SUBJECT: Beasley Community Centre (ECS07092) (Ward 2)

RECOMMENDATION:

That the General Manager of Community Services be authorized and directed to draft, in partnership with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, an Agreement respecting the design and build of a City owned community centre that is to be joined to the new school building, which is scheduled to be constructed on the existing site of the Dr. Edgar Davey Elementary School, and to report back to the Emergency & Community Services Committee.

Joe-Anne Priel
General Manager,
Community Services Department

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has confirmed their plans to rebuild the Dr. Edgar Davey Elementary School (the school) on its present site adjacent to Beasley Park.

City staff from the Planning and Economic Development and Community Services Departments have met with representatives from HWDSB to investigate opportunities to build a new Beasley Community Centre attached to or adjacent to the new school. City/HWDSB staff have determined that a community centre can be built attached to the school in a manner that accommodates school needs and has little impact on green space in Beasley Park. Site Plans for the school will be submitted to the City for comment in early December as part of the site plan approval process; these plans will include a “grey line” representation of the proposed community centre attached to the
school. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board staff have been clear that they are willing to collaborate with the City to develop a “community hub”, but will not jeopardize the timeline needed to ensure that the school will open in September, 2010.

Construction of a new community centre in Beasley would provide the City and other community groups an opportunity to offer needed programs and services in this inner-city neighbourhood, and support current community efforts that address challenges that exist in the poorest neighbourhood in Hamilton. Extension of existing reciprocal use agreements between the City’s Recreation Division and HWDSB would allow after-hour use of the school gym in return for specified school uses of City recreation facilities, further leveraging these important community assets for mutual and community benefit.

Designing the community centre within the timetable and on the site provided by HWDSB will provide operating efficiencies and program opportunities beyond what a separate centre could provide in this underserved community, in addition to considerable savings in facility construction. Report ECS07092 further recommends a joint design process to investigate opportunities that increase the amount of shared space and facilities within the new school and proposed community centre. This approach will maximize the benefits available to the community while respecting operational and financial requirements that exist within the City and HWDSB.

**BACKGROUND:**

School and Neighbourhood Needs

The Beasley neighbourhood spans 42 inner-city blocks, between James Street East to Wellington Street, and from Main Street North to the railway tracks. It is home to more than 5,000 residents from 41 countries. This neighbourhood has been recognized as the poorest neighbourhood in Hamilton and the 15th poorest neighbourhood in all of Canada, and has a poverty rate of two-and-a-half times the city average. Over half of Beasley residents and two-thirds of single parent-families live below the poverty line; the average household income in Beasley is less than half of the Hamilton average.¹

Beasley Park is a small, urban park that has a community hall, a skateboard park and playground equipment. The community centre within the park has only 1,100 square feet of program space within a 1,500 square foot building. While it is widely used for various activities organized by City staff, other providers and neighbourhood groups, its small size significantly limits the programming and community activities that are sought after by the community. The recently presented *Use, Renovation and Replacement Study of Hamilton’s Public-Use Recreation Facilities* (Report ECS07068) reviewed the distribution and use of Hamilton’s recreation facilities, and noted that programming and community use of this facility is restricted by its small size. Dr. Edgar Davey Elementary School has been scheduled for replacement for quite some time. In 2004, by way of a Council motion, Council directed staff to investigate an exchange of a portion of Beasley Park land with HWDSB to facilitate building a new school in a manner that would avoid student displacement and provide park land with

¹ Hamilton Spectator, June 26, 2007
improved street frontage. However, numerous issues related to this approach have prevented this from being achieved. On April 27, 2005, City Council endorsed Item 15 of the Planning and Economic Development Committee Report 05-009 directing staff to inform the HWDSB that the City of Hamilton no longer wished to pursue the land exchange between Dr. Davey Elementary School for a portion of Beasley Park.

Dr. Edgar Davey Elementary School is now scheduled to be torn down at the end of June 2009 and rebuilt on its current site in time for school opening in September, 2010. Students will be bussed to other city schools for the 2009/2010 school year while the new school is under construction. Current HWDSB plans are to build a three-storey school on the site, set back further from Ferguson Avenue than the current building. This placement on the site not only accommodates needed parking, but provides the best opportunity for location of a community centre attached to the school should the City and HWDSB officials decide to pursue this opportunity. With or without the addition of a recreation centre, the site has limited space for a school playground, and HWDSB has requested that the adjacent park space be available for use by the school to supplement onsite playground space.

Creation of a Community Hub

City staff has met with HWDSB to discuss the concept of building a larger community centre that is attached or adjacent to the new school. An attached centre, such as that envisioned, would provide synergistic benefits beyond those possible within the existing community centre or a new community centre located elsewhere in the community. This close proximity would allow for City use of the school gym after school hours for recreational programming, supplementing programs that can occur in community centre facilities.

The combined space would be used by City’s Recreation Division staff, community groups, and external service providers, such as Wesley Urban Ministries, to provide an increased level of recreation and community programming. It is envisioned that the community centre would provide dedicated space for the existing parent-child drop-in program, currently overseen by Wesley Urban Ministries, and allow increased services including early literacy services, nutrition programs and referrals to other community resources.

Site Limitations & Opportunities

Site restrictions (including water, sewer and other underground utilities on portions of the Park that abut the school site) severely restrict construction of a City building on the portions of the Park that are adjacent to the school. Location of a community centre in other portions of the Park would result in operational difficulties for City staff when operating the school gym.

City and HWDSB staff have determined that a community centre of sufficient size could be attached to the school in a location that would provide easy access to the school gym and have little impact on the green space within the park. This approach requires
that the community centre be built on HWDSB land, which has been done in other City facilities managed by the Recreation Division. While the proposed community centre will have no direct impact on the Park, it should be noted that HWDSB will be requesting confirmed access and improvements to Beasley Park as part of their site plan submission, regardless of the City's decision to proceed with the community centre.

A preliminary site plan of the school with the attached community centre is provided as Appendix A to Report ECS07092. The proposed community centre is shown as a “grey line” to demonstrate site placement and relative size of the proposed addition as compared to the school and site.

**Joint Development of a Community Centre**

One method of developing an attached community centre would be for the City to independently design a community centre with the needed building features and functionality, noting that the centre would need to conform to the overall design of the school that will be built on the site. This approach, however, will limit the amount of the shared space in the building to the school gym and any other pre-defined building elements.

As an alternative, joint planning with the HWDSB on the features and functionality of the community centre as well as some adjacent spaces within the school could result in a larger amount of shared space for use by students and the community on a scheduled and spontaneous basis. A joint facility planning exercise could expand the list of programs available to both students and the general community and ensure that the building was capable of facilitating program delivery in a cost efficient manner. This joint development approach increases the potential benefit of this project for the City, the school board, and local residents.

If a joint development approach were to be taken, including needed input from the community members and stakeholders, all parties must be aware that an expanded design process increases the risk of a construction delay for both the community centre and the school. While staff are recommending the exploration of opportunities that will maximize the community benefit of the project, this process cannot be allowed to inhibit HWDSB’s ability to open the school on time in September 2010. Staff believe that the current timetable does provide time for joint development to occur if staff groups within the City and HWDSB are directed to undertake this collaborative effort.

Regardless of the degree of joint development that is chosen, the scope of this process needs to be limited to areas of mutual concern and opportunity. These include building aesthetics, on-site parking and traffic flow, park access and improvements, as well as other minor design elements that are required to marry the two structures. The significant difference envisioned in a more robust joint design process is the additional effort spent determining ways to increase amount and multi-use aspect of common space that will be shared by both students and community members at different times of day.
Approval and Governance

The City and HWDSB must remain aware that pre-existing limitations exist that impact collaborative projects between the two organizations. In the case of this potential project, they include separate approval processes as well as different policies governing procurement of architectural and construction services. Proactive efforts will be required to effectively address these and other challenges in a timely manner.

It is envisioned that if approved by both the City and HWDSB, the City would utilize the design and construction services chosen by HWDSB for the school in recognition that the school is the larger project and its design is near complete except for minor changes needed to accommodate the addition of the community centre. City Purchasing Policy 4.12 Policy for Cooperative Purchasing provides for this circumstance by allowing the City to participate with other government agencies or public authorities in cooperative acquisition ventures for Goods and/or Services when it is in the best interest of the City to do so, and to follow the purchasing procedures and policies of the government agency or public authority initiating the procurement process.

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:

Development of a new community centre in Beasley provides the opportunity to provide services and programming to help address some of the challenges faced by residents within this community. Community stakeholders have shown the willingness of the Hamilton community to provide assistance and opportunities to Beasley residents; larger and improved community facilities are required to capitalize and expand on these efforts.

The costs to build a community centre onto the school are anticipated to be lower than the costs of building a similar, independent community centre elsewhere for a number of reasons:

- Shared use of the school gym without incurring capital costs to build the gym;
- Shared use of common, non-programming space (entrances/exits, hallway space, emergency egress exits, parking);
- Ability to leverage existing design elements already determined for school (building style, exterior materials, etc.) as well as site approval and construction efficiencies.

The location of the proposed attached community centre will have little impact on available green space within the park, and does not require the purchase of any additional land to accommodate the building or achieve the anticipated benefits of this project.

A joint development process would demonstrate the willingness and ability of the City to collaborate with other publicly funded organizations (HWDSB) to address community needs in a fiscally and socially responsible manner. This level of collaboration and joint effort is sought after by residents who are often unaware or not concerned with the complexities such efforts entail. Successful projects between the City and other public organizations that address topics of focus for other levels of government are positively
received as well, furthering Hamilton’s reputation as being a municipal government able to find creative solutions in collaborative relationships.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

**No Action:** Not proceeding with this collaborative effort is an option. This option does not address the demonstrated needs of the community.

**Alternate Location in the Park:** Building the community centre at another location in Beasley Park would result in a reduction of green space within this neighbourhood. It is anticipated that construction and design costs would be greater than if an attached building was developed as we would lose the anticipated design, approval and construction efficiencies envisioned with co-development. Further, location of the community centre in other portions of the Park would result in operational difficulties for City staff when operating the school gym.

**Later Date:** Building an attached building at a later date would result in an increased impact on the community and students at the school due to the extended overall construction period. The envisioned design, site approval and construction efficiencies made possible by co-development would be lost, and the likelihood of exploiting opportunities for increased shared space are significantly reduced. Initial estimates for the increased cost of building the community centre at a later date are between $250,000 and $500,000 ($50 and $100 per square foot) based on lost construction and design efficiencies.

**Build Elsewhere:** Building a community centre to serve the Beasley community at another, remote location would not leverage the school facility in any way. This option would require a new site (i.e.: land costs) as well as increased construction costs to build a gymnasium and other shared spaces that would be possible in the preferred option. Further, the opportunity to utilize Beasley Park space within programming at the centre would be greatly reduced.

**FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

**Financial:**

It is anticipated that joint development as proposed within Report ECS07092 will be more cost effective than sole development of a similar facility. However, new design, construction and operating costs will result from approval of Report ECS07092.

Design costs are anticipated to be less than $75,000. Preliminary estimates for construction of a 5,500 square foot addition to the school are $825,000; final estimates will be provided after completion of the design efforts and in time for the 2009 Capital budget process.

Construction costs will be put forward as part of the recreation block funding for 2009.
Staffing:

No increases in staff levels are included in this request. Participation in a joint design effort should be achieved using existing staff.

Legal:

Legal implications that will be explored as part of this proposed project include:
- Land use, construction and operating related to building a community centre on land owned by HWDSB; and,
- Purchasing policy and other implications of utilizing HWDSB architects, contractor and sub-contractors to complete this project.

Policies Affecting Proposal:

Reciprocal Use Agreement with HWDSB for existing combined sites. Purchasing Policy 4.12 Policy for Cooperative Purchasing.

Relevant Consultation:

City staff have consulted with senior facilities management staff at HWDSB. City staff consulted include:
- Manager of Purchasing
- Acting Manager, Development Planning
- Manager Lower Central Hamilton, Recreation Division
- Manager, Real Estate
- Manager, Open Space Development
- Researcher, Parks Maintenance

City Strategic Commitment:

By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

Community Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
Creation of a larger community centre in Beasley will allow provision of needed programs and services in this inner-city neighbourhood.

Environmental Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
City parkland is maintained with the recommended option.

Economic Well-Being is enhanced. ☑ Yes ☐ No
Creation of a larger community centre in Beasley will demonstrate that Hamilton is making concerted efforts to improve inner-city neighbourhoods.
Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines? ☑ Yes ☐ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants? ☐ Yes ☑ No