

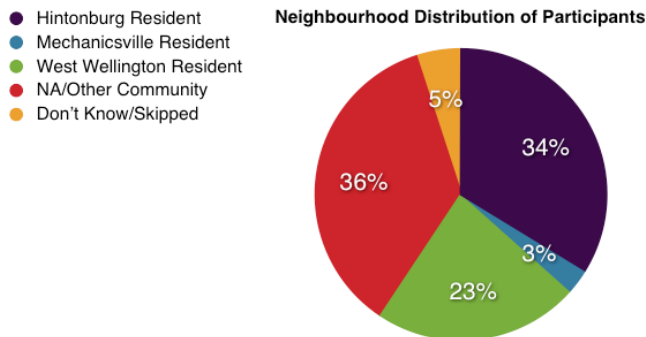
Community Cornerstones II:

Survey Findings for the Neighbourhood Planning Initiative

In 2008 Carleton University's Centre for Urban Research Education (CURE) conducted two monitoring surveys on the Neighbourhood Planning Initiative (NPI). The NPI is a pilot project (2005-2008) held in the Hintonburg/Mechanicsville and Vars neighborhoods in the City of Ottawa which is intended to involve residents more closely in the planning of their neighbourhood. CURE has been observing the progress of the NPI. The following two surveys were a follow-up on the two baseline surveys conducted in Hintonburg/Mechanicsville in September 2006.

Survey One: City of Ottawa Residents

The survey focused on resident visions for the Hintonburg neighborhood and perceptions of the NPI process. This survey was conducted in July 2008 with 364 Ottawa residents participating.



Neighbourhood Decision-making

(Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree Strongly Agree, Don't Know)

- Elected officials are best placed to make decisions over the future of Hintonburg (majority chose Disagree, 61%)
- Community organizations are best placed to make decisions over the future of Hintonburg (majority chose Agree, 80%)
- I want to be more involved in decisions (majority chose Agree, 62%)

Level of agreement with NPI-identified Objectives

Survey participants were asked to rate the objectives that have been identified through NPI. The top three were rated as 'Very Important': green space (79%); crime prevention (71%) and building renovation and upkeep (70%). The three considered least important by the most people were noise reduction (14.5%); expansion of Hintonburg's artist community (12%) and affordability of housing (11%).

Perceptions of the NPI Process:

(Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree Strongly Agree, Don't Know)

- Comfortable with goals of NPI (majority chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 52%)
- There was a range of opportunity to be involved (majority chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 54%)
- Satisfied with NPI information provided (majority chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 51%)
- Clear and easy to get involved in NPI (most frequent choice was Agree or Strongly Agree, 39%)
- Local groups are doing a good job of representing community interests (majority chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 52%)
- The NPI is on track in the reconstruction of Wellington Street (majority chose Agree or Strongly Agree, 59%)
- The NPI will held address the key social challenges affecting my neighbourhood (most frequent choice was Don't Know, 42%; followed by Agree, 41%)

What residents had to say:

"(My vision for Hintonburg) is higher density residential buildings with a mix of private market and affordable rent geared to income social housing. Hintonburg is becoming unaffordable for people with modest incomes."

"The CTF needed to reach out more to different interest groups through targeted workshops on specific issues."

"The willingness was there, for sure, but the time and resources were not."

"I have been more than pleased on the whole with the whole process. Some events, like the parking meter fiasco, have made me doubt the city's upper levels and politicians' commitment or even understanding of the process in which we are involved."

"(NPI events were) good but (I'm) not sure how feedback was handled from open houses, (I) do not see followup on how suggestions were incorporated, or even a summary of what the suggestions were."

"If I lived in Hintonburg I would be thrilled with this process; living in Mechanicsville I would say that the process has failed miserably."

"Consultation with residents in future and strategic planning (is) a must."



Survey Two: City of Ottawa Employees

This survey was conducted in February 2008 with 79 City of Ottawa employees participating. It focused on their perceptions of community engagement processes and their working relationships with other departments.

What influences City's engagement of residents?

(Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree Strongly Agree, Don't Know)

- City politics (majority chose Strongly Agree, 53%)
- City Hall's decision making process (most frequent choice was Strongly Agree, 49%)
- Departmental financial resources (most frequent choice was Strongly Agree, 46%)
- Departmental human resources (most frequent choice was Strongly Agree, 44%)
- Community capacity to engage (most frequent choice was Neutral, 28%)
- Community interest (most frequent choice was Strongly Agree, 25%)

Engaging local communities in the planning process

(Choices: Much Worse, Worse, Neutral, Better, Much Better, Don't Know)

Most surveyed said that engaging local communities had a positive impact on neighbourhood planning. When asked about the quality of decisions, inclusion, equity, public support and relations with city staff, most choose 'Better'. The highest score was given to inclusion (49%) and lowest on relations with city staff (29%).

Who influences city planning and development decisions?

(Choices: Very Little, Little, Some, Significant, Don't Know)

- Developers (most frequent choice was Significant, 39%)
- Local Councillors (majority chose Significant, 69%)
- Local community groups (most frequent choice was Some, 47%)
- Other city staff (most frequent choice was Some, 44%)
- Residents/citizens (most frequent choice was Some, 43%)
- Local business (most frequent choice was Some, 36%)

Perceptions of community consultation processes, excluding NPI

(Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree Strongly Agree, Don't Know)

Most city staff chose 'neutral' when asked if the city's current community consultation processes were cost effective (Neutral, 32%) or that they produced desired and timely results (Neutral, 35%). Most disagreed that community consultations resulted in good planning and/or investment decisions (Disagree, 30%).

What is the staff perception of City's performance?

(Choices: Very Poor, Poor, Neutral, Good, Very Good, Don't Know)

When asked to rate their department's ability to work with other departments, most city staff were positive, with 49% saying 'good' or 'very good', while just over 21% said 'poor' or 'very poor'. Asked how the city as a whole fared on planning projects and policies, staff were more critical.

- Coordination (most frequent choice was Good, 40.5%)
- Sharing information (most frequent choice was Good 32.4%)
- Avoiding duplication (most frequent choice was Poor, 33.8%)
- Consensus building (most frequent choice was Neutral 35.1%)
- Setting priorities (most frequent choice was Neutral, 33.8%)

CURE

Careton University's Centre for Urban Research and Education (CURE) is a collaborative research network focussing on community governance, citizen engagement and local capacity building to support planning infrastructure in social, economic and environmental sustainability. For more information, contact Chris Stoney cstoney@connect.carleton.ca or 613-520-2600 ext 2640.

What City employees had to say:

"Consultation is expensive, and many times attracts very little resident participation."

"Developers have the upper hand through city processes and contacts."

"Environmental concerns do not have the same weight as economic or political issues."

"Anyone who provides reasoned and open participation has a great influence on the process and on the staff undertaking the work."

"The consultation process is a specialty of its own. It's hard for a project manager to be conversant in progressive processes and to integrate the results."

"In many cases residents are only interested in themselves, not the well-being of the whole community."

"Politicians have to start supporting the decisions professionals city staff make - it will make (the) process more efficient and less costly."

"It seems many times these decisions are made totally in isolation of the Ottawa 20/20 Plan."

"Having early insights into resident desires and needs is GREAT!"

