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# MEETING HOUSE ... *MORE THAN ROADS, SEWERS, STORES AND SCHOOLS*

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## MAJOR THEMES WE HEARD IN OUR DISCUSSION

JAN 31ST 2012 NEWMARKET PUBLIC LIBRARY

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### HOUSING

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- Housing affordability. Single professional people, young families can't afford to live in Newmarket. Not just people living on the lowest income. It impacts economic diversity. Cost of home ownership results in landlords requiring high rents.
- Housing Supply. Rental accommodation is in very short supply. The market is driving housing development.
- Newmarket could be a victim of its own success – hottest resale market. High ratio of people living/working in their community. People stay – don't move on, and there is little opportunity for developing affordable housing. Limited land for development, boomers want to downsize, but there are few options.
- People with disabilities have difficulty accessing housing because of their limited income.
- Seniors need affordable, smaller housing with supports to enable independent living.
- Homelessness is an invisible reality that many people are not aware of. Without a home, it is very difficult to obtain and maintain a job. People on very low incomes are getting forced out of the community.

### Opportunity:

- York Region Human Services Planning Board (HSPB) released "*Making Ends Meet*" June 2011. Affordable Housing identified as a priority action area.
  - The town has a key role to play in supporting the development of a broad diversity of housing types. Could the Town of Newmarket provide incentives for developers to develop rental housing?
  - Could non-market driven groups develop more affordable housing?
  - Participation from other levels of government is necessary.
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## ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

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- Poverty is an issue. People do not always recognize the extent of poverty in the community. Inadequate income and lack of affordable housing are pushing people down into poverty.
- Residents on very low incomes have great difficulty obtaining/maintaining a job.
- There is concern about newcomers and young people trying to get a foothold in the labour market and begin their careers.
- The ability to meet basic needs is an issue for a growing vulnerable population. While volunteers can help, many people running food banks are ready to retire. These are social policy issues. There is a need for better understanding about who, and why people in communities are struggling.

### Opportunity:

- The town could provide information/promote all kinds of activities that are free of charge.
- There is a need for opportunities for residents to increase their knowledge of social issues in their community e.g. the growing income gap. Increase civic engagement in the development of healthy public policy.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

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- People with disabilities have difficulty accessing services.
- People impacted by the recession sought out assistance through the Library and a collaborative approach to support offered by service providers. However, an increasingly challenging economic environment resulted in less willingness of organizations to collaborate as they feared for their own future and ability to survive.
- We need to better understand what is already happening in communities before planning new services/supports. Too many organizations are working in isolation because there is no mechanism/mandate at the local/neighbourhood level to plan/organize.
- Capacity issue – social service sector, particularly the leadership is experiencing significant stress and there are insufficient resources to respond to growing community need for services. Additional growth will further challenge the capacity of agencies to respond.
- We need to be able to link people to existing supports/services/resources with minimal cost.

### Opportunity:

- Libraries as a meeting place/community space for gathering and accessing information/community hub for services.
- More local community based planning, social infrastructure – includes more than services such as other informal supports/programs/opportunities that are available in the community.

- Build on the success stories. There have been good models of collaborative work among social service agencies focused on the common good rather than individual agendas.
- Establish a Social Innovation Centre.
- Explore other jurisdictions that have models that can be adopted and/or adapted.

## **EDUCATION**

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- Mental health challenges for youth and families within communities and evident/impacting the school system.
- There are limited learning opportunities for young people in their community e.g. internships, and informal learning that will help them discover what they are passionate about.

### **Opportunity:**

- Schools as a focal point for support, point of contact with families.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

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- There are residents who for a variety of reasons (mental health, disabilities, and socioeconomic issues) who are unable to take transit.
- Transportation/access is a significant issue. Complex in a region of such vast geography.
- We need to have communities/neighbourhoods that are walkable.

### **Opportunity:**

- Expansion of model of community based response (volunteer drivers).
- Build a pedestrian culture.

## **GROWTH AND CHANGE**

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- There is limited public/community space for gathering –there is a need for more affordable meeting spaces for community organizations/citizen groups.
- A shift in culture has resulted in less institutional land available to support building of faith communities which have historically been points of connection/engagement.
- With youth leaving the community, adults are left to age alone without family support close by.
- There is a need for more opportunities for community gatherings, outreach and invitations to newcomers.

- Social isolation – particularly among seniors (widows, widowers)/individuals living on low income, who appear to be doing well from the outside, but are struggling.
- Additional efforts needed in relation to civic engagement by government. Do we really understand what is stopping people from volunteering/engaging/participating?
- People are not always aware of the great opportunities/activities that exist within Newmarket that they can participate in – particularly newcomers.
- We need to hear the voices of youth and seniors.

### **Opportunity:**

- Important to continue to build gathering places, engaging the schools – particularly away from the down town core in other neighbourhoods.
- Ensure public spaces are embedded within new commercial development.
- More neighbour to neighbour support. Community events at the neighbourhood level.
- Tax incentive for individuals to become a community ambassadors.
- Use food as a connector.
- The volunteers in the community are a huge strength. Need to outreach to newcomer/diverse communities in new and creative ways.

## **CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION**

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- There is a need for an inventory of everything that is happening – not siloed by jurisdiction (e.g. social services, recreation etc. culture, informal supports etc.) – a collective effort to bring the community together. Everything hinges on a community that cares.
- Technology prevents people from participating.

### **Opportunity:**

- Get technology to work for us.
- Town of Newmarket cultural mapping process will create an inventory of all meeting and gathering places.
- Editorial coverage by local media – invitations to the public are important.