Love My Hood: An examination of community engagement techniques in the City of Kitchener, Ontario

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Abstract

Community engagement in municipal decision-making can help strengthen trust and confidence in the government. A more nuanced understanding of how modern Canadian municipalities can engage residents in decision-making processes is needed. Thus, this case study investigates how community engagement is a strategy to achieve municipal policy objectives in a mid-sized Canadian city. The findings of a discourse analysis of municipal documents suggest the City of Kitchener utilizes their *Love My Hood* initiative as a means of cultivating a culture of engagement with residents, creating a nuanced city and community relationship. Moreover, the findings help reflect on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, moving to a multifaceted approach to engagement, including the timing and type of engagement included in the decision-making process. Cities must be transparent about the role of residents within the planning process and under what strategy the City wants to involve residents.

Keywords: Love My Hood; municipal policy; policy objectives; discourse analysis

Résumé

Une compréhension plus nuance de comment les municipalités canadiennes modernes peuvent impliquer les résidents dans les processus de prise de décision est nécessaire, car la participation de la communauté a la prise des décisions peux aider à renforcer la confiance au gouvernement. Ainsi, cette recherche examine comment l'engagement communautaire est utilisé comme une stratégie pour atteindre les objectifs politique municipale dans une ville canadienne de taille moyenne. Les résultats d'une analyse du discours des documents municipaux suggèrent que la ville de Kitchener utilise son initiative Love My Hood comme moyen de cultiver une culture d'engagement avec les résidents, créant une relation communautaire nuancée. De plus, les résultats aident à réfléchir sur l'échelle de participation citoyenne d'Arnstein, en passant à une approche à multi-facettes d'engagement qui comprend le moment et le type d'engagement à inclure dans le processus de prise de décision. Les villes doivent être transparentes quant au rôle que les habitants jouent dans le processus de planification et dans laquelle stratégie ils engagent les résidents.

Mots-clés : Love My Hood, politique municipale, objectifs politiques, analyse du discours

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Introduction

Community engagement has become a key component of municipal planning departments. Community participation helps to strengthen support and garner funding for municipal projects (Ketter et al. 2002; McGee 2009). Community engagement is characterized by opportunities created by a municipality for its citizens to participate in the decision-making processes (Aboleta, Ersoylu, and Cohen 2011). In a municipal context, engaging strategically with citizens on a community level is integral to implementing municipal goals as community buy-in eases municipal projects' implementation (Andrews et al. 2008; Beckie, Hanson, and Schrader 2013). As such, community engagement plans have implications for planning practice (McGee 2009).

However, in Canadian cities, Traynor and Andors (2005) argue that there is currently a failure to meet the communities' needs, leaving individuals feeling isolated from the government. This failure has prompted lower trust and confidence in the government (Traynor and Andors 2005). Opportunities for individuals to participate in the decisions made within their community (i.e., community engagement) can strengthen community relationships and help build social capital (Aboleta, Ersoylu, and Cohen 2011; Mayers 2020; Mayers 2021a). Thus, community engagement in city planning can be a strategy to help rebuild and strengthen trust and confidence in the government. Throughout this paper, we refer to the City as both the City of Kitchener's institution, including its governance structures such as elected officials and public servants.

Despite the overwhelming evidence to support community participation in city planning, community members seldom hold a prominent role in developing planning strategy and decision-making processes. At the same time, authority and power continue to be in city planning professionals' hands (McGee 2009). Although municipal officials hold the final decision-making power, research suggests that greater community participation and collaboration in decision-making processes amplify community engagement benefits outlined above (e.g., Trainor and Andors 2005; McGee 2009). There are, however, some recent examples of efforts taken by municipalities in Canada to adopt a more community-centred approach to decision making. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how community engagement is used as a strategy to achieve municipal policy objectives by a mid-sized city in southern Ontario. A case study of the City of Kitchener's use of community engagement is employed, with a particular focus given to the *Love My Hood* initiative, a strategy employed to foster resident-led community projects. Through the lens of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, a discourse analysis of key documents to investigate the City of Kitchener's community engagement strategies is employed to address the following research questions: (1) How does the City situate the *Love My Hood* initiative in their planning policy? (2) What are the goals of the engagement strategy of the *Love My Hood* initiative for the City and residents? (3) How does municipal policy align with community engagement strategies enacted?

The following sections will explore the nuanced aspects of community engagement before describing the present study's specific context. The paper will then present the study's methodology with particular methods employed to address the research purpose. The study findings and discussion will then be presented, followed by concluding thoughts.

Community engagement

Community engagement has multiple definitions and is often referred to interchangeably with 'civic engagement', 'citizen participation', 'community participation', and 'citizen involvement', amongst other names (Sutcliffe 2008; Vaidyanathan and Wismer 2005; Walsh, Shier, and Graham 2010). Arnstein (1969) presents one of the first papers on the topic of citizen participation and defined citizen participation as:

> Citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out (p. 216).
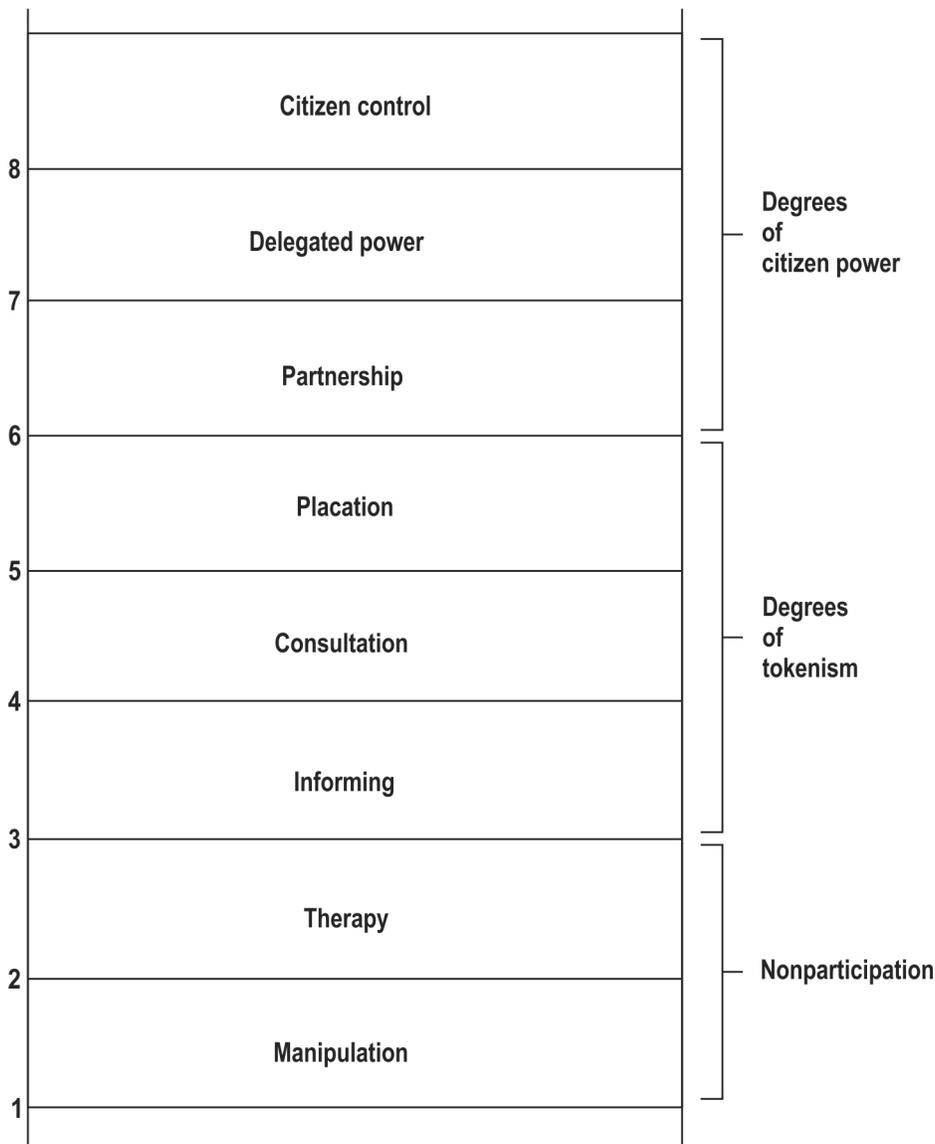
Figure 1

Eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein 1969, 217)

As seen in Figure 1, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation describes the lowest level of engagement with the community under "nonparticipation." Simply, citizens are not engaged with the municipality in a meaningful way. The nonparticipation levels include manipulation, where small groups of marginalized citizens are told that they are advising the municipality. Yet, the municipality either does not listen to the group or manipulates the group's activities to suit pre-determined outcomes; and therapy, where citizens are given an ingenuine platform for communicating concerns to distract from the lack of action on the municipality's behalf (Arnstein 1969). The mid-range of engagement encompasses "degrees of tokenism", including informing, one-way communication to citizens from the municipality, consultation, which is one-way communication to the municipality from citizens. Also in the mid-range is placation, two-way communication between the citizens and the municipality, although tokenism is often still at play (Arnstein 1969). The highest level of engagement is "degrees of citizen power", which includes: partnership, where planning and decision making power is shared between the municipality and citizens; delegated power, where the municipality allows citizens to hold more power for a particular decision; and citizen control, where citizens hold power to intervene in municipal decision making (Arnstein 1969). Others employ Arnstein's ladder to explore the role citizen participation has in the success of plans, such as Lait (2016), who found some engagement
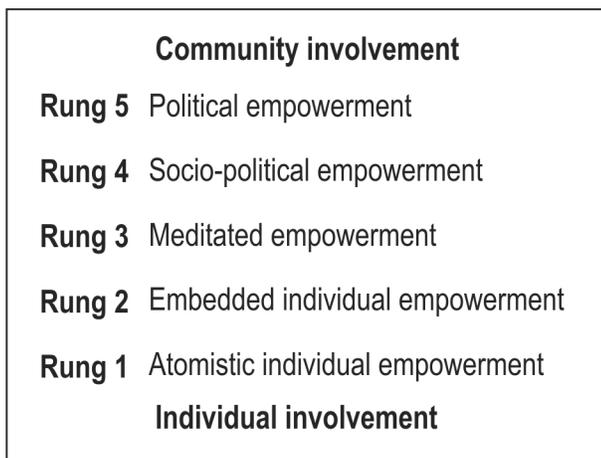
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Community involvement                 │
│                                                  │
│   Rung 5   Political empowerment                 │
│                                                  │
│   Rung 4   Socio-political empowerment           │
│                                                  │
│   Rung 3   Meditated empowerment                 │
│                                                  │
│   Rung 2   Embedded individual empowerment       │
│                                                  │
│   Rung 1   Atomistic individual empowerment      │
│            Individual involvement                │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 2
Ladder of empowerment (Rocha 1997)

techniques to be tokenistic and not genuine attempts to engage citizens or relinquish any control from the City to citizens.

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation has been highly influential in planning; to theorize on community engagement, and as a tool for planners to engage. For example, the ladder of citizen participation is widely used today in the form of a practitioner tool entitled "IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation" (see Appendix IaP2 2018). Arnstein's ladder continued to be well theorized and discussed as a model to critique issues and engagement methods. The ladder has incited other scholars such as Rocha (1997) to create a ladder of empowerment, as seen in Figure 2. Under this ladder of empowerment, the bottom rung of involvement is atomistic individual empowerment, and the top rung is political empowerment, which is the aim of community engagement (1997). Therefore, we analyzed our paper using the original Arnstein's ladder and incorporated the critiques of others. For the present study, we prefer to use community engagement rather than citizen engagement because we recognize that individuals in the community may not be citizens. Thus, it is crucial to include permanent residents and other immigrant populations when considering the definition of community.

Purpose of community engagement. According to Ketter et al. (2002), the goals of community engagement are to address an issue within the community directly (e.g., the need for additional traffic signage), to collaborate on solving a problem within the community (e.g., how to increase recycling participation), or to foster a representative democracy (e.g., a town hall meeting). Often community engagement is intended to address an issue or concern and to collaborate in the form of learning and capacity building in the hope of creating a better future (Ketter 2002). Although there are a plethora of benefits to community engagement, the process is not without shortcomings. First, participation in engagement activities is often made up of the most vocal individuals in the community, who have the time and resources to advocate on their behalf, often ignoring power, politics, and justice (Barnes, Newman, and Sullivan 2007). Second, Innes and Booher (2004) suggest that community participation can be counterproductive, often co-opted by civil society organizations who work to maintain their own agenda and pit citizens against each other. Third, specific segments of the population such as new immigrants with language barriers, those who are socio-economically challenged, young parents, and those who work outside typical business hours are often not able to participate in the activities supposedly benefitting their community (Innes and Booher, 2004; Khazaei, Jope, and Elliot, 2019; Quick and Feldman, 2011). Lastly, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) representation in City government is lacking (Mayers 2021b). Specifically in the City of Kitchener, BIPOC representation is lacking. Eighty-nine percent of Kitchener City employees are white, and those who have historically experienced colonization, such as Indigenous populations, others who have been taken advantage of, ignored, typically have mistrust in government, are not willing participants in the typical community engagement efforts (Brock, Reed, and Stewart 2021; Nielsen 2020). These discrepancies in participation are omnipresent in more controversial developments such as locally unwanted land uses (LULUs), projects that aim to intensify areas with high rises or mega projects in

low-density areas, often influenced by NIMBYs (Not-In-My-Backyard) or YIMBYs (Yes-In-My-Backyard) (Brown and Glanz 2018; Schively 2007).

Benefits of community engagement. Despite literature on community engagement shortcomings, it is still one of the best tools for planning departments for re-allocating resources and re-distributing responsibility to the community (Gurstein, Lovato, and Ross 2003). Some of the benefits of community engagement are trust, participation in social networks, and cooperation, ultimately leading to greater social capital within the community (Putnam 2000). Kagan (2005) suggests community engagement can be an empowerment tool for communities. Moreover, municipal governments have found value in community engagement. It offers a more robust understanding of community needs, improved accountability, better problem solving, and broader democratic participation (McGee 2009), all of which can serve the community members better.

Community engagement as city strategy. Many municipal governments are now planning community engagement initiatives, as they know engagement can be an effective tool for ongoing public support for local projects (Andrews et al. 2008; Beckie, Hanson, and Schrader 2013). Furthermore, community engagement strategies are often a way for the community to be involved in the planning process, aligning with the municipality's objectives (Wates 2014). Municipalities use various community engagement strategies to facilitate and foster participation within the community. Some of these strategies include GIS maps intended for design charrettes where the community is invited to talk about upcoming projects (Girling 2006), participation through engagement on Twitter (Evans-Cowley and Griffin 2012), and other "do-it-yourself" democracy whereby cities engage in public dialogue (Lee 2014). Despite the proponents of community engagement advocacy, there has been some critique of specific engagement strategies. Although engagement sessions and community input are often seen in municipal decision-making, municipal officials tend to make final decisions that may ignore the community's needs (Corbett and Le Dantec 2018; McGee 2009).

One example of how a municipality has effectively engaged community members is the City of Kitchener, Ontario, and the *Love My Hood* initiative (Kropf and Cronkite 2018). The City gave funding to a community that wanted to traffic calm their street through painted crosswalks, murals, and other temporary measures. They found that the *Love My Hood* initiative was a valuable method to engage with their community and make tangible changes to their street's speed (Kropf and Cronkite 2018). Building on the findings of Kropf and Cronkite (2018), the present investigation takes a broader perspective of the City of Kitchener's use of community engagement to achieve more general municipal objectives.

Study context

The Region of Waterloo is a mid-sized community located in southwestern Ontario. The Region comprises three cities (i.e., Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo) and four townships (i.e., North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, Woolwich). The townships are primarily rural farmland, and the cities are suburban and urban areas (*About Waterloo Region* 2020). The City of Kitchener is the largest municipality in the Waterloo Region (*About Waterloo Region* 2020) and is home to many of the Region's social services (e.g., *Housing and Shelter* 2018; *Where to Get Help* 2020). In recent years, the City of Kitchener has been pushing a revitalization agenda, particularly for the downtown core (home to many of the Region's social services), in hopes of improving the perceived quality of life for current residents and attracting new residents who come to the Region for the technology-scene (Mayers and Glover 2020). In doing so, the City of Kitchener has developed several strategies to reach its overall goals.

Love My Hood

One strategy developed by the City of Kitchener to achieve its broader policy objectives of City revitalization is the *Love my Hood* project. The project is self-described as "both a strategy for the City of Kitchener and a movement led by residents" (*About Love My Hood* 2018). The *Love My Hood* strategy was developed in 2017 through community consultation and collaboration. The strategy provides public funding to private residents to plan and implement events and initiatives in their neighbourhoods (*About Love My Hood* 2018). The *Love My Hood* strategy is promoted as a way for City of Kitchener residents to "choose the projects that matter most to them and decide how to shape

the future of their neighbourhood" (*About Love My Hood* 2018). However, there is a finite list of initiatives to which residents can apply for funding per year.

Methodology

The present study addresses the research purpose through a discourse analysis (Foucault 2002) of the community engagement strategies used by the City of Kitchener to achieve municipal policy objectives. Specifically, a qualitative single-case case study methodology is employed. As case study research is used to investigate a phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin 2014), it is an appropriate methodology to be used in the present investigation. Specifically, a single-case case study will be employed. The case under investigation is the City of Kitchener's use of community engagement to achieve overall City goals, focusing on the *Love My Hood* community development strategy.

Methods

Documents from various sources were collected for analysis, as outlined by Yin (2014), including policy documents and reports from the City of Kitchener website; web pages from the *Love My Hood* website; and pages from Engage Kitchener, an online forum for Kitchener residents to offer feedback, opinions, and ideas about the City. The specific pages collected from these sources are depicted in Appendix A. The processes of how extracted documents were identified are described below. The documents that yielded the most codes for data analysis include Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy (municipal document); 2018 Community Engagement Policy (municipal document); 2018 Community Engagement Review (municipal document); Corporate Accountability and Transparency Policy (municipal document); and, various webpages from the *Love My Hood* program website.

The policy documents were collected from the City of Kitchener website in July of 2020 to provide contextual information about how the City of Kitchener approaches community engagement and associated policies and procedures. The data extraction process began with a general search of the city website for documents such as the strategic plan and financial plans. Following this search, the website search tool was used to identify items related to "community" and "community engagement". Any documents or policies that were rendered during that search were screened for relevance to the study (i.e., documents and policies that address community engagement). The process of data analysis is described below. In total, 501 pages of data were extracted across 13 documents and policies.

The web pages were collected from the *Love My Hood* website in June of 2020 to identify the specific processes of the *Love My Hood* program in community engagement. Data collection started with the home page. The pages that were one click from the home page (e.g., navigation panes, clickable images, hyperlinks) were then collected. This process was repeated per web page until all pages within three clicks from the home page were collected. A total of 55 unique web pages from the *Love My Hood* website appear within three clicks from the home page. These 55 pages were screened for relevance. The pages that were deemed relevant (i.e., address community engagement) were extracted for data analysis. The process of data analysis is described below. A total of 42 web pages were extracted from the *Love My Hood* website for analysis.

The pages collected from Engage Kitchener were collected in July of 2020 to provide additional contextual information on how residents of the City of Kitchener participate in community engagement. The home page of Engage Kitchener features the different initiatives where the City of Kitchener is currently seeking and has sought community input. The top of the home page features the initiatives presently open for community input, followed by the initiatives open for input but are now closed. Lastly, the initiatives that were open for input and are now complete. The City can also post surveys for community members to complete. Community opinions are only visible for initiatives that are currently open for community input. As of July 2020, the following initiatives were open for community input and have publicly visible community comments: Exploring Inclusionary Zoning to Support Affordable Housing; Affordable Housing Strategy; Kitchener.ca website transformation; Separated Bike Lane Pilot; and, A pedestrian-first Gaukel Street. The community forum pages for these five initiatives were screened for relevance. The pages that were deemed relevant (i.e., address community engagement) were extracted for data analysis. The process of data analysis is described below. All five pages were extracted for analysis.

Analysis

A discourse analysis of the collected documents was conducted, informed by the study's lens of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. The language and images found in the documents collected for analysis convey discourse around the City of Kitchener's policy objectives and are revealing in the way they frame meaning for the reader (Foucault 2002). To facilitate a discourse analysis, open and axial coding was employed (Strauss 1987). Open coding is the initial interpretation of data for preliminary themes, while axial coding draws connections between those identified themes (Strauss 1987). One researcher read and re-read the documents and identified initial discursive themes (open coding). Initial notes and codes derived from open coding were made directly within each PDF document as annotations. The codes were then transferred to an Excel sheet to organize the codes along with corresponding text excerpts. The research team then discussed the initial codes and reviewed the data to refine and search for relationships between the codes (axial coding). Initial notes were taken corresponding to 184 relevant text excerpts. From these notes, 35 codes were developed, which were eventually distilled into three main themes. The coding was an iterative process whereby the researchers continuously consulted one another and the guiding framework to determine the three main themes presented below.

Findings and discussion

Data analysis resulted in three main themes, including (1) cultivating a culture of engagement within the City; (2) a nuanced City/community relationship; and (3) a multifaceted approach to engagement. These findings are relevant for those who research community engagement and those who work to actively seek community engagement in the City planning process. As explored below, rather than the present sequential conceptualizations of community engagement in municipal decision making, an approach that is multifaceted and context-specific is present in the City of Kitchener context.

Cultivating a culture of engagement within the City

The data analysis shows that the City of Kitchener works hard to build an embedded culture of engagement amongst City officials, staff, and the public. Moreover, this goal has been in progress over many years (i.e., since 2005; as discussed below). This theme of *Cultivating a culture of engagement within the City* is primarily demonstrated in the alignment of engagement-related initiatives across city documents and policies. Engagement is embedded in most City documents and policies, regardless of whether they addressed *Love My Hood* specifically or City initiatives in general. For example, the *Kitchener Strategic Plan* 2019–2022 states that one of the City's goals is to "increase people's satisfaction, trust, and engagement with the city by providing friendly, easy, and convenient services." Further, the 2018 *Community Engagement Policy* clearly outlines that "Community engagement plans are required for all major projects and initiatives that will consult, collaborate and/or entrust the community." These quotes indicate the alignment of themes across policies and documents, showing that engagement is valued not only with the *Love My Hood* program but also in the City.

It is also evident across documents that City staff are expected to work towards engagement as much as possible in most instances and further focus on the organizational aspects of engagement within the City operations and staff roles. The City's *corporate accountability and transparency policy* states:

> The City has adopted a commitment to effectively involving the community in public decision-making processes. A community engagement framework has been established, and training is provided for city staff to provide direction and guidance on developing and implementing community engagement processes.

The organizational focus on engagement could be seen as a worthwhile strategy to embed a culture of community engagement within and across City operations. However, the organizational focus and bureaucratic requirements for engagement outlined in some documents and policies could also deter City officials and staff from beneficially engaging the community. For example, the City's Community Engagement Review clearly states that the City is bound by certain legislative requirements and may exceed minimum requirements in appropriate circumstances (p. 14). Further, in some cases, staff members may be required to develop a communications plan or a "detailed Commu-

nity Engagement Plan" (p. 14) depending upon the engagement strategy to be deployed. In this way, staff members may be tasked with additional responsibilities prior to engagement, and therefore organizational barriers may exist to reach out to the community. Indeed, when power is left with the City to decide when, how, and who to engage, the community members themselves may miss out on the opportunity to actively engage in decisions (Tritter and McCallum 2006). The power relationship between the City and community members will be further discussed in subsequent themes.

Moreover, the timeline of working towards community engagement before *Love My Hood* becoming a policy initiative indicates that the City has been working toward a more resident-focused strategy for some time. The need to further engage residents in the planning process was identified in 2005, with *Love My Hood* formally starting in 2017 and the *Community Engagement Policy* being finalized in 2018. This timeline demonstrates a clear focus on engagement over several years, which results in multiple engagement events across initiatives, policies, and documents to varying degrees, particularly in the *Love My Hood* initiative. The document *Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy: How did we make it?* outlines the timeline of the initiative, suggesting that a strategy for community engagement is one of the City's top priorities. As such, the neighbourhood strategy states, "Previous and existing City strategies and plans dating back to 2005 identified the need to develop a Neighbourhood Strategy. The City's 2014–2016 Business Plan included developing a Neighbourhood Strategy as a corporate project to begin in 2014."

Scholars have suggested that community engagement and participation initially stemmed from the need to engage residents to improve trust and confidence in public administration (Rowe and Frewer 2004). The culture of engagement within the City of Kitchener may indeed reflect this need and certainly begins to address concerns in this regard. Although evaluating the engagement strategies' outcomes is outside the scope of the present study, the organizational focus on community engagement within the City of Kitchener is promising; it suggests a clear focus on community needs and participation. Such an organizational focus on engagement may indicate that community members may have a better chance of being involved and having their needs met than if the City did not have an embedded culture of community engagement (Price 2010/2011; Rowe and Frewer 2004). The complex relationship between the City and the community in the context of community engagement strategies and *Love My Hood* will be further explored in the following theme.

A nuanced city/community relationship

This theme refers to the relationship between service providers at the City level and community members. Although a culture of engagement is evident across documents and policies, regardless of their direct mention of the *Love My Hood* initiative, the data indicate that the power relationship between the City and the community is central to how engagement strategies are enacted. Throughout the data, the City's role in initiatives and engagement strategies varies from facilitator to gatekeeper, in other words, determining which community members speak and when, to the funder; thus, indicating a complex and nuanced relationship between the City and the community members. This facilitator-gatekeeper-funder relationship will be discussed later on. Underlying each role that the City seems to play in this relationship is the notion of power and its centrality in the relationship between the City and its residents.

Arnstein (1969) discusses power delegation, and the documents analyzed suggest that power within community engagement and city/community relationships is much more nuanced. As such, different City roles in the relationship manifest in other distributions of power between City officials and staff, and community members. Across the data, there seem to be limited accounts of true citizen control. Even when community members have ideas and power over certain initiatives, funding structures are set up to allow the City to maintain a certain amount of power. For example, the *Love My Hood* grant matching program requires residents to meet certain criteria or provide their time or in-kind donations to unlock funding opportunities. The following excerpt from the *City of Kitchener Business Plan* suggests that the City maintains power and control over how money is handed out and spent. "…to support resident-led initiatives in neighbourhoods by offering a Love My Hood Matching Grant and administer the circulation process for resident-led projects to selection committees and internal departments and divisions."

Furthermore, the City acts as a gatekeeper to engagement itself, in that elected officials and public servants decide when community members can engage and how they can engage. For example, policy documents delineate the City's role as appropriately managing engagement, potentially limiting how community members can engage in decision-making and consultation processes. For example, the city engagement policy states, "The City will comply with all minimum legislated requirements that dictate public involvement and exceed minimum requirements when

appropriate." Moreover, the City dictates how decisions can be made, setting the expectations of citizen engagement to be balanced and intended to achieve the expected outcome. The corporate accountability and transparency policy states:

> There must be a reasonable balance between expectations and capacities. Customer and citizen expectations may change from time to time, and all expectations must be balanced against the City's authority, available skills, and resources required to achieve the expected outcome.

While this is, technically, part of the City's job, as they are ultimately the individuals making decisions for budgeting and governing purposes, there remains space for the community to be more involved in decisions, particularly when public-facing documents indicate this to be already occurring.

Furthermore, community engagement boundaries seem to be communicated differently depending on the document/policy, which could cause frustration and confusion in the community if more control is expected than what truly occurs. For example, the excerpt above indicates that City staff will comply with minimum engagement requirements when possible, potentially limiting the reach and scope of engagement strategies to suit the City compared to the community members. However, the *Love My Hood* documents indicate a much more collaborative and community-focused environment. This environment is demonstrated in the following quote, where community engagement discourse in public-facing documents is much more inclusive and flexible: "Residents choose the projects that matter most to them and decide how to shape the future of their neighbourhood. After all, the best neighbourhoods are made by the people who live in them."

The varying discourse across the data set and the evidence of the City's myriad of roles in managing the City/community relationship indicate a nuanced environment in which the City of Kitchener enacts its community engagement initiatives and strategies. Power is central to this discussion, where the City seems to maintain the most decision-making power and control over finances. Nelson, Babon, Berry, and Keath (2008) suggest that this nuanced relationship with the City has resulted in "blurred roles and responsibilities…and a balance of power between the state and civil society" (p. 40). As a benefit of negotiating this nuanced relationship, Trueman et al. (2013) found that through a community-first perspective and giving power to residents, the residents felt more empowered to manage change within their community. In the following theme, we further unpack how Arnstein's (1969) conceptualization of community engagement can be broadened to incorporate some of the nuances discussed here.

A multifaceted approach to engagement: Beyond Arnstein's ladder

The data analyzed adequately met some rungs of Arnstein's (1969) ladder of community engagement while not entirely falling under the rung of citizen control. Interestingly, the community engagement processes outlined in the City of Kitchener documents analyzed indicate a broader conceptualization of community engagement than the ladder. The present research demonstrates how the timing and type of community engagement are integral to engagement initiatives' success. We analyzed a variety of City documents to determine the degree of engagement with the community.

The majority of documents indicate that the City is focused on "informing" and "consulting" the public at various times throughout *Love My Hood* implementation. The following excerpt from the *Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy: What did the community tell us?* document demonstrates this strategy, with a focus on informing the community and, in part, gathering some baseline consultation data.

> The purpose of the first community engagement campaign was to inform and consult with the community by creating awareness about the strategy with a travelling lemonade stand offering lemonade and cookies in exchange for completing a brief survey about neighbourhoods.

Another section of the document states: "The purpose of the neighbourhood party and community engagement process was to inform, consult and collaborate with the community to create Kitchener's first-ever *Neighbourhood Strategy*". The *City of Kitchener Community Engagement Policy* (2018) identifies four pillars of engagement, which are "inform", "consult", "collaborate", and "entrust". These align with parts of Arnstein's (1969) ladder, mainly informing, consultation, placation, partnership, and delegated power. Aside from a grant matching opportunity, however, the "entrust" pillar was not directly observable in the data collected in this study, suggesting that the City, through the

Love My Hood initiative, does not adequately address higher degrees of citizen power outlined in Arnstein's (1969) framework. Further, the engagement discourses varied between documents depending on the intended audience (i.e., public-facing documents compared to internal governance documents and policies), as discussed above. Therefore, power delegation and citizen control were not evident. These findings indicate that while Arnstein's (1969) ladder does, in part, inform the data collected in this study and the City of Kitchener community engagement strategy, the policies and documents analyzed indicate that other aspects of Arnstein's ladder are not present, and those nuances of engagement are not described by Arnstein's (1969) ladder. In this way, the findings of the present study support other work in the area which critiques Arnstein's (1969) ladder and offer additional areas of improvement such as the inclusion of; power in the engagement approach (Carpentier 2016), social learning in policymaking (Collins and Ison, 2006), and the power differentials relevant to user involvement (Tritter and McCallum 2006). For example, in the context of this study, the concept of timing and the use of a variety of different approaches (in-person, online surveys, etc.) to engage the public on one issue were evident yet are not considered in Arnstein's (1969) conceptualization. The importance of type and timing of the *Love My Hood* initiative and community engagement, in general, are indicated in the following quotes:

> The community engagement process that was undertaken to help guide the creation of the Neighbourhood Strategy can be divided into four phases: 1. Lemonade stand consultations (July to September 2015) 2. Stories, colouring books, and hot chocolate (December 2015 to March 2016) 3. Neighbourhood party and community engagement (April to August 2016) 4. Comments and prioritization of draft recommendations (October to November 2016) (Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy: What did the community tell us?).

During the initial meetings that shaped what *Love My Hood* is today, Kitchener residents, community partners, and staff identified seven outcomes that support safe and thriving neighbourhoods, including connectedness, diversity, inclusion, safety, accessibility, engagement, and resilience (State of Kitchener's Neighbourhoods Report 2017).

Diversity, access, and inclusion, for example, were mentioned throughout the analyzed documents and policies. However, there lacks alignment regarding these goals when considering tangible engagement opportunities for community members. The *Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy* document outlines that the "Neighbourhood Strategy will not…. Only engage people who are already engaged" (p. 6). Further, the "Promote your event" page on the *Love My Hood* website suggests that individuals hosting neighbourhood events should "think about different ages, demographics, cultural backgrounds or special interest groups." And that each group will "all have different ways of communicating". However, the *Love My Hood* website fails to offer strategies to engage diverse groups and lacks resources in languages other than English. The failure to translate these documents demonstrates a potential lack of engagement with Kitchener's sizeable immigrant population.

Further, the Love My Hood Matching Grant requires applicants to meet several criteria to be eligible for funding, likely limiting the individuals that are able to access such resources. When considering diversity and inclusion factors such as those from the data outlined above alongside Arnstein's ladder, a deeper discussion of privilege and level of engagement is warranted. The findings outlined here may suggest that level of engagement could be in part a function of privilege, whereby individuals who speak English and have sufficient leisure time. Those with access to resources such as childcare may have more opportunities to participate in meaningful engagement than individuals who lack resources, do not speak English, and may need to work multiple jobs. These findings are in line with the critiques of community engagement efforts, as discussed prior through the lens of Innes and Booher (2004), Khazaei, Jope, and Elliot (2019), and Quick and Feldman (2011).

The complexity of planning a multifaceted approach to community engagement (such as that described in the excerpts above) which suggested a focus on engaging as many people in as many different ways as possible, indicates that Arnstein's (1969) ladder is insufficient for explaining community engagement in this context of the City of Kitchener. Further, Arnstein's (1969) ladder fails to address how the timing of certain strategies may be more beneficial for engagement than the same strategy used at a different time point. For example, consultation may help engage a community during the planning phases of a project, while it may lose value and act more as "placating" in later phases (Tritter and McCallum 2006).

Further, the data indicate that timing plays an additional role in the City of Kitchener engagement strategies through feedback loops. Although not directly referred to as such, the City implemented processes to gather feed-
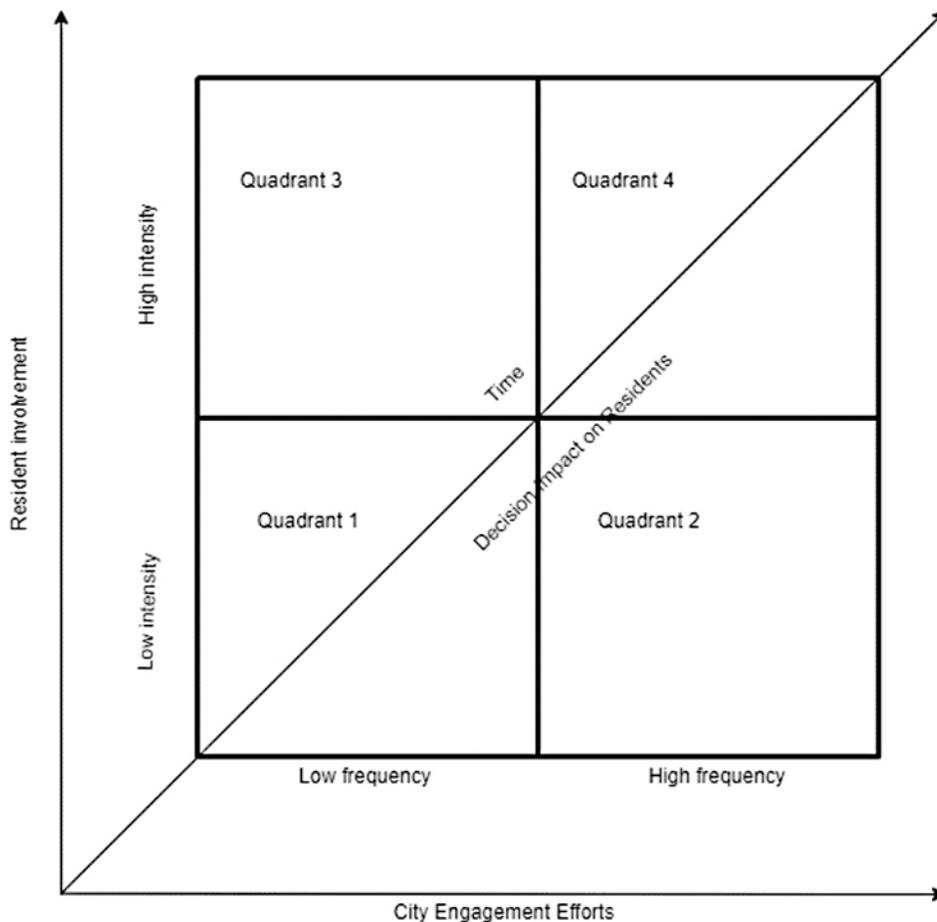
Figure 3:
Community Engagement Consultation Matrix

back from community members on the engagement activities themselves and the programs and projects for which feedback was collected. For example, one webpage had a dedicated section available for individuals to offer open-ended feedback on the *Love My Hood* program; "Did we miss something that you'd find helpful? Contact us, and we'll discuss how we can help" (*Tools and Money* webpage). Further, throughout developing the *Love My Hood* program, "the project team endorsed sharing the draft recommendations with the public to receive their comments and help prioritize implementation" (*Kitchener's Neighbourhood Strategy: How did we make it?*). This suggests that implementing engagement practices is an ongoing process and should be an iterative process between the City and the community. This aspect of engagement is not evident in Arnstein's (1969) ladder framework; however, it has been pointed out as an essential aspect of engagement approaches, mainly to ensure the sustainability of community engagement practices (Tritter and McCallum 2006).

Based on the analysis of the City of Kitchener and the *Love My Hood* program, within the framework of Arnstein's (1969) ladder, the *Community Engagement Consultation Matrix* (Figure 3) is proposing an extended version of Arnstein's (1969) ladder to address the additional factors and nuances of community engagement that were evident in this project. This extended framework for community engagement considers additional aspects of resident involvement and City engagement efforts. Resident involvement is captured by the intensity of involvement, meaning the amount of effort required from community members in the engagement process. For example, receiving a notice about upcoming projects or filling out a quick online survey may not necessarily require as much effort on a residents' behalf as planning and attending a community event, which could be considered highly intensive. City engagement efforts, however, are captured by the frequency of community involvement in the entire project process. For example, low frequency would be one or no community touchpoints, whereas high frequency would involve several community touchpoints.

Indeed, each municipal project would require a different level of community involvement. The projects that do not require much community action, at few points in time, would fall under the bottom left quadrant of the matrix (e.g., an informing event such as a town hall). This quadrant is characterized by projects that are short and do not have a high impact on community members. Projects that do not require much community involvement but would require several touchpoints with the community would fall under the bottom right quadrant (e.g., creation of City planning documents). This quadrant is characterized by longer-term projects that do not have a high impact on residents. Projects that require greater community input but at few points in time would fall under the top left quadrant (e.g., the city funding residents to run their events). These projects are characterized by projects that are short in duration but have a high impact on residents. Projects that require a lot of community involvement throughout the project would fall under the top right quadrant (e.g., participatory budgeting). This quadrant is characterized by long-term projects that have a high impact on community members. Further, an extended framework should involve a policy environment/context (Bratt and Reardon 2013). For example, engagement activities that occur early in planning phases, where resident perspectives will be taken into account and involve open-ended strategies, would be considered more robust than those that occur later in planning phases. Engagement strategies, later on, are considered less robust of a strategy as they often include close-ended or not face-to-face methods and include items over which the City maintains decision-making power. An engagement strategy continuously growing in popularity is the online forum for crowdsourcing feedback on planning projects (Bradham 2009). Although online crowdsourcing public participation can be an effective method for gathering a lot of feedback on a planning project, the digital divide, whereby those who don't have computers, the skills to use a computer, or internet access are left without the opportunity to provide feedback (Bradham 2009). One example of the City of Kitchener's efforts is the website "Engage Kitchener", an open town hall for residents to sign up for upcoming projects. Despite the potential inaccessibility of online platforms such as these, the City could incorporate similar methods for engaging community members and planning events for "Love My Hood". All told, planning professionals and policymakers should consider the level of engagement, procurement of balanced feedback, and the overall access to the public engagement process.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study presents an investigation into the *Love My Hood* community engagement initiative by the City of Kitchener. Findings indicate that the City of Kitchener states community engagement as a priority. Yet, with examining the City documents through the lens of Arnstein's (1969) ladder, the City seems to continue to control most of the initiatives and engagement process. We also found that the City promotes the *Love My Hood* initiative to cultivate a culture of engagement, aiming to strengthen the relationship with the community. However, Arnstein's ladder does not consider the types or timing of such engagement initiatives and how these may play a role in the degrees of power held by the City residents. A Community Engagement Consultation Matrix for both researchers and practitioners is presented. The matrix can be used moving forward with community engagement initiatives to consider the contextual influences in the process itself. Moreover, the findings help reflect on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, moving to a multifaceted approach to engagement, including the timing and type of engagement to be included in the decision-making process. This matrix could also be used in other municipalities to analyze various components of their community engagement strategy to ensure they achieve a high degree of engagement efforts.

This study was limited by the research team being unable to consult the public, community members, and City staff directly impacted by and involved with the strategies and plans outlined in the documents analyzed. The present study is a first step in understanding the current context of community engagement in Canadian municipalities. Future research should endeavour to employ the presented framework to unpack further and explore initiatives specific to other Canadian municipalities in engaging community members in decision-making processes. Municipal planners may use these findings to implement more community engagement strategies and for more power to be given to residents.

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Appendix A:
Document analysis sources

Document source	Document title
Municipal Documents	Kitchener Strategic Plan 2019-2022 (2019)
	Accountability and Transparency Policy (Amended 2014)
	Community Engagement Policy (2018)
	Community Engagement Review (2018)
	2020 City of Kitchener Business Plan (2020)
	Kitchener Long-Term Financial Plan 2020-2029 (2020)
	Kitchener Growth Management Strategy (2009)
	Kitchener's Guide to Great Neighborhoods Report 2017 (2017)
	Brownfield Remediation Community Improvement Plan (2003, Amended 2008)
	Downtown Kitchener Community Improvement Plan (1997, Amended most recently 2014)
	Kitchener's Neighborhood Strategy: How did we make it? (2016)
	Kitchener's Neighborhood Strategy: What did the community tell us? (2016)
	State of Kitchener Neighbourhood Reports 2017 (2017)
Love My Hood Website	Cool ideas
	Ideas and inspiration
	Boulevard beautification
	Community gardens
	Little libraries
	Neighbourhood art
	Neighbourhood greening
	Neighborhood markets
	Placemaking
	Art in a park
	Murals on a retaining wall
	Accessible community gardens
	Multi-use destinations for people of all ages
	Public seating
	Traffic calming
	Tools and money
	Guides and tool kits
	All city grants
	Love my hood matching grant
	Get money
	Neighbourhood project proposals
	Events and parties
	Festivals and neighbourhoods
	Neighbourhood activity trunk
	Neighbours day
	Porch parties
	Promote your event
	Street parties
	My 'hood
	What's in my hood
	Good neighbour recognition program
	State of Kitchener neighbourhoods (Report)
	Volunteer with us
	Need help
	About love my hood
	Neighbourhood development office
	What did the community tell us? (Report)
	Love My Hood: How did we make it? (Report)
	Our progress
	Our vision
	Love My Hood: Kitchener's Guide to Great Neighbourhoods (Report)
	Working together
Engage Kitchener	Exploring Inclusionary Zoning to Support Affordable Housing Forum
	Affordable Housing Strategy Forum
	Kitchener.ca website transformation Forum
	Separated Bike Lane Pilot Forum
	A pedestrian-first Gaukel Street Forum

Appendix B:
Spectrum of public participation, (IAP2 2018)

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

iap² international association for public participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION →

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.