

# The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole  
Community and Health Services  
November 7, 2019

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

## Development of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

### 1. Recommendations

1. Council approve a place-based approach to prepare a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for York Region.
2. Council direct Commissioner of Community and Health Services to determine initial areas for engagement based on data and undertake targeted consultations to identify and develop possible strategies to reduce risks to community safety and well-being.
3. Council direct Commissioner of Community and Health Services to report back to Council on the outcomes of consultations.
4. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to Clerks of local municipalities, York Regional Police Services Board and Human Services Planning Board of York Region.

### 2. Summary

This report seeks Council's direction on the recommended approach to prepare a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for York Region.

Key Points:

- *Police Services Act, 1990* requires single-tier and regional municipalities to prepare and adopt a community safety and well-being plan by December 31, 2020
- The Plan must identify and assess risks to community safety and well-being, include strategies to reduce prioritized risks and consider input from specified groups
- The Region compares favourably to neighbouring regions from a safety and well-being perspective, but there are opportunities to strengthen outcomes in some communities within the Region
- A place-based approach would involve focusing on geographic areas using data, identifying and assessing risks in those locations, and identifying strategies to reduce prioritized risks, through engagement and in partnership with local municipalities and community organizations

- A place-based approach would build on and inform the development of broad-based plans by providing opportunities to apply and learn from outcomes of targeted actions
- The Human Services Planning Board of York Region, approved by Council as the Advisory Committee to the Plan as required under the *Police Services Act*, supports including a place-based approach as part of the Region's Plan

### 3. Background

#### **Single-tier and regional municipalities must prepare and adopt a community safety and well-being plan by December 31, 2020**

On [March 29, 2018](#) and [April 11, 2019](#), the Regional Solicitor reported to Council on requirements to prepare a community safety and well-being plan under the *Police Services Act, 1990*. The legislation is permissive on how to prepare a community safety and well-being plan, but does include the following requirements:

- Identify and prioritize risks that contribute to crime, victimization, and harm
- Identify strategies to reduce prioritized risks and set measureable outcomes
- Consult with an advisory committee (whose members are prescribed under legislation) and with members of public including youth, racialized groups, Indigenous peoples and community organizations that represent these groups
- Adopt the Plan by December 31, 2020
- Implement the Plan, and monitor, evaluate and report on the effect of the Plan (subject to reporting requirements to be outlined in regulations)

#### **The Province's approach focuses on preventative actions, targeted plans and collaboration to leverage existing community strengths**

The Ministry of the Solicitor General has published guidance documents to support municipalities in preparing a community safety and well-being plan: "Crime Prevention in Ontario: A Framework for Action" (Booklet 1) and "Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework" (Booklet 3).

According to the Province, the ultimate goal of community safety and well-being planning is to achieve "communities where everyone is safe, has a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression". To help achieve these objectives, guidance documents highlight that "prevention is better than cure", and indicate that the focus of community safety and well-being planning should be on risk factors and preventative actions to reduce incidence and mitigate severity of crime, victimization and harm.

It also notes "crime prevention through social development recognizes that the intersection of multiple, complex social, economic, health and environmental factors lead to criminality", and

are often referred to as social determinants of health. Social determinants of health, which are conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age that influence health outcomes, were described in a report to Council on [February 16, 2017](#). Recognizing the diversity and complexity of communities, the Province advises that “communities should tailor programs and strategies to the unique needs and strengths of different groups, as well as to address the distinct risk factors they face”.

There is also recognition that work is already underway to improve community and individual social, economic and health outcomes. The Province explains that community safety and well-being planning is “not about reinventing the wheel – it’s about recognizing the great work already happening within individual agencies and organizations, and using collaboration to do more with local experience and expertise”.

### **Work on preparing a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan has started, including striking the Advisory Committee and undertaking initial research**

On [June 28, 2018](#), Council designated the Human Services Planning Board of York Region (Board) to act as the Advisory Committee for preparation of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan (the Plan). Council approved changes to the Board’s composition to meet the legislated requirements. Attachment 1 lists the current members of the Board, which includes representation from the York Regional Police Services Board and sectors such as education, community services, health and children and youth.

Regional staff conducted research including a literature review and jurisdictional scan to supplement provincial guidance and to better understand community safety and well-being planning. Based on this work, staff have compiled a preliminary list of common risks related to community safety and well-being, which are outlined in Attachment 2. Through meetings and discussions, these risks were validated by Regional and local municipal staff, subject matter experts and members of the Board. These common risks are intended to serve as reference and starting point for future community engagement.

Staff have also started to gather relevant demographic, economic, health and social data to inform selection of possible initial engagement areas and the identification and prioritization of risks. The Region has relied on the combination of these types of data sets to inform the location of possible services and facilities, such as community hubs. An example of a composite measure that could guide this work is the Ontario Marginalization Index. Developed by Public Health Ontario in partnership with St. Michael’s Hospital, this index is publicly available and uses census data (see Attachment 3).

### **Regional staff is working with York Regional Police to develop the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan**

In addition to being part of the Advisory Committee, York Regional Police is an important partner in the development and implementation of the Plan. York Regional Police, particularly through its Community Engagement and Well-Being Bureau, is providing valuable support, information and data. Police insights from their work in such areas as community policing

and crime prevention are helpful as part of the process to better understand risks and develop possible strategies.

## 4. Analysis

### **York Region is a great place to live, work and play, and Regional plans and programs contribute to strong, caring, safe communities**

York Region is a vibrant, growing municipality of 1.2 million people. It is considered a destination of choice for residents and employers. The 2018 Growth and Development Review highlights that York Region has a low unemployment rate (4.8%) compared to Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (5.8%) and Ontario (5.6%), and has the second highest median income in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

York Region is also one of the safest communities in Canada. A [June 2019](#) report from The Regional Municipality of York Police Services Board states that “York Region has maintained a low overall crime rate that ranks first/lowest in Total Crime Code and Crime Severity Index across the nation when compared to the eight regional/municipal police services serving the largest populations in Canada.”

A variety of Regional plans, policies and programs have helped to create and sustain strong, safe, caring communities. These initiatives generally take a broad perspective and include actions that can be applied across the Region to address specific issues. Attachment 2 outlines some of these plans and programs, particularly those related to the common risks to community safety and well-being that have been identified through staff research. These plans and programs include such initiatives as the [Newcomer Strategy](#), [Housing Solutions](#) and [Opioid Action Plan](#).

### **While the Region compares favourably to other municipalities, there are opportunities to strengthen outcomes in some communities within the Region**

The publicly-available Ontario Marginalization Index, created by Public Health Ontario in partnership with St. Michael's Hospital, calculates a composite score using census data to help better understand well-being in communities across the Province. Attachment 3 shows scores for communities in the Greater Toronto Area.

York Region fares well compared to neighbouring municipalities. For example, only 4% of census tracts in York Region rank in the highest level of marginalization scores compared to almost 32% of census tracts in City of Toronto. While, overall, York Region communities have favourable scores, there are opportunities to leverage programs and services to improve outcomes in certain areas.

## **Place-based approach strengthens Regional programs and services by providing opportunities to apply, assess and learn from targeted actions**

The broad perspective that Regional plans and programs take establishes a strong framework and foundation for understanding and addressing issues important to residents across the Region. Given the diversity and complexity of York Region communities, targeting and customizing actions to reflect local context and needs can provide valuable opportunities to enhance impacts within certain areas. A place-based approach to areas that may benefit from focused attention can augment the broader plans to better address local issues, fill in gaps in our existing plans and work toward further improving outcomes for residents. Figure 1 illustrates the linkage and mutual feedback between broad Regional plans and community-based actions envisioned in the proposed place-based approach.

**Figure 1**  
**Proposed Approach and Plan**



The Region already takes a place-based approach for certain policy and program design decisions. For example, local context, as evidenced through socio-economic data and other community-level information, helps inform the location of programs and facilities such as community hubs.

## **Place-based approach is not new and has been deployed in jurisdictions across Canada and internationally**

Place-based approaches have been implemented in other major Canadian municipalities, such as the City of Montreal (Boroughs initiative) and City of Toronto (Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy). This approach has also guided initiatives in Vancouver, Regina and Winnipeg. Globally, place-based approaches have been adopted in the United Kingdom, United States and the European Union. Research has shown successes in these cases, where there was a proactive effort “to align better public policies with local needs and capacities,” gain an “understanding of neighbourhood needs, assets and capacities,” and not

“starting from scratch; but rather working with and through existing neighbourhood networks or community-based projects already in place” (Bradford, Neil. 2005. “Place-based Public Policy: Towards a New Urban and Community Agenda for Canada”).

For example, under the City of Toronto’s Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy, a data-driven approach is taken to identify specific areas within the City which are not doing as well as others across a range of indicators. Targeted consultations with community partners inform the development of action plans that build on existing City programs and services. The strategy, for example, notes that certain services (e.g. those that aim to improve health of racialized groups or mental health outcomes in communities experiencing high rates of violence) can be piloted within targeted areas. The City recognizes the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy as “one of the many approaches the City has available to improve the quality of life for residents and enhance Toronto’s reputation as a world class city.”

### **Research on place-based approach shows mostly positive benefits**

Research on place-based approaches from other jurisdictions shows wide-ranging benefits. Table 1 summarizes key benefits to taking this approach.

**Table 1**  
**Benefits of Place-Based Approach**

Effectiveness	Efficiency	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on both overall critical risks to region and local community while responding to uniqueness of community</li> <li>• Targets areas of highest opportunity</li> <li>• Provides strong platform to work with local agencies and existing community assets within specified areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverages existing insights from regional plans already in place</li> <li>• Limited resources could be focused to increase efficiency</li> <li>• Allows opportunity to hone in on gaps</li> <li>• Gives flexibility to scale up and beyond and apply learning to larger endeavours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength-based and builds community capacity by recognizing work already happening and using partnerships to do more with local experience and expertise</li> <li>• Community building and collaboration results in stronger commitment and engagement</li> <li>• Recognizes that no one organization or level of government can fully own the initiatives or solve risks</li> <li>• Helps manage expectations</li> </ul>

## **The requirement to prepare a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan provides an opportunity to apply and benefit from a place-based approach**

With Council endorsement of a place-based approach to community safety and well-being planning, as recommended in this report, staff would use data and research to identify a few communities within which to conduct targeted engagement. The process would involve bringing together local municipalities, community agencies and groups, and residents to understand and prioritize risks, and develop strategies and measurable outcomes customized to each community. Regional plans and initiatives along with existing community assets would form part of the range of tools available to reduce risks, while targeted, community-based actions would in turn inform the development and continued evolution of higher-level plans.

This approach would meet legislative requirements and also aligns with the Province's intention and vision for community safety and well-being planning.

A key part of the process would be prioritizing identified risks within the identified area(s). Possible considerations to assess and rank community risks include:

- Level of importance and urgency as identified by stakeholders through targeted engagements
- Presence, willingness and ability of partners, including local municipalities and community agencies, to tackle the issue and collaborate on strategies
- Extent of alignment with and ability to leverage work already being done at the Regional, local municipal, or community agency level
- Ability to access and deploy resources

Outcomes of targeted engagement, including prioritized risks and possible strategies, would be reported back to Council. Council direction received at that time would inform development and finalization of the proposed Plan to be submitted for Council adoption in late 2020. Implementation of the Plan would begin after Council approval. Depending on provincial reporting requirements, staff expect there will be opportunities to evolve and add on to the Plan in future years.

## **There are concerns associated with taking a place-based approach, however, mitigation measures could be implemented**

Table 2 outlines some concerns and mitigating measures associated with a place-based approach, based on planning discussions to date and other jurisdiction research. A concern that often arises, and did arise in the Board meeting and working group discussions, is the risk of stigma being attached to identified areas. This was a concern as well in other municipalities that have used place-based initiatives, and they reduced stigma by: clarifying objectives and goals; having a comprehensive communications plan including using more positive language; and associating specific issues with broader municipal, regional and national issues.

The Region could help mitigate the risk of stigma through deliberate and careful engagement and communication strategies. The strategies would highlight the broader context of this work, including: the strength and vitality of York Region overall; the presence and success of Regional programs and services; and the opportunity, through the Plan, to build on Regional initiatives in collaborative ways that leverage community strengths, reflect local context and target specific gaps in services.

Another concern is that place-based approaches may take time and resources to implement and show results. There is often an expectation from the community that results should be immediate when dealing on a community level. However, developing quality and effective targeted initiatives with partners takes time and effort. For example, with the City of Toronto, some initiatives such as increasing lighting in parks was a relatively quick action done by the City and provided more immediate results. Other initiatives, such as language and computer training, involve partnerships and may take more time and effort to implement and see results. The Region could mitigate this concern by managing expectations and setting reasonable goals and timelines.

**Table 2**  
**Concerns and Mitigating Measures of Place-Based Approach**

Concerns	Mitigating Measures
Potential stigma associated with identified areas	<p>Develop appropriate, carefully-managed engagement and communications strategies that focus on the broader context within which community safety and well-being planning is being undertaken</p> <p>Highlight strength of the Region overall, presence of broad programs and services, and opportunity to leverage existing programming and assets to target specific needs</p>
May need time to show results	<p>Community building and collaborative processes take time; set reasonable goals/timelines</p> <p>Ownership of some actions by the community or agencies for success; manage expectations</p>
Resourcing	Carefully prioritize risks and scale strategies appropriately to reflect available resources

### **Human Services Planning Board of York Region supports a place-based approach**

In June and July 2019, a Board meeting and a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan working group meeting was held to obtain input from Board members, other relevant human service agencies and local municipalities about how to best move forward. Some key themes emerged from the meetings, including the need for the process to be flexible, the Plan to address unique and changing needs in communities, and the importance of hearing from



residents about priority issues in their communities and what they might need to address those issues. Participants at the meetings generally supported a place-based approach.

At the Board public meeting on October 18, 2019, Board members re-affirmed their support, and in a formal motion unanimously endorsed a place-based approach.

### **York Region could meet the provincial requirements without taking a place-based approach**

Should Council decide not to approve a place-based approach, the Plan can still be developed to meet legislated requirements. The alternative approach would be more broad-based. This would be consistent with plans done by some municipalities such as [Town of Bancroft](#), [Halton Region](#) and [City of Thunder Bay](#) (focused on risks that apply across their municipalities). It is important to note these municipalities differ from York Region in many aspects such as population size, demographics, diversity, community make-up and geography/landscape.

### **Community Safety and Well-Being Plan aligns with Vision 2051 and the 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan**

Community safety and well-being planning, at its core, directly supports the Region's efforts in achieving its vision of strong, caring, safe communities. More specifically, the Plan supports the Region in reaching the goals as outlined in Vision 2051, particularly Goal Area 1: A Place Where Everyone Can Thrive, which identifies "developing sustainable community safety and crime prevention strategies through community mobilization, engagement and education" as one of the actions.

The Plan also supports community result area of Healthy Communities in the 2019 to 2023 Strategic Plan and achieves one of the key activities under priority area Support Community Health, Safety and Well-Being: "develop a community safety and well-being plan to enhance collaboration, engagement and outreach with our community and policing partners."

## **5. Financial**

In [March 2018](#), Council endorsed Association of Municipalities of Ontario's advocacy for provincial funding to help municipalities meet Community Safety and Well-being Plan obligations. At this time, however, the Region has not received any provincial funding to support the preparation or implementation of the Plan. Regional staff will need to develop the Plan using existing resources, balancing the requirements of the project with other priorities and pressures.

To implement the Plan, Regional staff will explore opportunities to leverage or adapt existing Regional initiatives, such as the Community Investment Fund. Any additional resources that may be needed will be identified as part of the 2021 budget process.

## **Given resource constraints, development and implementation of the Plan will need to be carefully scoped and cannot be done in isolation**

Support from partners such as local municipalities and community organizations will need to be leveraged. In addition, as many of the common risks to community safety and well-being generally fall within provincial jurisdiction (such as alcohol and substance misuse, education, employment and income, housing stability, and mental and physical health), Regional staff will continue to look for funding opportunities to support this work.

## **6. Local Impact**

Collaboration and partnerships are key to community safety and well-being planning. This work provides an opportunity to build on Regional initiatives through the development of targeted plans that reflect local context and address community-level gaps. The Region will need to work closely with local municipalities and other community partners to obtain insights about community risks and priorities, leverage resources, and collaborate on implementation of actions under the Plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Region is a vibrant, growing destination of choice for residents and employers. Regional plans and initiatives help build and sustain strong, caring, safe communities for all residents. Taking a place-based approach to the preparation of the Region's Community Safety and Well-being Plan provides an opportunity to build on Regional initiatives and develop targeted strategies that reflect community needs and address specific services gaps.

If approved, the Commissioner of Community and Health Services will identify areas using data, undertake engagement in those communities to identify and prioritize local risks and develop possible strategies, and report back to Council on consultation outcomes. Insights from these engagements will inform the development of a Community Safety and Well-being Plan that Council is required to adopt by the end of 2020.

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For more information on this report, please contact Joseph Silva, Director, Strategies and Partnerships Branch at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77201. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Attachments (3)  
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