



## **Community Hubs in Ontario**

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### **A Strategic Framework and Action Plan Overview**

August 2015

The following is a high-level overview of the [Ontario Community Hubs action plan](#).

The Premier's Community Hubs Framework Advisory Groups: *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*, shares feedback received from stakeholders and outlines a Strategic Framework and Action Plan consisting of 6 key objectives, each with specific action items. Positing key considerations and steps forward, the report outlines challenges and suggested ways forward for the successful implementation of community hubs in Ontario.

A key recognition in the establishment and success of community hubs are "local heroes."

### **Strategic Framework:**

#### **Vision:**

*"We want Ontario to be the best place to work, live and raise a family and community hubs are part of that vision."*

Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario.

#### **Principles:**

- 1. Strengthening communities requires provincial leadership.**
- 2. Community planning is done locally with strong local leadership.**
- 3. Community needs should drive integrated service delivery.**
- 4. Community use is an integral part of the provincial public property planning.**
- 5. Community hubs are built through collaboration and shared responsibility.**

#### **Goals:**

- **Coordinated Planning:** A coordinated system of planning that encourages partnerships and builds on what works.
- **Client-focused Service Delivery:** a delivery system that provides integrated services to people in their communities.
- **Community Infrastructure/Public Properties:** a system that maximizes the use of public properties for community benefit.

#### **Strategic Framework (p. 33)**

- Recognition that each successful community hub is a unique solution to local needs (p. 34).
- It would be "a mistake to attempt to control this community-driven process from the top down. The Province needs to play a collaborative role in facilitating coordination and addressing barriers at the provincial level" (p. 34).
  - "A top down (policy and funding) and bottom up (local input and involvement from the beginning) are a good way to approach community hub development" (p. 71).

## **Action Plan (Highlights) (pg.35)**

### *Foundational Recommendation:*

That a Provincial Lead for community hubs be established – the Provincial lead would work across ministries to implement the Action Plan and further develop recommendations, requiring resources and accountabilities to be aligned across ministries (p. 36).

- The Provincial Lead would be responsible for the integration required to implement the Strategic Framework and Action Plan.
- “Formalize a structure to be responsible and accountable within government for overseeing the implementation of the Community Hubs Framework and Action Plan” (p. 37).

### **1. Integrated Service Delivery (p. 37)**

- Consultation has made evident that there is overwhelming support for integrated service through community hubs (p. 36).
- Example that was highly effective: lead agency at local or municipal level with partners mandated to be at tables (p. 68).

### **2. Develop a Provincial Strategy for Public Assets (p. 37)**

- Change the disposition process for surplus public properties to review public needs and explore potential partnerships before final decision.
- Review government mandate to require disposition of public properties at FMV and develop methodologies for conducting cost-benefit analysis of surplus properties that may have broader social and economic benefits to communities.
- Implement a short-term strategy for schools (p. 38).

### **3. Remove Barriers and Create Incentives (p. 38)**

- Continue to work with stakeholders to identify/find solutions to additional barriers that prevent the establishment of community hubs.
- Review the liability, security, access and property management issues to maximize the use of school spaces by community partners.

### **4. Support Integrated and Longer-term Planning (p. 38)**

- Require integrated planning to ensure client-focused service delivery regardless of jurisdictional boundaries (provincial, municipal, etc.).
- Work with the municipal sector and local stakeholders to explore opportunities to use provincial policy levers and legislation to strengthen and better enable community hubs.

### **5. Ensure Financially Sustainable Community Hubs (p. 39)**

- Review options to leverage municipal financial tools, including business incubators, municipal capital facilities agreements and development charges, to support the creation of new community spaces.

## **6. Increase Local Capacity (p. 39)**

- Engage experts and local practitioners to develop a resource centre for service providers to support the establishment of community hubs and provide training for providers.
- Make government data such as demographic, GIS mapping, service planning information and the surplus public properties inventory publicly available online.

## **7. Evaluate and Monitor the Outcomes (p. 39)**

- Develop an outcomes-based evaluation and measurement structure.

Overall, recognize that community hubs do not reduce costs – in some cases, there are increased costs in the short-term. They increase the efficiency of current program funding, reducing duplication and leveraging new opportunities, and reducing longer-term societal costs. This demonstrates a social return on investment (p. 73).

### **How the recommendations align with OMSSA/CMSMs/DSSABs:**

The report touches on many of the recommendations in OMSSA's [Keeping it Local](#) submission, including:

- *Flexibility to Set Objectives and Mandates (at the local level):* Throughout the Provincial report, the recognition that community hubs are most successful when they are responsive to the local unique needs of a community is highlighted. The report also states that it would be “a mistake to attempt to control this community-driven process from the top down” (p. 34).
- *Clarification of Provincial Privacy Legislation:* Action Item: “Work with the Information and Privacy Commissioner to leverage existing work to establish protocols that protect privacy while allowing appropriate sharing of client information” (p. 37).
- *Coordination between CMSMs and DSSABs, Local Agencies, and the Provincial Government:* “Require integrated planning to ensure client-focused service delivery regardless of jurisdictional boundaries” and “Working with the municipal sector and local stakeholders, explore opportunities to use provincial policy levers and legislation to strengthen and better enable community hubs” (p. 38).
- *Greater Coordination between Schools and Community Hubs:*
  - The report acknowledges that many groups, including municipalities and schools, identified challenges forming partnerships in schools (p. 30).
  - It also highlights a suggestion that a “multilateral consultative relationship with the municipality, CMSM/DSSAB, the school boards and the Province [be established, that] will provide a way to retain public ownership of schools when there is agreement among the parties that the site should be retained” (p. 29).
  - The Province will be implementing a short-term strategy for schools, which will focus on ensuring that community and provincial interests are considered when there is a possible sale of a school (p. 80).

- *Locating Community Hubs*: The report touches on the importance of the location of community hubs, including the importance of accessibility: “Explore how public buildings can be designed and built with greater consideration for multi-use, inter-generational and long-term requirements to meet the needs of today and tomorrow” (p. 38). This suggests that reviewing physical buildings for community hubs is a priority. To address rural and northern considerations pertaining to geography and access, the report recommends virtual hubs as an option.
- *Access to Capital Funding*: The Province recognizes that capital funding is a challenge for community hubs (p. 29). Regarding the OMSSA recommendation to increase response times for school buildings beyond 90 days, the provincial report stated that “we recommend pursuing an interim amendment to O. Reg. 444/98 to extend the 90-day circulation period of surplus property to 180 days” (p. 80).
- *Stable Funding*: The report states that issues around funding and financing weave through each category of challenges (planning, integrated service delivery, and community infrastructure/public property) (p. 20). It also acknowledges that organizations must deal with “multiple ministries and in some cases, multiple programs within the same ministry - each of which has separate funding agreements and different reporting, accountability and timelines requirements” (p. 21).
  - The report suggests that the above challenge can be alleviated by the Provincial Lead, who will work across ministries to implement the Action Plan, and will require resources and accountabilities to be aligned across ministries (acknowledging that structural realignment may be necessary). In addition, the report recommends exploring innovative financing models and leveraging provincial programs to provide financially stable community hubs (p. 38).

Several of OMSSA’s recommendations were not specifically addressed in the provincial report, including:

- reviewing lease agreements with schools;
- challenges relating to the *Schools First Policy* in rural areas;
- and challenges related to smaller economies of scale in rural communities.

These issues could be explored further in the Action Plan through the implementation of a short-term strategy for schools, and exploring opportunities to support virtual community hubs (p. 39).

The report does not provide detailed information regarding the process or timelines for the *Action Plan*. While the importance of partnerships at various levels of governments and the local level was emphasized, details on how these partnerships will be developed were not included in the report.

## Summary of points related to the roles/responsibilities of CMSMs/DSSABs

### Executive Summary

- Challenges identified in the report regarding the development of community hubs include: lack of government coordination within the Province and between the provincial and municipal governments; conflicting policies; program silos; uncoordinated funding; unclear, confusing, time-consuming forms and eligibility criteria; and non-client-focused programs/services (p. 5).
- Issues tend to fall into three general categories: planning, integrated service delivery, and community infrastructure/public properties (p. 5).

### Introduction (p. 6)

- Recognition that “each hub is as unique as the community it serves and is defined by local needs, services and resources” (p. 7).
- “Programs and services offered by the government need to keep pace with the complex needs of our growing and diverse population. In addition, the current fiscal environment requires a disciplined focus on finding smarter, better ways to deliver the best possible value for every dollar spent” (p. 8).
- Recognition that there are rules and constraints imposed by the Province and others. “Provincial policies and processes are often complicated, fragmented and are driven by ministry-specific requirements rather than being viewed through a lens of community needs and outcomes” (p. 9).

### The Journey So Far (p. 10)

- “There is a lot of support for better alignment within the government for a cross-ministry approach” (p. 11).

### What We Heard (p. 13)

#### Planning

- Planning was raised as an issue by stakeholders. The two challenges to coordinated planning were identified as: need for provincial community planning table and multiple local planning tables (p. 20).
- There is no designated lead for overall community planning when developing/sustaining a community hub – it can include levels of government, school boards, etc. (p. 21).
- Local planning is also complicated by the geographical boundaries of school boards, municipalities, CMSMs/DSSABs, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINS), etc., that do not align (p. 22).
- The Province is currently undertaking multiple planning reviews. There is an opportunity in the context of these reviews to require more integrated local planning (p. 22).
- Some ministries and Infrastructure Ontario (IO), including the Ministry of Education, have excellent Geographic Information Systems (GIS) that could be used to enhance capacity to plan community needs (p. 23).

### *Integrated Service Delivery (p. 23)*

- Recognition that there are barriers that impeded integrated service delivery models, such as: start-up funding; funding silos; transfer payments and accountability; measuring inputs, not outcomes; sustainable funding; privacy legislation; local capacity; and resources (p. 23).
- *Funding silos*: government should move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to service provision – instead looking at streaming clients according to the level and nature of support they require (p. 23).
- *Transfer payments and accountability*: recognition that multiple provincial programs from multiple ministries with different reporting timelines, benchmarks and requirements create challenges for agencies (i.e. time, completing multiple reports, etc.). Recommendation that consistent and transparent transfer payment agreements should be established across ministries (p. 25).
- Recognition that the long-term viability and flexibility of a community hub depends on its ability to adapt and respond to evolving community needs (p. 26).

### *Local Capacity and Resources (p. 26)*

- Suggestion to have a central place where organizations/agencies can go for information and resources when considering a community hub model (p. 27).
- Ask that consideration be given for standard template forms for community hub operations (i.e. evaluation, planning, multi-stakeholder template agreements for organizations/agencies operating a community hub as a partnership) (p. 27).
- Recognition that strong, collaborative partnerships benefit target populations in hubs and are effective in moving projects forward when resources are scarce (p. 69).
- Building partnerships can be fiscally prudent – on average, \$3 from community partners for every dollar they allocate (p. 70).

### *Community Infrastructure/Public Assets (p. 27)*

- *No accessible comprehensive public assets database*: Organizations want access to an up-to-date inventory of all public assets, including those at municipal level (p. 28).
- *Planning in Silos*: Recognition that “there is no overall provincial lens to review the inventory of public assets prior to decisions being made to dispose of property that might be surplus to the needs of one ministry” (p. 28).
- *Sale at Fair Market Value (FMV)*: Recognition that there may be socio-economic value which is not considered in the current FMV analysis for a school (i.e. one organization wanted to buy a school to leverage affordable housing funding but could not get the financing to pay market value for the school) (p. 29).
- *Circulation Process for Surplus Property*: Recognition that there is a limited circulation list regarding surplus property and not all potential end users are included (i.e. DSSABs) (p. 29).

- *Access to School Space*: Report highlights a suggestion that a “multilateral consultative relationship with the municipality, CMSM/DSSAB, the school boards and the Province will provide a way to retain public ownership of schools when there is agreement among the parties that the site should be retained” (p. 29).
- *Property Management, Liability and Security Issues*: Many groups, including municipalities and schools, noted challenges forming partnerships in schools (p. 30).
- *Design of New Buildings*: New buildings need to be better designed to respond to the changing needs and demographics of local communities (p. 31).
- Recognition that policy solutions work differently for urban and rural settings (p. 32).

OMSSA will continue to work with the Province to ensure that OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs will be engaged in the development and implementation of the Action Plan, and that CMSMs and DSSABs are strongly positioned as leaders and partners both provincially and locally.

*The Strategic Framework and Action Plan* is a positive step forward that confirms the time has come to move forward on what OMSSA, its members and many others have been advocating on for some time.

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