

Central Etobicoke Community Hub

Backgrounder

May 2018

Building on the preliminary work of the Central Etobicoke Multi-Service Agency (CEMA), also known as the B427 Steering Committee, a resident-led service and advocacy group active in the late 1990's, the Etobicoke Youth Network (EYN) picked up on the call to community action contained in the "Roots of Youth Violence" report done in 2007 by former Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and former Speaker of the Ontario Legislature Alvin Curling, and began to advocate for a Community Hub in central Etobicoke for marginalized youth and their families. The EYN did workshops and trainings for youth and families, liaised with Rathburn Area Youth (RAY), offered signature events, advocated with politicians, and coordinated representatives of about 30 agencies in providing programming and services to marginalized youth.

The EYN had spoken of advocating for a Hub for several years, but it wasn't until it decided, in the spring of 2016, to broaden the Hub mandate to include seniors, immigrants, and others, that momentum was truly built. In addition, just as the Central Etobicoke Community Hub Working Group (CECH-WG) was being founded, news of funding from the City of Toronto for a Feasibility Study about both the needs of all people and the current services offered in Wards 3 & 4 was received, also in the spring of 2016.

The CECH-WG is a collaborative collective consisting of local residents and youth, various agencies, government and public sector staff, ethno-cultural and non-profit groups, senior advocates, faith community leaders, and individuals. Having started with 23 people on the e-list after the first meeting in July of 2016, there are now 120 people, including numerous representatives from various groups as well as interested individuals, on the e-list.

The Etobicoke Community Hub Working Group have been meeting since June 2016 with the common vision to create a community-based and community-led hub offering multiple services and programs (including health, social services, community kitchen and food/garden access, employment, education, cultural arts and recreation), and community gathering space for youth and seniors, families and singles to become fully engaged, healthy, socially included and participating members of the community.

The Central Etobicoke Feasibility Study, done by Social Planning Toronto staff, begun in the fall of 2016, was completed in December of 2017. The objectives of the feasibility study have been:

- To increase knowledge of the strengths, assets, needs and gaps in service provision in central Etobicoke
- To identify space requirements and potential sites for potential hub locations
- To engage residents and stakeholders in documenting hub requirements in the areas of arts, recreation, social services and opportunities for civic engagement
- To increase community awareness of the community hub project and mobilize support and engagement with it.

Comprehensive community engagement and stakeholder input has been sought and received, with a priority on vulnerable communities and citizens, and the neighbourhoods of The West Mall, The East Mall, Capri, Willowridge, and Mabelle. A partnership survey was also recently circulated, to identify possible

lead and itinerant agencies and organizations which might plan to be part of a comprehensive Hub project, and follow-up with potential partners is ongoing.

Central Etobicoke has been identified as an area in need of one or more community hubs due to:

- It is severely lacking in infrastructure, especially recreation/community/arts facilities
- The physical presence of agencies and social services are minimal
- The number of community services is minimal (it has lost children's mental health and medical services)
- It has several social housing neighbourhoods that lack resources needed to address inadequate community programming
- The community experiences barriers of 'precarious employment, English language challenges, and cultural and religious differences'
- It contains a high proportion of older adults, many living in isolation
- Inadequate public transit service in the area adds to the difficulties of distances to services, retail, and recreation
- Low walkability scores

("The Recreation Gap: A Case for Resource Investment in Etobicoke Centre" research by Masters of Planning students in York University, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Winter 2016).

The CECH-WG completed a Vision Report in the spring of 2017, having visited several Hubs operating in the greater Toronto area, and has identified a short-list of desired services needed within the Hubs as well as a preferred shared-governance model for the way the Hubs should operate. An agreed-upon structure and Terms of Reference also govern how the CECH-WG operates, and there are currently 4 Task Groups and a Coordinating Group to guide the work and advocacy.

The CECH-WG has enjoyed the support of all levels of government and numerous public servants, including the current Councilors in Wards 3 & 4, the MPP and MP in our area, and School Trustees from both TDSB and TCDSB. It is now also known that central Etobicoke has been identified within the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Master Plan as needing an increase in services and space. A CECH-WG strategic planning process was completed in late September of 2017, and steps are being taken to intensify the detailed advocacy for Community Hubs, including the search for available space opportunities, in cooperation with various stakeholders and possible partners.

In the winter of 2018 a student from Humber College was engaged to help us develop a communications strategy, and we're now beginning to implement it. Our partnership engagement strategy is also part of our focus, as is the potential grants and fundraising opportunities that are available to enable us to have staff support for our efforts. In addition, the development of a comprehensive business plan is on our immediate horizon. And we're holding our first Annual General Meeting as a Working Group, to hold ourselves accountable to one another and to give authority to our leaders in the Coordinating Group, in June 2018. There are numerous tasks that remain for us to undertake together, and if you'd like to know more or get involved, don't hesitate to volunteer for one of the following four Task Groups:

Communications, Partner Engagement, Finance & Fundraising, Business Plan Development

For information about the Hubs project, or to inquire about participating, contact: info@etobicokehub.org