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**Date** Tuesday, October 6, 2020 **Report No.** 2020-383  
**To** Chair and Members  
Committee of the Whole – Operations and Administration  
**From** Brian Hutchings  
Chief Administrative Officer

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### 1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item   
Item For Consideration

### 2.0 Topic **Healthy Aging: City of Brantford Age-Friendly Plan – Annual Report [Financial Impact: NONE]**

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### 3.0 Recommendation

A. THAT Report 2020-383 Healthy Aging: City of Brantford Age-Friendly Plan – Annual Report BE RECEIVED.

### 4.0 Purpose and Overview

This report provides an update to Council regarding the progress of *Healthy Aging: The City of Brantford Age-Friendly Plan*.

### 5.0 Background

In 2016, staff completed the City of Brantford's Age-Friendly Needs Assessment, an internal audit of age-friendly policies, programs, and services (PHSS2016-103). Staff further supported an extensive community consultation process, facilitated by the Grand River Council on Aging, which engaged over 700 older adults, caregivers, and service agencies in identifying priorities for an Age-Friendly City.

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This internal assessment and community feedback highlighted the need for a comprehensive municipal Age-Friendly Plan, and in March 2018, Council approved Healthy Aging: The City of Brantford Age-Friendly Plan which outlined tangible recommendations for the City of Brantford to maintain and enhance the quality of life for its aging population (HHS2018-011).

The Plan is based on best practices as outlined by the World Health Organization and categorizes municipal recommendations into eight domains:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social participation
5. Respect and social inclusion
6. Civic participation and employment
7. Communication and information
8. Community and health services

The three-year plan contains specific recommendations, actions, and indicators that will be used to track progress between 2018 and 2021. Council further approved \$100,000 in casino funds annually over three years to cover one-time costs and pilot projects that support the goals of the Plan (HHS2018-011). The Healthy Aging Plan is also designed to support and complement the Brantford Accessibility Plan.

In September 2019, Council approved the Healthy Aging Year One Update Report which highlighted the milestones and successes for the first year of the Plan (Report No. 2019-517). Additionally, in January 2020, staff provided a report to Council regarding funding that was received from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, and Council amended the recommendation to include the following staff direction: (Report No. 2020-16)

- A. That Report 2020-16 Funding Received from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT Staff BE DIRECTED to;

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- i. Provide continued support and commitment to age-friendly community planning;
  - ii. Engage the Grand River Council on Aging to share the “voice of seniors” when developing projects and programs;
  - iii. Include the Grand River Council on Aging in an age-friendly implementation plan; and
  - iv. Confer with the Grand River Council on Aging regarding resources available in other municipalities.

## **5.1 City of Brantford Recognized for Age-Friendly Planning**

The City of Brantford continues to be recognized as a leader in age-friendly planning since being officially welcomed into the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in 2017. In March 2018, the Ministry of Seniors Affairs recognized the City of Brantford with the Ontario Age-Friendly Community Recognition Award. Other associations, including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and the International Federation on Aging, have cited Brantford as an example of progressive age-friendly planning.

Most recently, OMSSA recognized the City of Brantford for their innovative approaches to support seniors’ mental health and well-being and invited the City to participate in their 2020 Mental Health Forum. The City will be sharing programs developed to support seniors, reduce social isolation and minimize the mental health effects of physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, including partnerships with emergency food providers, the redeployment of parks and recreation staff to support senior residents in affordable housing sites, and the launch of virtual programs such as, Healthy Aging without Walls and Buzz Me.

## **6.0 Corporate Policy Context**

### **High Quality of Life & Caring for All Citizens**

Brantford will be recognized as a safe and healthy community – one that promotes and enables the well-being of its citizens, and supports access for all citizens to a full range of health and community services.

## **7.0 Input From Other Sources**

Grand River Council on Aging

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City of Brantford, Health and Human Services

City of Brantford, Public Works

City of Brantford, Community Development

City of Brantford, Communications and Community Engagement

City of Brantford, Economic Development & Tourism

City of Brantford, Corporate Services

## 8.0 Analysis

Since 2006, the population of seniors has increased 27% in Brantford, with a current population of 16,760 older adults. By 2041, it is projected that at least one quarter of Brantford residents will be seniors. While the impact of age-friendly planning on the health and wellness of older adults is significant, attracting and retaining older adults as a “community-of-choice” can also be a catalyst for economic growth through social and cultural contributions. As seniors often have greater assets, less debt, and more discretionary time than the average population, they are able to contribute to the local economy, volunteer, and support their extended family with childcare and household support.<sup>1 2</sup> Age-friendly communities, which include accessible transportation, inclusive programming, and well-coordinated health services, create both social and economic benefits, fostering opportunities for older adults to actively participate in their community.

### 8.1 Year Two: Highlights

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Canada (2014). Action for Seniors Report. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/seniors-action-report.html>

<sup>2</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2018). Housing a Senior Population: The Economic and Social Benefits. <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/developing-and-renovating/accessible-adaptable-housing/aging-in-place/economic-social-benefits-of-seniors-your-community>

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As outlined in Appendix A: Age-Friendly Plan: Year Two Status Report, the City continues to make progress within each of the Healthy Aging domains. This progress includes new capital projects designed to be fully accessible, including 110 Airport Road, Mount Hope Cemetery, and 324 Grand River Avenue. Enhancements also include the purchase of new low-floor busses to aid passengers with walkers, canes and other assistive devices, as well as, 9.1 km of added sidewalks and additional tactile plates to allow for greater accessibility of public spaces, and 2.6 km of paved paths to allow for easier access to parks and recreational spaces.

Review of corporate processes continue to enhance age-friendly planning, including updates to the City's Accessibility Plan to address actions to continue building a fully accessible City, and commitment to increase training for staff through the addition of new content to the AODA and Customer Services module to include Age-Friendly Customer Service.

The City of Brantford's communication department has played a vital role in increasing access to public information with improvements to the City's website, increasing the number of hits by 65% since 2017. The City continues to receive positive feedback from residents who are able to better navigate the website for information.

Affordable housing is a priority of the Healthy Aging Plan, and was also recognized as a top priority by City Council for 2018-2020 (Report No. 2019-384). Additionally, Mayor Davis and Mayor Bailey developed the Mayors' Housing Partnerships Task Force to focus on housing options across the spectrum. Affordable housing options for seniors is an ongoing priority, as seniors represent 31% of the housing waitlist (519 seniors as of June 2020). Council recently approved an increase of up to 50 units at 170 Trillium Way in Paris and 70 units at 346 Shellard Lane, to maximize affordable units as quickly as possible (Report No. 2020-326). Providing various programs and supports for tenants living in affordable housing sites is also a priority to increase social connections and access to supports and services; for example, the paramedicine program provides health supports to 82 residents, diverting 100 monthly emergency room visits.

The City has also worked to support employment opportunities and provide additional training for older adults. The Business Resource Centre introduced a Business Basics workshop that helps to meet the specific needs of older adults looking to start or grow their business, and staff

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further developed community workshops to enhance seniors' digital skills to participate in the online community, reaching over 150 senior residents. Enhancing seniors' skills is also highlighted as a priority of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force under action item 5.b: staff will continue to prioritize and meet the needs of low-income and senior residents by providing opportunities and the training needed to participate through online mediums.

The City has also explored ways to support seniors' financial management and has coordinated with financial non-profits including, Credit Canada Debts Solution Inc. and the Community Legal Clinic of Brant, to offer workshops that provide seniors with the opportunity to learn more about options for financial planning, managing debt, and navigating wills and power of attorney.

The Healthy Aging Plan also focuses efforts to promote seniors health and wellness, and reduce the impact and incidence of social isolation within the community. Through strong community partnerships, programs such as: Seniors for Seniors, Let's Get Moving, Holistic Health Series, and Seniors Information and Technology Fairs, have had over 1,282 participants, and provided seniors the opportunity to connect with peers, volunteer, develop their skills, engage in physical activity, and learn valuable health and safety information. Additionally, over 5,000 copies of the newly revised 2020 Seniors Toolkit will be distributed across the community ensuring seniors can access information about important resources and services.

## **8.2 Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Provincial state of emergency declared on March 17, 2020 impacted the Brantford community, especially marginalized and vulnerable residents. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health strongly urged those over the age of 70 to stay home. This presented a challenge to many seniors, especially those who rely on support from family, friends, and healthcare professionals. Older adults with limited access to technology were also unable to benefit from connecting with loved ones virtually, or easily accessing food delivery services or important community resources and health information online. Though social isolation can be experienced at any age, seniors experience an increased risk of social isolation, and research indicates that social isolation is associated with increased risk of mortality, equal to

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that of other health related issues<sup>3</sup>. The City's commitment and investment in age-friendly planning positioned the City to provide immediate support and resources to vulnerable seniors within the community.

A staff team was established to connect with seniors at the affordable housing sites and over 1,500 calls were made to senior tenants. The calls provided an opportunity to check-in with tenants, identify any immediate needs, and connect them with community resources, mental health supports, and opportunities for social connection. Staff also coordinated with the Brantford Food Bank to ensure that senior tenants who were unable to access delivery grocery services or meal programs would have access to food baskets. Re-deployed recreation staff were stationed at the affordable housing sites to provide preventative screening, and resources packages were delivered to each tenant containing reusable masks, information about COVID-19 and available supports and services.

The City also worked in collaboration with community partners to support vulnerable seniors throughout the community. Family Counselling Centre of Brant offered free mental health counselling to adults over 50. Seniors and Kids Intergenerational Programs (SKIP) with the support from Wilfrid Laurier students, launched "Buzz Me" for seniors to connect with volunteers by phone, engage in friendly conversations, and learn about local resources. Additionally, City recreation staff launched Healthy Aging Without Walls, a free telephone-based program for adults 50+ to participate in various activities, which has had over 650 participants.

The City further developed the Neighbours Helping Neighbours campaign to ensure residents could find information about accessing food, mental health support, and virtual services, as well as learn how to connect with community volunteers and neighbourhood resources. City Council also approved \$20,000 from the Council Priorities fund to purchase reusable

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<sup>3</sup> Gilmour, H., & Ramage-Morin, P. L. (2020). Social isolation and mortality among Canadian seniors. *Health Reports*, 31(3), 27-38.

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masks to residents in need, which were distributed through neighbourhood associations and community agencies (Report No.2020-325).

### **8.3 Building Community Capacity**

The City continues to benefit from ongoing consultation with the Grand River Council on Aging, and strong partnerships with various community agencies, organizations, and businesses that are committed to improving the health and well-being of residents and promoting age-friendly initiatives. The City has been fortunate to work with various partners, including:

- Adult Recreation Therapy Centre
- Alzheimer Society
- Bicycle shop
- Brant County Health Unit
- Brant Elder Abuse Awareness Committee
- Brantford Audiology Clinic
- Brantford Fire Department
- Brantford Public Library
- Canadian Hearing Society
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Community Legal Clinic of Brant
- Grand River Community Health Centre
- Grand River Council on Aging
- Local Health Integration Network
- Modo Yoga and Brant Skills Centre
- Seniors and Kids Intergenerational Programs



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- Solutions for Living
  - Wilfrid Laurier University
  - YMCA Settlement Services

Staff is also committed to working with community partners to explore grants and other funding opportunities to build and sustain community programs. Since 2018, Brantford has been recognized for its commitment to age-friendly initiatives that support the well-being of seniors, and a total of \$106,000 has been awarded to the City and community agencies to support seniors' health and safety, and increase social participation and inclusion.

In 2018, Victim Services of Brant, in partnership with the Brant Elder Abuse Awareness Committee, received \$69,000 from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services to develop community response protocols to address elder abuse, increase training opportunities, and educate older adults on their rights, and how they can prevent and intervene in abuse situations. To date over 200 community workshops and training sessions have been conducted with over 1000 senior participants and a community response protocol has been developed and distributed to community partners, and added to the Seniors Toolkit.

In 2019, the City received \$25,000 from the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility for the Seniors for Seniors project. In partnership with the Grand River Council on Aging and Brant County Health Unit, the City launched the volunteer led program that successfully trained 30 community volunteers and hosted over 60 programs and workshops in private and public spaces across the community.

Most recently, the City in partnership with Seniors and Kids Intergenerational Programs (SKIP) was recognized by the Federal New Horizons for Seniors program for their COVID-19 pandemic response; the City received \$10,000 and SKIP was granted an additional \$2,000, to expand the Buzz Me program to reach more isolated seniors across the community.

Staff will continue to develop community partnerships and explore funding opportunities to support age-friendly planning and initiatives.

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## 9.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications related to this report.

## 10.0 Conclusion

Healthy Aging: The City of Brantford's Age-Friendly Plan represents the City's commitment to creating and maintaining an age-friendly community. This report outlines milestones accomplished to date and recognizes strong community partnerships that enhance age-friendly planning and programs. Staff will continue to address the goals of the Healthy Aging Plan, and update Council on progress.



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Aaron Wallace  
Director of Corporate Initiatives &  
Community Strategies



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Brian Hutchings  
Chief Administrative Officer  
City of Brantford

Attachment: Appendix A: Age-Friendly Plan: Year Two Status Report

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required  yes  no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk  yes  no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council?  yes  no