Information:

Background

This information report provides Council an update on two key components of the 2010 Corporate Priority Plan which was approved by Council in December 2009 (2010 Corporate Priority Plan (CM09021(a) / CS10091) (City Wide)), specifically: a) improving neighbourhoods in the lower city and b) better integration and focus between the City and community actions including the establishment of a community development strategy.

The City has long recognized the vital importance of our community’s neighbourhoods to the over-all success and prosperity of Hamilton. Neighbourhoods are in fact the foundation or building blocks of our city. Council embedded the significance of strong neighbourhoods in the City of Hamilton’s Corporate 2008-2010 Strategic Plan. Under the key focus area of Healthy Community the plan identified the creation of ‘a community development strategy to enhance community and neighbourhood involvement by 2011’ as a key action item/measurement that would demonstrate
movement towards fulfilling the City’s vision and mission. The plan describes a healthy community as having planned and managed built environments, an engaged citizenry, and adequate access to food, water, shelter and income, safety, work, recreation and support for all (human services).

The 2010 Corporate Priority Plan builds on the strategic plan by identifying unique opportunities to develop a ‘community building’ initiative that should result in a safer and more investment friendly downtown core, a waterfront that continues to serve the growing needs of this community, and inner city neighbourhoods that benefit from revitalization. Focused work in this area will result in engaged citizens and the City of Hamilton working together to make our community and neighbourhoods stronger than ever before.

The Mayor and Members of Council were provided a preliminary work plan this spring (April 20th, 2010 Corporate Priority Plan Information Update), and highlights of work efforts already under-way that are moving the City forward toward the Plan’s two priorities; optimizing economic opportunities, and providing sustainable services. Specifically related to neighbourhoods, the following were highlighted:

- Work is already underway in the City to improve neighbourhoods in the lower city.
- The release of the Hamilton Spectator Code Red series that highlighted significant disparities between the health outcomes of residents living in various Hamilton neighbourhoods, and emerging opportunities both internal to the City and with other partners and community stakeholders that could be leveraged to advance the City’s work in this area.
- Additionally, the work plan indicated that a community development strategy would be created to further advance this work.

In addition to the work being completed by the City Manager’s Office, the Planning and Economic Development Department brought forward a report in October 2009 (PED08017a) which outlined a work plan for future Secondary Plan and Community Strategy work within this department. The Community Strategy tool is relatively new to the City and staff had recommended that a study be completed to determine how the tool could be used effectively in the City of Hamilton.

While the focused work on neighbourhoods and a community development strategy directly support the ‘optimizing economic opportunities’ priority in the plan, this work will also serve to advance and/or facilitate work on the other priority area in the plan ‘sustainable services’. Identified strategies relating to sustainable services include focusing on the needs of citizens, managing cost pressures, integrating systems and services towards one-stop service delivery, aligning and managing service delivery channels, and understanding the link between employee engagement and citizen satisfaction.
**Next Steps in Moving This Work Forward**

**Assessing Our Readiness to Move Forward with Neighbourhood and Community Development Strategies**

Hamilton is uniquely positioned to move forward with a more focused and integrated approach to strengthening neighbourhoods and supporting community development. City of Hamilton and community efforts currently under-way provide a solid and comprehensive base from which this work can further evolve.

Many City of Hamilton’s recent planning initiatives provide data and ‘intelligence’, frameworks, context, legislated authority, and the spring board to move forward in a new way to plan for and deliver services to our neighbourhoods. Examples include: The Official Plan, Secondary Plans, Human Services Plan, Economic Development Strategy, Cultural Plan, Indoor/Outdoor Public Use Recreation Study, Master Infrastructure Plan, etc. While these City plans and initiatives all relate to and/or impact our neighbourhoods there currently is no formal mechanism to link or co-ordinate these planning initiatives. Our residents do not always readily see how one relates to another, and how collectively these initiatives will impact their neighbourhood. Furthermore, there is no standard approach from one department to another to working with neighbourhoods and/or community development. While various departments have different reasons or mandates to work in neighbourhoods, residents should expect and receive a certain consistency in approach, engagement, and commitment from the City.

The City has also been an active supporter of/and participant in a number of community collaboratives (Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council, Hamilton’s Centre for Civic Inclusion, Hamilton Best Start Network, Hamilton Human Services Planning Initiative, and the Jobs Prosperity Collaborative), which have focused their efforts on addressing a number of complex challenges and issues that have a direct impact on the quality of life of residents and the prosperity of our city. Key partners, stakeholders and residents are actively engaged in new ways of working together to find solutions that build capacity and move Hamilton toward its vision ‘to be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities’. The innovative and leading edge work of these community collaboratives has been recognized on a national and international level.

Work of the various collaboratives occurs at many levels, sometimes at making improvement or change on a city wide basis as well as other efforts that are targeted to specific areas or neighbourhoods. This can be illustrated by the recently released Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) 2010 Action Priorities. The Roundtable’s goal of ‘Shifting attitudes about poverty’ is clearly directed to our
community as a whole, whereas another goal ‘promote innovative ways to tackle poverty in neighbourhoods’ is very targeted to particular neighbourhoods. In order to achieve the goal of promoting innovative ways to tackle poverty in neighbourhoods, the Roundtable is committed to working with the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Community Foundation and other partner organizations to develop a resourced ‘neighbourhood strategy’, and to ‘leverage funding to put an independent, integrated and co-ordinated team of community developers in all priority neighbourhoods’.

Earlier this year the Hamilton Spectator’s series Code Red, a comprehensive health mapping project, highlighted the significant disparities in health outcomes between various neighbourhoods in Hamilton. This work validates the City’s Priority Plan’s approach to improving neighbourhoods and working with partners to better integrate and focus City and community actions in order to comprehensively address the broad social determinants of health that lead to more positive health outcomes, build strong neighbourhoods and improve the over-all quality of life for all of our residents. In response to the Code Red Series, the City of Hamilton’s Senior Management Team, along with the community collaboratives and other ‘anchor’ institutions such as our hospitals, school boards, post secondary institutions and other key NGO’s, came together to identify potential areas of action, conditions for success, operating principles, and structures that will collectively facilitate specific change required to reduce the disparities that currently exist across the neighbourhoods of our city.

In addition to the work referenced above it should be noted that many other individuals, organizations, and agencies make significant contributions to the well being and vitality of neighbourhoods across our community. While it is not possible to highlight all of these contributions it is important to acknowledge the Hamilton Community Foundation’s Tackling Poverty Together Program – Support to Neighbourhoods. The Foundation began its Tackling Poverty Together Program in 2004 as part of its ongoing work to reduce poverty in Hamilton. The eight year granting program supports strategies that address concentrated poverty in Hamilton. To that end the program is focusing on eight low-income neighbourhoods in the lower city and has expanded to address the Mountain where poverty is concentrated in social housing complexes. On June 18th the Foundation announced its 2010-2011 Grants including $422,074 to work in these specific neighbourhoods plus an additional $316,00 in Foundational Grants (some of which directly support the neighbourhoods as well).

Not withstanding the various initiatives and actions described above, including those of the City of Hamilton, we see by looking to other municipalities the value of the City in: a) determining current gaps in how we plan for and deliver services at a neighbourhood level, b) assessing opportunities to further integrate departmental approaches to work with neighbourhoods, and c) continuing to explore community partnerships, in order to more effectively and efficiently utilize city resources while improving the quality of life of our residents and prosperity of our city.
Emerging Promising and Best Practices in Other Communities

There is a significant body of national and international best and promising practice work related to neighbourhood and community development initiatives. This work has been underway in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia for many years. Canada, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto have been engaged in this work for some time. Both Vancouver and Winnipeg have had formal tri-level agreements with the federal and provincial governments to focus particular efforts on specific neighbourhoods in their cities. Recently the cities of London, Ottawa, and Edmonton have also undertaken focused work and developed unique approaches to building and supporting strong neighbourhoods in their communities.

While some communities have taken an approach that has focused on priority neighbourhoods only, others have positioned work to support all neighbourhoods to move to the vision they have set as a community. The literature reviewed also underscored the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of each community, and the need to build upon existing capacity when undertaking this work.

The Senior Management Team (SMT) and departmental staff have carefully reviewed the best and most promising practice work from other communities and have communicated directly with key contacts in London, Ottawa and Edmonton to more fully understand the work that is under-way in their cities. We have learned about the leading practices for coordinating planning, strategic investment, and service delivery, the models of interdepartmental co-operation and community partnership, and the tools used to support neighbourhood program quality and outcomes.

Municipalities that have undertaken this work report enhanced quality of life in their neighbourhoods, increased co-ordination and quality of city services at the neighbourhood level, improved co-ordination of neighbourhood planning and re-investment, and increased leverage of the work of other partners and funders work in neighbourhoods.

Building the City of Hamilton Neighbourhood/Community Development Strategy

This initiative will be led from the City Manager’s office. The General Manager of the Community Services Department will be SMT’s corporate sponsor. Responsibility for ensuring the successful development and implementation of the City of Hamilton neighbourhood/community development strategy is shared among all departments. The goal is to better link and co-ordinate interdepartmental planning and service delivery efforts.

Resources required to support the neighbourhood/community development work in the plan have been identified within the existing budget. This is consistent with the approach taken thus far to resourcing the work of the 2010 Corporate Priority Plan.
(refer to 2010 Corporate Plan (CM09021) (City Wide)). Should any additional resources be required to facilitate the work of the Priority Plan, a request will be brought forward to Council for consideration during the 2011 budget process.

Work will proceed in a phased approach. Phase 1 will focus on the development of the strategy. A recommendation report will be forth-coming to Council at the end of this phase.

Staff recruitment of two FTEs to lead this work is underway. As well, it is expected that staff from all departments will provide input/support as required to the strategy development. The preliminary focus of the phase 1 work will include:

- establishment of a steering committee to over-see and support development of the strategy;
- review of best practice, current local neighbourhood development activities, and City of Hamilton planning initiatives and programs and services to inform the development of the strategy;
- development of engagement and communication strategies;
- consultation with City Departments, Councillors, community collaboratives, key stakeholders including neighbourhood associations, residents, funders, and others;
- determine linkage/alignment to work of community collaboratives and other stakeholders to maximize impact and prevent duplication; and,
- development of the proposed strategy including implementation structure and plan.