



# HAMILTON COMMUNITY BENEFITS NETWORK

building capacity through building communities

**Community Conversation:** LRT, Employment,  
Community Benefits and Shaping Hamilton's Future

2019



January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019 – Hamilton Public Library

6:00pm - 8:30pm

**About HCBN:** For almost 2 years the Hamilton Community Benefits Network has built a broad city-wide collation of labour, community groups/hubs and social enterprises, residents and marginalized groups to help bring Community Benefits Agreements to Hamilton’s government and private development projects. The Hamilton Community Benefits Network (HCBN) is a collective made up of representatives from the Hamilton Building Trades, the Immigrant Working Centre, the Hamilton District Labour Council, the YWCA, Hamilton Food Share, Environment Hamilton, and many more organizations in Hamilton that envisions Hamilton as an inclusive, thriving city in which all residents have equitable opportunities to contribute to building healthy communities and a prospering economy. HCBN sees Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) as a proven approach to achieve this vision. With a mandate from Hamilton City Council and the Province of Ontario we have begun discussions with Metrolinx and City of Hamilton staff about a Community Benefits framework for the Hamilton LRT project. Our organization is looking to build on the success of the Toronto Community Benefits Network with a made in Hamilton agreement tailored to our city’s local needs.

**The Project:** The Hamilton Light Rail Transit project proposes to construct 14 km of rapid transit service down existing streets in Hamilton’s urban core. Passing along King St and Main St. from McMaster in the West End of the City to Eastgate mall in the East End of the city it will connect some of highest density areas in the city with an east/west Rapid Transit system. Travelling down the center of the road for most of the length the system will be curb separated, with a separate bridge over the 403, to provide 6-minute peak time service much faster than existing transit options. The line itself stretches through some of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in the city. The project will require the procurement of up to 91 properties along the line. Unlike other LRT/Metrolinx properties land acquisition has been a significant requirement for construction. The residents and neighbourhoods along the line represent high densities of marginalized residents. The increased challenge of rising property rates is already seeing displacement of low-income renters along the corridor. Coupled with the existing challenges of gentrification the potential for Community Benefits to directly improve the lives of those living on the corridor is very high. Although the project brings with it challenges the HCBN believes only a strong community-based Community Benefits Agreement will maximize the benefits of this project for residents along the corridor and in the city as a whole.

**Outreach and Accommodation:** To make the general public and interested residents aware of the Community Conversation event, extensive advertising was used in social media. The Event posting on Facebook garnered 60 “going” participations over 375 interested persons. Tickets were also available free on Eventbrite. It was widely shared across many local Facebook and Twitter groups. A 50\$ advertising budget was also used focusing on the friends of those who had liked our page. With volunteers from Hamilton ACORN approx. 500 posters were placed across the LRT corridor, and downtown areas. An email to our partner organizations and contacts requesting they email and share the event as well as an invitation to attend was also utilized. The location of the Hamilton Public Library Central Branch was used due to its close proximity to major public transit lines and accommodation facilities (washrooms, doors, etc.). Childcare was also provided with a prewritten ask and Childcare coverage was donated by Immigrant Working Center for approx. 12 children. Light snacks, coffee and water were provided as well.

**The Event:** Was very well attended despite the cold weather. Around 140 people attended the event. 105 email addresses were gathered from those interested in volunteering or being added to our distribution lists. Attendees were seated in tables of 6 to facilitate a more relaxed and intimate environment conducive to the sharing of information. Members of the HCBN board and other volunteers were seated at each table to observe the conversations and record feedback. Feedback forms were available for all attendees. The structure of the event was divided into two stages. Speeches and introductions from invited guests. And a moderated workshop with each of the tables asking to frame a vision for the city, community benefits and specific asks for the Hamilton LRT project.

### **Matthew Green, Former City Councillor Ward 3, Executive Director – Hamilton Center for Civic Inclusion**

“When I was a city councillor, I would witness the most vulnerable, while we were doing billion-dollar development permits... living in tents.”

Matthew Green led the group in a land acknowledgement and gave a brief summary of the importance of CBAs in leveling the playing field between power structures and community members. He gave a good background of community benefits beyond LRT and took aim at every single development project across the city. He touched on some themes that were to later emerge in discussion groups: Local employment, inclusionary zoning, safe neighbourhoods, opportunities for small business so that money that comes to Hamilton stays in Hamilton and greener development. He stressed the requirement of organizing to demand a seat at the table working with governments, stakeholders and residents to assert community power and to ensure what happens in communities is what we want to happen.

“anger can paralyze us, let us do something with it today for a better future”

### **Jennifer Miller, Director of Social Investment, Atkinson Foundation**

“Community Benefits has a particular approach: it’s not just about going to lobby government, it’s about generating power in communities”

Jenn from the Atkinson foundation introduced the group to the broad history and concept behind community benefits agreements. She talked a lot about making sure we have economic and democratic power for those that have been left out of decision making. She discussed the different facets of Community Organization and Benefits, looking at the hard shift between becoming part of the development process. Some groups, residents and members of a Community Benefit group might be occupying buildings or engaged in protest, others in negotiations. Miller states it’s important to hold space for both in an organization. Looked at the idea of Community Benefits in root in the United States around the beating of Rodney King and the LA Riots exploding forward underlying pressures. People were

energized to action. Local unions worked with Community Members and said things had to change. Created first living wage ordinance, the gold standard for community benefits agreements. Including Jobs, community assets, parks, chapters, access to affordable housing, including its construction. She stated strongly that local campaigns use law, policy, agreements, and require building coalitions.

“we are...working with people on the inside, putting pressure on the outside, to ensure economic development needs meet community needs”

Kumsa Baker, Campaign Manager, Toronto Community Benefits Network and  
Troy Moussa, Community Organizer, Toronto Community Benefits Network/Rexdale Rising!

“the movement for community benefits in Toronto started in a room like this one, with community members, organizations, labour, all coming together to talk about opportunities in Rexdale”

Troy and Kumsa took turns taking the group through the struggles of various Community Benefit projects they had worked on with the Toronto Community Benefits Network and the Rexdale Rising Campaigns. The Finch West LRT, the Woodbine Casino and Eglinton Crosstown LRT, and the Parkdale People’s Economy movement. Each of these successful community projects built on each other. Eglinton LRT was only aspirational targets; Harder targets were set out for Woodbine Casino. Community Support and resident engagement was needed, especially for the political will to support CBAs for the Woodbine Casino. Wins included commitments from between 10% (Crosstown LRT) and up to 40% in the Woodbine Casino for employment targets. Consideration such as childcare, community spaces, affordable housing were also discussed around the various organization campaigns. The key message was for the need to create a critical body and mass support to influence the outcomes to more favourable CBAs. Organization, communication and framing the “good planning possibilities” required equity-seeking communities and having them at the table. Decent work, affordable commercial spaces, affordable housing and community access are some of the desired outcomes of CBAs.

“how can we ensure that the community can hold the city and developers accountable to agreements forged?... quarterly meetings, with regular updates to the community and CBAs oversight”

**Mike, Chair, Hamilton ACORN – Downtown Branch**

**“fighting for change creates better living”**

Mike Wood discussed some of the challenges residents along the Hamilton LRT corridor are facing, with increased interest from development groups and displacement pressures. He talked about some of ACORN’s successes in building community power door by door, speaking to individuals and families around Hamilton about the issues they face: unaffordable housing, unreliable transit, and lack of community spaces. ACORN

believes CBAs are an important tool for an affordable city, not a tent city. He also discussed some of ACORN's community organizing victories around inclusionary zoning.

**“By building power within the community, we can get things done!”**

Resident Workshop, Moderated by Alejandra Bravo, Director of Leadership and Training at the Broadbent Institute

Each table was asked to consider the discussed Community Benefits models discussed and consider the problems they were trying to take on? What are our benefits, not the projected benefits? What do we see as benefits as Individuals and as Community? What Challenges may be generated by the project? Who do we need to consider as this project moved forward? What are the concerns that could be generated in the communities and with residents on the line? Each table was asked to discuss these points with assistance and moderation from HCBN Board of Directors facilitation and other volunteers.

Next the Group was asked what is our vision for Hamilton? How do we see the Hamilton LRT in that vision for Hamilton's future? What Community Benefits will help shape you and your communities' vision of the city of Hamilton? What can we do with the opportunities of this project to help shape that vision? How do we make sure no one is left behind?

Each table took about 20 minutes or more on each of these key discussion topics to unpack views of the city and the future of Community Benefits in Hamilton especially around the LRT. Discussions were very respectful and quite lively. Each group generated a mountain of feedback, recorded by note takes at the table, with general specific priorities and asks mounted to post-IT Notes.

The groups then submitted all this feedback, as well as Feedback forms available on every table, back to the Hamilton Community Benefits network team for review.

General themes emerged with a great deal of overlap at all tables around concerns: The information was condensed into the following general themes.

**Affordable Housing (32 comments):** This was by far the largest concern and request around CBAs at the event. Many of the feedback comments touched on affordable housing and concerns around affordability and displacement. Every table agreed the cost of housing in the city was increasing and changing the city. Thoughts about who mitigates the risk of a project that is gentrifying the area. Concerns were raised about who is benefiting from the development in the city.

Rent-g geared apartments, stronger more connected neighbourhoods and zero displacement were considered priorities for the assembled group. Use of parking lots, higher density, inclusionary zoning tools, enforced property standards, more shelter beds and supports all came out as themes. Transit Oriented development and hard goals on the building of true affordable housing along the LRT corridor was clearly key and loud demand from the group for a CBA. New units and making sure that all the city's most vulnerable groups, specially on the LRT corridor had access to safe, acceptable and deeply affordable accommodation was loudly proclaimed by the group.

**Community Spaces: (Stations, stops, Shelters, Parks, Community Hubs, etc.)** (24 comments): This was the second largest consideration around CBAs from the assembled group. There was some overlap with comments in this section with affordable housing, the environment and other CBA topics and themes. Suggestions for Community Hubs and Plazas with affordable activities, and other public assets which might improve the Quality of Life, create Healthy Resilient Communities emerged as trends. Free indoor/outdoor spaces, local destinations, sports, entertainment industry, local theatre. Were all seen as needed in a CBAs around infrastructure to improve the city. The need for community-based Hubs, and spaces along the LRT corridor was the most commonly discussed benefit but some concerns appeared in this topic around traffic flow, complete and safe streets during and after construction. Finally, each group made a small note around station stops, making sure the transit hubs are safe, warm and welcoming.

**The Environment (21 comments):** This category also saw overlap with Community Spaces and affordable housing, as well as other topics. Traffic concerns, less cars, more bike lanes, more trees and the loss of trees on the LRT corridor appeared to cross most discussions at the community tables. Sustainable, locally sourced goods, rooftop gardens, rain gardens at stations, interlocking pavement, greenspaces, and less cars emerged as conversation points around CBAs, and the Hamilton LRT specifically. Many comments asked for complete streets, improved traffic flow, looking at entirety flow as opposed to neighbourhood by neighbourhood. The possibility of more community garden spaces, flowers, less pavement also emerged. The need for cycling, walkability and better transit crossed into this topic as well. The need for Complete Streets and more trees was agreed by every table to be a Community Benefit requirement.

**Accessibility (17 comments):** This category talked not just about physical AODA compliance, but all forms of accessibility, including economic accessibility. Comments around fares/discounted presto cards and passes topped the list; As did stop distances, engagement and project involvement of indigenous peoples and culture. And an overall theme of equality for everyone regardless of income. Accessibility concerns around affordable housing, and the system itself were overlapping themes.

**Shop Local and Business Support (11 comments):** It was generally agreed by the tables that revenue from development in Hamilton should stay in Hamilton. Most tables listed local business support as a common ask around a CBA in the city. Several tables also discussed as much local procurement as possible and procurement that inclusive and environmental. Some overlap with the environment and accessible areas was mentioned in concerns about business owners being displaced. Losing businesses due to construction restrictions was the top concern among the tables.

**Employment (11):** Jobs topped the list at every table for feedback. Concerns about who would get those jobs, including teams, adults and at need children. Training and CBAs to drive decent work to lift those on the fringes of society was a top priority. Financial investment in education, job readiness and training/employment opportunities was listed. Concern about if the LRT jobs themselves, if they would be union, decent and not just more low paying gig jobs. Hamilton Living or Fair Wage is a must in any employment considerations from CBAs

**Transportation Connection (9 comments):** Each table discussed in some for or another making sure the system was interconnected with HSR, Sobi Bike Share, Walkability, and other transit systems. Concerns mirrored those in accessibility about making sure the LRT was affordable to teens, low income residents, students and the elderly. Station design must be age-friendly and accessible. These overlapped with concerns from Community Spaces. The biggest concern in this category was how would the LRT system specifically (and other development projects broadly) integrate with the vision of Complete Streets for the city of Hamilton, connect to the existing systems and be affordable.

**Public Arts: (7 comments)** Although the least mentioned topic in notes and feedback there was definitely concern that that CBAs should include Art Work done by local artists. At each stop and across the line. They wanted that Art to be meaningful to Hamilton and its History. Concerts on blocked streets, more cultural activities in communities and community feedback on the types of public art to be selected also were discussed. Finally, the general trend seemed to be that arts and arts support from CBAs was an important topic seeing some overlap with Employment (artists and a precarious career). Hamilton Arts for and by Hamiltonians was an important theme in this topic group.