History of the Neighbourhood Action Strategy

By: The Neighbourhood Action Evaluation Team
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1 – Introduction

Hamilton’s Neighbourhood Action Strategy (NAS) was incubated in 2010 and began working in 11 neighbourhoods in order to address social, economic, and health concerns on a neighbourhood level in the city of Hamilton. As a resident-led, city-wide initiative, the strategy has evolved over the past five years to try to respond to the varying needs of these communities. This report seeks to give a detailed account of the history of the NAS and its precursors, giving particular attention to events and decisions that have influenced the governance and structure of the strategy. The NAS has launched many associated projects that span multiple neighbourhoods including the Xperience Annex, the Beautiful Alleyways Project, and the McQuesten Urban Farm. This report, however, aims to focus primarily on the NAS as an initiative overall, rather than focus on individual projects emerging through the neighbourhoods. The information in this report is drawn from publicly available information on the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Community Foundation websites, as well as interviews with various NAS partners.

2 – Community Development Work Before NAS, 2002-2010

2.1 – Hamilton Community Foundation

Before the creation of the NAS, community development was long practiced in Hamilton, particularly through the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF). As a philanthropic charity established in 1954, the HCF traditionally funded other charities to deliver services; however, it began to take a larger role in anti-poverty work in 2002 when it launched a neighbourhood-focused program called “Growing Roots, Strengthening Neighbourhoods.” The program supported a community development worker to engage residents in four identified neighbourhoods. With the initial principles of resident leadership and community building, the HCF offered small grants for resident-led projects that drew in community service providers as well. The four initial neighbourhoods where this program took place were Beasley, Lansdale, McQuesten East, and McQuesten West. The program was planned to continue until 2007.

In 2004, two years after the launch of the Growing Roots initiative, the HCF directed 80% of its unrestricted funds \(^1\) to continue anti-poverty work, calling this project “Tackling Poverty Together” (TPT). With TPT, the HCF aimed to address broad issues of poverty across the city, investing $3.4 million in grants over three years across all sectors that could touch on one or more aspects of poverty prevention or alleviation, prevention, or reduction. To complement the new granting system, in 2005 HCF collaborated with the City of Hamilton to launch the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction, a 42-member group representing various sectors, with the primary aim being to “Make Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child” through policy and programs. After TPT was launched, the Growing Roots neighbourhood program continued to function with a focus on resident engagement and leadership development.

As both TPT and the Growing Roots projects came to a close in 2007, a second phase of Tackling Poverty Together II: Building Strong Communities (TPT II) was launched in 2008.
Through this project the principles of HCF’s two prior initiatives were blended together. In TPT II, the HCF invested $5 million over five years to address poverty through a) strengthening neighbourhoods in developing ‘hubs’, and b) foundational grants that tackled systems-level issues in poverty, such as employment, policy, and educational initiatives. Six neighbourhood hubs were identified at the beginning of this phase of the project: Jamesville, McQuesten (a combination of McQuesten East and West), Keith, Wever, South Sherman, and Community Access to Child Health (CATCH), later known as Davis Creek. In each hub, grants were provided through a neighbourhood Planning Team consisting of residents, a community development worker, and service providers.

### 2.2 – Neighbourhood Hubs and Community Development Workers

While community development work has roots pre-dating the Hamilton Community Foundation’s explicit anti-poverty focus, the employment of Community Development Workers (CDWs) by the HCF to focus on specific neighbourhoods initially began through Growing Roots, Strengthening Neighbourhoods. CDWs are staff employed through the HCF (starting from the Growing Roots project and continuing through TPT II) to support residents and Planning Teams of the different neighbourhood hubs. The role of the CDW has varied between neighbourhoods; however, during 2002-2010 they were identified as carrying out five primary activities: asset mapping, working on community celebrations and beautification, meetings, grant applications, and supporting the creation of programs. In “Growing Roots, Strengthening Neighbourhoods”, a single CDW was employed through the HCF to work with the four neighbourhoods identified. In TPT II the role was formally transferred to Wesley Urban Ministries, though the position was still funded by HCF.

The emergence of ‘neighbourhood hubs’ began with HCF’s launch of Growing Roots, Strengthening Neighbourhoods in 2002. A neighbourhood hub was defined as a “local collaborative with a strong resident voice... an existing structure focused on centralized community work to reduce and prevent poverty” (Hamilton Community Foundation [HCF] 2009, p.3). Each hub was governed by a Planning Team, led by residents, and includes service providers in the area that support neighbourhood work or receive funding through TPT II. Some Planning Teams grew out of existing neighbourhood associations, while in other neighbourhoods Planning Teams were developed without a prior history of neighbourhood organizing. Each Planning Team met monthly to work with and build on neighbourhood assets. To be eligible for the annual HCF small grant fund of $5,000 available through TPT II, each Planning Team was affiliated with a charitable organization. By 2009, two new neighbourhood hubs of Crown Point and Riverdale were established, bringing the total number of hubs to eight. An additional CDW was hired to support TPT II work through both the CATCH (in what was later known as Davis Creek) and Riverdale neighbourhoods through Wesley Urban Ministries, while the existing CDW continued to work in the other six neighbourhoods. Before the end of 2010, a third HCF-funded CDW was hired through Environment Hamilton to provide environment-related community development support across the eight hubs.
3 – The Emergence of NAS, 2010-2013

3.1 Governance

3.1.1 Code Red and the Initiation of NAS, 2010-2011

As a part of the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction public education campaign, income disparities within the city were particularly highlighted in an April 2010 local news series called Code Red. The series was based on health and poverty statistics at the neighbourhood level (Figure 1), but also included vivid accounts of resident challenges. Shortly after the release of the news series, in September 2010, Hamilton City Council approved a neighbourhood initiative that focused on two specific goals: a) improving “Code Red” neighbourhoods, and b) better integrating and supporting City and community work on a neighbourhood level (City Memo CM11007). The City of Hamilton earmarked $2 million of their unrestricted Capital Levy to support the ‘Neighbourhood Development Strategy’, later known as the NAS. From this funding, they hired a Director of Neighbourhood Development Strategies and secured other City of Hamilton staff support to develop a framework based on the existing history of community development work in Hamilton, and to implement the strategy. Eleven neighbourhoods were identified to be included in the NAS, as a combination of existing HCF hubs and additional City-identified neighbourhoods.

3.1.2 Selecting NAS Neighbourhoods, 2010-2011

Although the HCF had previously been working in eight defined neighbourhood hubs, the City developed broad criteria to apply to the nearly 50 Hamilton neighbourhoods to select the final hubs. The criteria sought not to create a ranked list of neighbourhoods in need in support, but weighed the following factors to select the final neighbourhoods: “desire by residents in the neighbourhood to work in partnership with the City on neighbourhood development; presence of existing networks or planning bodies within neighbourhood; planned investment that could be leveraged for additional development; current planning already scheduled and could therefore be expanded/augmented; and existing assets [of] people, associations, organizations” (City Memo CM 11007). This process identified six City of Hamilton neighbourhoods: Keith, Stinson, South Sherman, McQuesten, Beasley, and Rolston. Overlap between the City selected neighbourhoods and existing HCF Hubs led to a final list of: Jamesville, Beasley, Keith, McQuesten, Stinson, South Sherman, Gibson and Lansdale Area (GALA), Crown Point, Riverdale, Davis Creek, and Rolston (Figure 3).

3.1.3 Beginning Structure of the NAS, 2011

The funding for the NAS came from three partners: the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Community Foundation, and the Hamilton Best Start Network, with distinct roles as follows:

1) The City created a Neighbourhood Action Strategy office, which provided overall guidance for the strategy, primarily in the form of an NAS Manager. It also provided support and direction to staff from other City departments to work with the local Planning Teams. The City also created a process for City Council to formally endorse the Planning Teams’ action plans.
2) The Hamilton Community Foundation continued to provide significant granting funds to the NAS, which included small grants for resident-led projects, larger grants to local service providers with neighbourhood approval for programs offered in NAS neighbourhoods, and salaries for CDW staff.

3) The Hamilton Best Start Network (an organization focused on early learning and services to families and children up to age 12) provided funding for one of the CDWs, and half of the NAS Manager’s position.

Together, staff members from each funding organization contributed to guiding the vision of the overall strategy through participation in the NAS Steering Committee.

In a similar fashion to Tackling Poverty Together II, resident-led Planning Teams played a central role in the NAS. Planning Teams included residents, service providers, City staff, and the Community Development Worker assigned to each neighbourhood (Figure 2). The Planning Teams were spaces to work towards developing and implementing “Neighbourhood Action Plans”, a document created by each Planning Team to articulate specific short- and long-term neighbourhood hub goals and priorities over five years. Action Plans were developed through broad resident engagement by the CDWs, City staff, and Planning Teams early in the NAS’s process. A variety of community engagement methods were used to gather a representative set of goals for the entire hub. Once the plans were developed, they were brought to City Council for endorsement (discussed further below). In addition to addressing their action plan, Planning Teams served as a place to organize around new and emerging issues impacting their communities.

3.1.4 – Endorsement of Neighbourhood Action Plans

From 2012 to 2013, eight of the eleven NAS neighbourhoods presented their neighbourhood action plans to Council for endorsement. (The other three neighbourhood had their plans endorsed in 2014 and 2016 - see table below.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Neighbourhood plans endorsed for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 2012</td>
<td>Beasley, Keith, McQuesten, and Stinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Riverdale and Davis Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>South Sherman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>Jamesville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2014</td>
<td>Crown Point and GALA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>Rolston</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 http://www2.hamilton.ca/NR/rdonlyres/F52CFBD6-0860-4FCE-BCDA-EACEF388B1320/Feb15EDRMS_n267577_v1_5_4__CM11007_b_.pdf
2 In 2014, the South Sherman hub renamed itself as the Sherman Hub in an effort to “address an economic divide between the south and north ends of the neighbourhood” (The Spectator, 2014).
3.2 CD Work

3.2.1 The Role of the CDW in Early NAS, 2011

From the beginning of the NAS, the role of the CDW was adapted from TPT II work to the strategy. While many of the principles of the CDW’s role stayed similar, the level of engagement they had with their neighbourhood hub deepened. In TPT II, three CDWs were employed through the strategy to do grassroots engagement and capacity building across the 8 hubs, with one CDW employed to provide environmental community development support across the eight hubs. With the creation of NAS, each CDW supported the creation or growth of Planning Teams and NAP development in 2-3 hubs. This meant that two additional CDWs were employed, with efforts to include residents from the Planning Teams into the hiring process. The total of 5 CDWs were supervised through four non-profit agencies across the city: one CDW at the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC), two at Wesley Urban Ministries, one at Environment Hamilton, and one at Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY).

While all 11 neighbourhoods were identified at the outset of the strategy, the timelines to engage with them through the project were laid out over time to allow for project resources to expand. As each neighbourhood was expected to develop a Neighbourhood Action Plan (NAP), Community Developers worked with neighbourhood Planning Teams to engage in an inclusive resident-led process that was reflective of the values of the entire neighbourhood hub. Plans were expected to create a five-year timeline to achieve long-term change, provide a holistic and comprehensive vision of the neighbourhood, and focus on building on the existing community assets. Each Planning Team worked with the City’s Neighbourhood Development Office and various other Departments, their CD, and a wider range of external partners to create their NAP. Once a neighbourhood hub completed their plan, it was brought to Council for endorsement, thereby supporting the work of the residents and supporting City Staff to put neighbourhood actions on their work plans. The majority of plan development and neighbourhood engagement began in 2011.

3.2.3 Rolston Neighbourhood Engagement, 2013-2014

The Rolston neighbourhood was one of the six neighbourhoods identified by the City to participate in the NAS and, relative to the other hubs, had some unique characteristics that prompted a longer engagement and planning process. The Rolston neighbourhood had no existing history of community development, and was the only neighbourhood located on the escarpment. As a result, pre-engagement in the neighbourhood by the CDW began in October 2012, and a series of Photovoice projects was launched with 50 youth in Rolston beginning in 2013.

3.2.4 The Neighbourhood Leadership Institute, 2013

Launched in 2013, the Neighbourhood Leadership Institute (NLI), an annual program that aims to strengthen the leadership capacity of residents in Neighbourhood Action neighbourhoods over the long term. The program, developed and funded through the Hamilton Community Foundation, brings residents together to grow a local initiative specific to their neighbourhood
over 10 learning sessions. Mohawk College has certified the NLI course, meaning that graduates can receive a college-level credit, and the HCF offers additional small grants for them to implement their projects in neighbourhoods. The program draws in many institutional stakeholders, such as McMaster University, the City of Hamilton, and multiple community service providers. Since the resident stream’s launch, over 80 participants have graduated to date.

3.3 Grants: The Granting Process in Early NAS, 2011

The provision of grants through the NAS has played a central role throughout the strategy, and has often been used as a tool to broaden and strengthen resident engagement. The HCF funded the extensive granting system that provided funds to service providers and residents beginning with TPT II. With the establishment of NAS, HCF staff continued to manage the administration of the granting process as they did in TPT II, from reviewing applications to providing the funds to the recipients of the service provider grants and the neighbourhood hub grants named “small grants”. The service provider grants originally ranged from $2,000 to $75,000 a year, where a maximum of 3 service providers/organizations could submit a hub-focused grant supported by residents; the hub grants ranged from $100 to $1,500 to carry out a resident-led project, to a maximum of $5,000 a year. Many funded hub events were focused on grassroots celebrations and recurring events in TPT II. The beginning of NAS, however, brought a greater emphasis on the specific objectives of the strategy and each hub’s NAP when reviewing applications. The HCF funded small grants in the original eight hubs from TPT II, while the City of Hamilton supported these grants in the three additional NAS neighbourhoods of Stinson, Beasley and Rolston.

3.4 Inclusion

Issues of inclusion and representativeness among Planning Teams were key goals in early engagement efforts, and many Planning Teams made inclusion part of their mission, vision, and values statements. The SPRC also created neighbourhood profiles compiling various neighbourhood-level statistics, which were intended to support engagement of residents that was comparable with the overall demographic profile for each neighbourhood.

4 - Further Development of NAS, 2014-2016

4.1 Governance

4.1.1 SPRC Managing the Community Developers, 2014

In 2014, in an effort to reconcile the diversity in pay, benefits, and mandate between CDWs at multiple agencies, the NAS Steering Committee put out a call for proposals for one organization to house all of the CDWs, and the bid was secured by the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC). The SPRC is a non-profit organization that conducts research and service planning, and had been engaged in community development work in Hamilton from the 1970s. This change allowed for the CDWs to be centralized under one employer (the SPRC) in an organization whose mandate was broad enough to encompass the range of community development that was part of the NAS, and have the staff team supervised directly by a CD Manager (an SPRC
employee). As the CDWs moved into the SPRC, they were renamed ‘Community Developers’ (CDs), to reflect the greater role they were playing in neighbourhood development. As the neighbourhood work continued, one additional CD was added in August 2014 to allow for each CD to work with no more than two hubs, bringing the total number of CDs in the NAS to six.

4.1.2 NAS Mission, Vision, and Values, 2015

The NAS Steering Committee, SPRC staff (including CDs), and City of Hamilton NAS staff came together in 2015 to participate in a facilitated workshop to develop a NAS vision, mission and values. The vision became defined as “vibrant, healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods built on opportunity and trust by an engaged community”; mission: mobilize, encourage and support Hamilton residents and community partners to work together for positive neighbourhood change; and its principles as “equity, asset-based, integrity, collaborative, innovation”.

4.2 CD Work

4.2.1 Community Developer Neighbourhood Assignments, 2014

The decision to add an HCF-funded sixth CD to the NAS prompted a reshuffle of the CDs in August 2014, so that they were paired with a different set of neighbourhood hubs than they had previously worked in. The NAS Steering Committee and SPRC CD Management considered how CDs’ skills could best fit with the dynamics and assets of each neighbourhood in the reassignment process.

4.2.2 – Neighbourhood Leadership Institute Expansion, 2016

In October 2016, the NLI launched a professional development stream through McMaster University’s Centre for Continuing Education. Recognized as Certificate in Leadership in Community Engagement, the program supports professionals working in community development settings build their capacity to continue taking on this work. The certificate program has five courses, and is academically recognized by McMaster University. Each of the CDs are required to participate in the certificate, and the program also has enrollment from many organizations across Hamilton. The NLI is also exploring the development of a youth stream, to be added to the two existing streams.


In April 2014, the SPRC was contracted to take over the administration of the granting process from HCF, and rolled out their first small grants toolkit for Planning Teams. The small grants toolkit included new guidelines for applicants to try to engage residents within the neighbourhood not yet connected to the planning team. The toolkit also attempted to provide a clearer process for the application by outlining the decision making steps and outlining the primary purpose for the funding, of outreach. By the end of 2014, the HCF no longer provided a service provider grant through the NAS.
Since the initial launch of the package, a second and third iteration of the toolkit have been released in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The use of small grants for special or seasonal events was limited to $2,000 in the 2015 version of the small grants package, to encourage residents to put forward more applications for activities that focused on community engagement. Each seasonal event was eligible to be funded three times before the funding had to be made available to support other events. The 2016 version of the small grants toolkit encouraged the same, and further specified that religious celebrations were not eligible to receive funding year after year. The 2016 package also emphasizes further resident support of each grant application, requiring that a minimum of three residents in the neighbourhood put forward their names in support of the proposed project.


The use of language around inclusion and the commitment to diversity and inclusion within the NAS was further strengthened and formalized when the SPRC became the manager of the CD team. From 2014, CD Assistants were hired in several neighbourhoods each June-July, and were tasked with further outreach and inclusion of diverse community members. With funding support from NAS and under the SPRC’s management, the CD team were also involved in additional anti-racism and anti-oppression (ARAO) training as professional development opportunities. This later extended to one neighbourhood Planning Team in early 2016. At the management level, the incorporation of an ARAO framework followed by City staff training also occurred in early 2016.

The ARAO framework has continued to be more prominent in the NAS since 2015. A one-day anti-racism training was included in the NLI in 2015, and it has informed the development of the NLI’s Professional Development Stream heavily (McQuesten Urban Farm Posting; HCF, 2016). Part time and full time NAS-related 2016 job descriptions called for an understanding of anti-racist/anti-oppressive practice. Explicit emphasis on practicing inclusion is also seen at Planning Teams, where one Planning Team began providing workshops and an anti-racism round table beginning in Fall 2016.

5 – The Future of the NAS

In October 2016, the NAS Steering Committee launched a “Reimagining NAS” project, managed through the HCF. This process seeks to get clarity and consensus about what the NAS should be, and what it should be for. The work is led by a team of seven residents and four community researchers, and will engage various partners across the 11 neighbourhoods to help answer these questions. Once completed, this work will guide the future direction of NAS.
Sources:


City of Hamilton Memo: CM09006(I):


http://hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca/leadership/neighbourhood-leadership-institute/


https://www.mcmastercce.ca/lce


NAS Annual Report 2013

NAS Annual Report 2014

NAS Annual Report 2015

NAS Annual Report 2016


Appendices

Appendix A: The Code Red Map

Figure 1: Map of Code Red in Hamilton. (DeLuca et al., 2012)
Appendix B: A Diagram of the NAS Structure

Figure 2: Diagram of the 2016 NAS Structure
Appendix C: Map of the 11 NAS Neighbourhoods

Figure 3: Map of NAS Neighbourhoods (Mayo, 2013)