civics curriculum and TAG (Teacher Advisory Group) programs as vehicles for enhancing student engagement in political, social and economic processes

5. In view of the common perception that available services are not well understood or easy to access, the Civic Panel recommends

- a. that the City of Burlington, Regional Municipality of Halton and human service agencies actively support the Halton 211 Steering Committee to implement a 211⁵ system for Halton.
- b. that the City of Burlington, working with the Regional Municipality of Halton and human service agencies, explore the implementation of a 311⁶ service.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

6. The Civic Panel recommends that the City of Burlington, Regional Municipality of Halton and human service agencies endorse and advocate for the following recommendations to reduce poverty, with its deep social and economic consequences.

- a. that social, educational, recreational and transit programs and services be strengthened, recognizing that these services have a redistributive effect that narrows inequality.
- b. that the Government of Canada in partnership with the provincial governments and nonprofit sector develop and support a high quality National Early Learning and Child Care and Development Strategy which is co-ordinated, universal, accessible and transparent.⁷
- c. that the Province of Ontario, in partnership with Boards of Education and Teachers Federations, determine and ensure the level of funding necessary to provide adequate special education, arts, sports and physical education in the school system.
- d. that the Province of Ontario reassess the funding of provincially funded and mandated social services to ensure that all regions or municipalities in the GTA receive equal per capita funding.
- e. that the Government of Ontario maintain Social Assistance and Disability Support payments at a level at least equal to the Low Income Cut Off for Halton as defined by Statistics Canada.
- f. that the Government of Ontario review regularly and adjust the minimum wage so that everyone working full-time will earn a living wage that at least provides for their basic needs.

7. The Civic Panel, in order to meet basic human needs that encompass physical security (food, housing, clothing, protection against violence and physical/sexual abuse), health, home care and education:

- a. endorses and supports the process of the Roundtable on Funding Matters convened by the Regional Chair to “address and resolve the issues of inadequate and diminishing infrastructure faced by Halton nonprofit and voluntary organizations.”⁸

and recommends:

- b. that the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Regional and Municipal Governments of Canada commit to developing a National Housing Strategy to ensure the building of sufficient affordable and accessible housing in Canada.
- c. that the City of Burlington and the Regional Municipality of Halton partner with human service agencies and community groups to identify and fill gaps in services to the population of Burlington, including, but not limited to:
 - i. the need for safe emergency housing for youth aged 16 to 18 years
 - ii. the need for a 24/7 mobile emergency crisis team to address the needs of people with mental illness
 - iii. the need for a shelter capable of serving people with mental illness
 - iv. the shortage of options in supportive housing
 - v. the shortage of affordable accessible housing
 - vi. engaging the Province of Ontario in reviewing the current model of funding for Long term care facilities and in-home care, both acute and chronic, with a view to increasing in-home supports, with greater flexibility to adapt to individual needs, thus reducing the need for institutionalization
 - vii. engaging the Province of Ontario in developing a strategy to provide for the long-range need for affordable, supportive housing for the seniors population and those with disabilities, including a review of the Ontario Building Code
- d. that Inclusive Cities Canada, with the support of all Civic Panels, address our diminishing social infrastructure by recommending to the Federal and Provincial governments that these two senior levels of government restore their investment in human service programs, including their support of community based nonprofit and voluntary organizations, and that these reinvestments be as important a priority as reinvestment in Medicare.

8. The Civic Panel recommends that the City of Burlington, Regional Municipality of Halton, Provincial and Federal Governments

- a. promote participation in appropriate life and/or employment skills training and participation in the labour market by ensuring access to high quality affordable child care.
- b. continue to support economic development which creates employment opportunities that provide adequate income and working conditions, enabling community members to support themselves and their families with a sense of security.

9. The Civic Panel, in recognition that limitations to transportation services compromise access to employment, health care and other services, inhibit the participation of residents in cultural, recreational and civic pursuits and constrain economic opportunity recommends:

- a. that Burlington Transit, community agencies and service providers consult and partner to evaluate hours of service, routes and costs with reference to providing adequate service to all those in the community, and that the City of Burlington provide the financial and other support necessary to Burlington Transit to accomplish the above task.
- b. that all levels of government view transportation as an essential social and economic service and that public transit be affordable, accessible and increasingly funded from the tax base.
- c. that the Province of Ontario and municipalities which provide transit in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) adopt financial and regulatory policies that will integrate land use and transportation planning. This should include both local transit and transit across the GGH, so as to build a base for more efficient, effective and accessible public transit services. In particular, this should be accomplished through: intensification and compact mixed-use development in key transportation corridors; and investing in transportation infrastructure to allow easy access between and within urban centres.
- d. that the Province of Ontario, in recognition that transportation needs to be integrated to be effective through the Region of Halton and the Greater Toronto Area, move on the development of a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority such that a continuous transportation web exists across the Greater Toronto Area.

10. The Civic Panel recommends that the City of Burlington, in partnership with community agencies and the Inclusive Cities Canada Civic Panel for Burlington review the recreational and arts programs and activities in Burlington with reference to accommodating the diversities of the community to:

- a. ensure a vital recreation program and arts culture in which people of all income levels and abilities participate

- b. ensure the development of recreational and arts programs and activities that reflect and celebrate the diversity of Burlington.

11. The Civic Panel recommends that the City of Burlington review its city planning programs and procedures to ensure that they:

- a. meet evolving social needs
- b. provide full public access to planning decision making, and
- c. generally are consistent with the Inclusive Cities initiative

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY PROBLEM-SOLVING

12. The Civic Panel recommends that Burlington residents and organizations, in conjunction with the City of Burlington, actively engage in increasing their community knowledge and strengthening community organizations, and engaging in community problem-solving as follows:

- a. that the Civic Panel meet with representatives of the print, television and radio media to develop strategies to ensure more and better media coverage of civic life in Burlington.
- b. that the City of Burlington explore the development of an innovative Internet-based Burlington news service that gives full coverage of civic life in Burlington.
- c. that the City of Burlington regularly assess the degree of staff support, resources, and regard provided to Council Advisory Committees to ensure they can effectively formulate positions and influence public policy issues.
- d. that the City of Burlington develop a model for acquiring effective advice on seniors' issues.
- e. that the City of Burlington use an inclusion framework in the work of all City committees and staff and as a lens in the development and implementation of City policies and programs.
- f. that Inclusive Cities Canada research ways in which local municipalities can implement and use community councils at the ward and neighbourhood levels to enhance broad based engagement of residents in the life of their community.
- g. that Inclusive Cities Canada research and assist municipalities to pilot participatory budgeting processes as an expression of resident concerns, priority setting, and direct political participation in local democracy.

- h. that the Government of Ontario, in partnership with Boards of Education and municipalities in Ontario, develop a model which fosters the use of schools as community centres or hubs to promote community capacities and social cohesion.
- i. that the Ministry of Education reassess the value of the compulsory 40 hours of community involvement for secondary students.

CIVIC PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS - DEFINITIONS AND NOTES

¹ Human service agencies are a category of the nonprofit and voluntary sector that provide both health and social services

² Human service agencies and community groups are part of the nonprofit and voluntary sector, often described as the third pillar of Canadian society and its economy. Katherine Scott in her study, *Funding Matters: The Impact of Canada's New Funding Regime on Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* (2003), describes the organizations of the sector as ranging from “small community-based groups to large, national umbrella organizations, all enriching the lives of Canadians in various ways. Some provide services such as health, education, social services, and arts and culture, while others have an essentially representational role, working on issues specific to particular causes or groups. Some advance religious faith and practice; others raise funds and provide financial support to other voluntary organizations. Together, voluntary organizations play an essential role in promoting active citizenship and building bridges between communities and cultures, across regions, and between Canada and other countries... Generally speaking, the nonprofit and voluntary sector is made up of organizations that exist primarily to serve others ...and the broader public interest... They rely to a significant degree on volunteers in conducting their activities and overseeing their affairs. And lastly, nonprofit and voluntary groups can be said to be guided by values that set them apart from market and state, namely philanthropy, altruism, charity, reciprocity and mutuality” (Shields and Evans, 1998:89).

³ For purposes of this document, “diversity” is defined according to the Terms of Reference of the Halton Diversity Advisory Committee, as follows: “ ‘Diversity’ shall mean the inherent value in the distinctive characteristics, qualities and elements of an individual, a group of individuals, or a community. These characteristics, qualities and elements include ethno-racial, faith, gender, mental ability, physical ability, literacy/educational level, age, sexual orientation and economic circumstances” (Regional Municipality of Halton, Halton Diversity Advisory Committee, Terms of Reference).

⁴ For purposes of this document “local authorities” refers to both public and quasi-public bodies, such as City and Regional governments, school boards, police services, hospital boards, etc.

⁵ “211 is an easy to remember telephone number that simplifies access to the ‘first-stop’ for information. Trained information and referral specialists respond to telephone calls and provide, or mediate, a non-clinical assessment of the callers’ needs. Callers receive information about community, government, health and social services that will address their needs” (Halton Social Planning Council, Halton 211 Feasibility Study, June 2002).

⁶ The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has approved the joint application by the Regional Municipality of Halton and 5 other municipalities, that 311 be assigned for telephone access to non-emergency municipal government services. “The Municipalities provided examples of the various functions of the proposed 311 service. Citizens could dial 311 to report dangerous road conditions (i.e. potholes, missing manhole covers), traffic light / street light outages, water main breaks, blocked / broken sewer mains, stray animals, abandoned vehicles, and noise complaints. Further, citizens could make inquiries regarding garbage / recycling, water quality / safety, public transit schedules, development and building permits, property tax bills, parking tickets, and recreation facility schedules. The proposed 311 service could also provide referrals to the mayor's / aldermen's offices, handle general service complaints and compliments, and provide access to all police / fire non-emergency services” (CRTC, Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-71, Ottawa, November 2004).

⁷ The Civic Panel advises that this be undertaken with reference to the OECD report “Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Country Note for Canada, Oct. 26, 2004” and the Campaign 2000 report “One Million Too Many: Implementing Solutions to Child Poverty in Canada (2004 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada)”

⁸ “The mandate of the Citizen’s Roundtable would be to take a meaningful and profound look at the non-profit and voluntary sector. Their comprehensive review will encompass three broad areas in which to make recommendations: the funding system and structure that exists in Halton; the importance and impact of the nonprofit sector on the Halton economy and quality of life; the necessary components and status of the agency infrastructure necessary to support the non-profit and voluntary sector (e.g. staff development, volunteer coordination and training, board governance and operation, visioning and planning)” (Regional Municipality of Halton. Draft Terms of Reference for Citizens Roundtable, SS-57-04 Attachment #1, 2004)