ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

City of
Kelowna

2014 Community Engagement Events Summary

Introduction

The objective of the Strong Neighbourhoods Project is to improve the quality of life in Kelowna by increasing resident attachment to their neighbourhoods. During the summer of 2014, the project aimed to learn what drives connection, engagement and attachment for Kelowna citizens and to establish a baseline understanding of current levels of attachment to their neighbourhoods.

Connection, engagement and attachment, for the purposes of this project, have been defined as follows:

- Connection refers to one's relationship with others and the strength of those relationships.
- Engagement refers to one's commitment to community and their willingness to take action to solve problems or participate in activities that make the community better.
- Attachment refers to one's emotional bonding to a particular environment and the social ties one has there.

To understand the factors impacting connection and engagement and citizen levels of attachment, a survey was developed. In order to promote representation across all areas and demographics the survey was made available on-line and on paper, with facilitators visiting multiple parks to promote the survey and encourage discussions about residents' values and views of their neighbourhood experiences.

What follows is an overview of the community engagement events and the emerging themes relating to neighbourhood attachment, including:

- the characteristics residents value about their neighbourhood,
- the drivers of attachment, and
- the strengths found within the community that support attachment.

While not necessarily representative of all residents, the overview does provide an introductory insight into citizens' levels of connection, engagement and attachment across Kelowna.
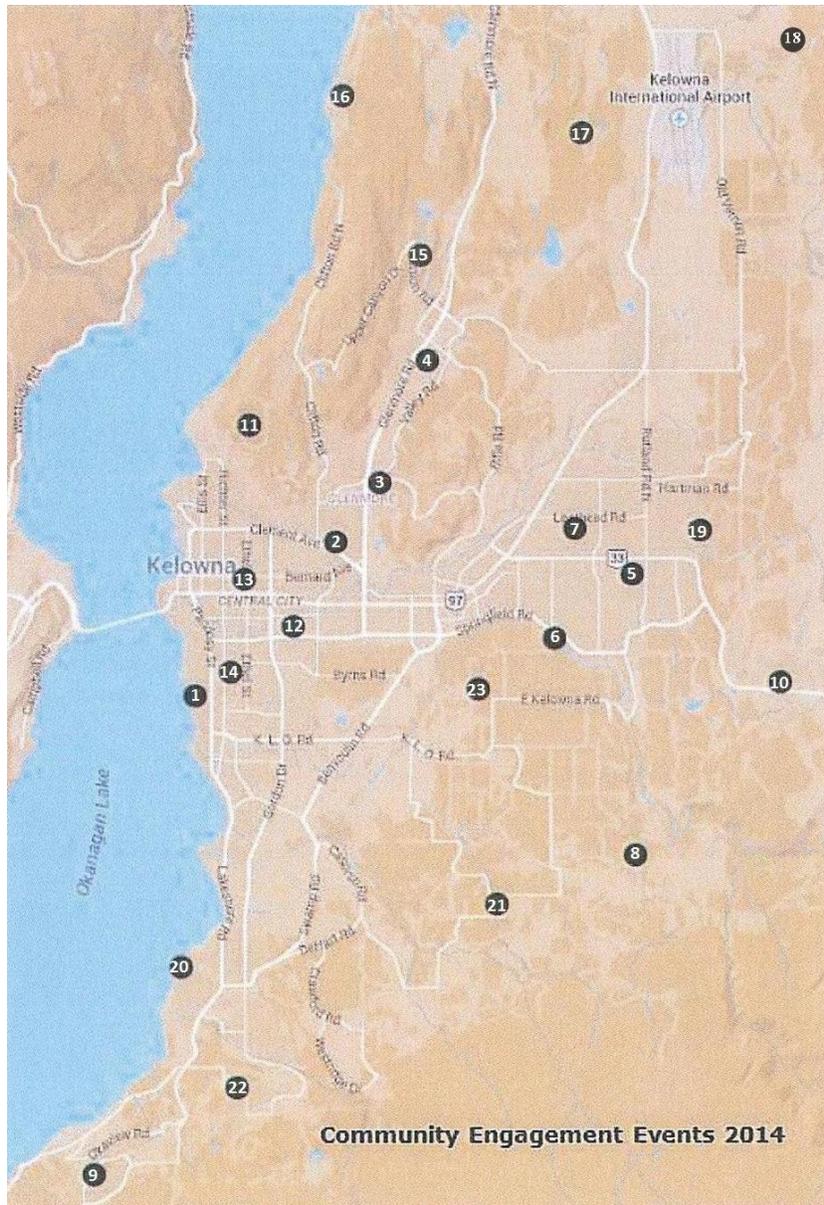
Methodology

Between July 5th and September 13th, 2014, two Neighbourhood Facilitators contracted by the Activity Living and Culture Division hosted twenty-four community engagement events at neighbourhood parks throughout the City of Kelowna. These events served multiple purposes including providing opportunities for neighbours to connect, building awareness about the strong neighbourhoods' survey, interviewing residents, and observing interactions between neighbours.

In addition to interviewing residents and encouraging participation in the survey, facilitators also engaged resident's in an art-based exercise where they could write or draw what they liked about their neighbourhood on a puzzle piece and add it to their neighbourhood puzzle.

Event Locations and Format
Initially twenty-two events were scheduled and promoted throughout the City of Kelowna. Two events were added to the schedule in response to resident requests. One event provided an opportunity to pre-test the survey, and the second was in conjunction with a neighbourhood association seeking to promote higher levels of engagement.

For ten of the community engagement events, facilitators joined the Park & Play program. The remainder of the events were held as block party style events in neighbourhood parks. Two summer students, a Recreation Technician, and a community entertainer helped establish the block-party atmosphere. This framework for the engagements was strategically chosen because of the welcoming, accessible nature of block-parties was thought to attract the highest number of residents. The map on the left shows where events took place. See Table 1 below for the corresponding list of parks where engagement events were held and event type.

Figure 1: Community engagement event locations

	Park & Play Event Locations		Block-Party Event Locations
1	Kinsmen Park	11	Knox Mountain Park
2	Jack Robertson Park	12	Pacific Court Park
3	Golfview park	13	Knowles Park
4	Matera Glen Park	14	Cameron Park
5	Rutland Lions Park	15	Still Pond Park
6	Gertsmar Park	16	McKinley Landing Park (2 events)
7	Ben Lee Park	17	Carney Park
8	Summerside Park	18	Country Rhodes
9	Quilchena Park	19	Mugford Park
10	Loseth Park	20	Sarson's Beach
		21	Centennial Park
		22	Quarry Park
		23	Johnson Park

Table 1: Community engagement event locations by type

Survey Design

One of the contract facilitators designed a short, mixed method survey with the intention of gaining both quantitative and qualitative insight into the demographics of those who participated and into citizen levels and current experiences of connection, engagement and attachment within their neighbourhoods. Residents of all ages could complete a survey on site; however the main objective was for facilitators to conduct face-to-face interviews and discussion with residents and record the data presented.

Pre -event Data Collection

Prior to every event, the facilitators conducted a preliminary visit to the neighbourhood to observe the most notable features of each setting. Facilitators recorded their first impressions and thoughts regarding the neighbourhood and took note of physical features including boundaries, housing type, and natural gathering spaces. A web search was also conducted in an effort to discover important historical information, current issues, and general facts about the area.

Onsite Data Collection

Paper copies of the survey were available onsite for residents to fill out, or residents could opt to participate in an interview with a facilitator. Facilitators used the survey as a guide for discussions and captured the information provided by residents on individual survey forms. When facilitators were recording answers, they always read back to the participant what they had written down to ensure accuracy. All surveys filled out onsite were then manually entered online through a unique link which enabled data collected onsite to be separated from data collected from online responses.

Post-event Debrief

Facilitators debriefed each event with the entire event team. Debriefs followed a consistent format designed by the facilitators which allowed for observations outside of survey responses, primarily regarding resident interactions, to be captured.

Throughout September and October 2014, facilitators compiled their contextual analyses and *observations* of each neighbourhood setting within a neighbourhood evaluation template. Using this information and the reported levels of attachment from the surveys, the facilitators then made an evaluative judgement of resident attachment as experienced in each individual park.

Findings

The facilitators compiled the written survey responses, their observations of social interactions, and their contextual analysis of each neighbourhood, and discovered that common themes influencing attachment began to emerge. Through this process, facilitators developed a preliminary understanding of what residents' value most about their neighbourhoods and the drivers which underscore neighbourhood attachment.

Characteristics Residents Value Most

Facilitators identified four major themes across all neighbourhoods: amenities, nature, mobility, and social connectivity.

 Amenities

Residents consistently identify their proximity to basic amenities including schools, medical and dental services, shops, restaurants and stores as integral to meeting their daily needs and improving their quality of life. This result was consistent across all neighbourhood discussions and survey responses. Whether one resides within a two minute walk, a ten minute bus ride or a twenty minute drive from these amenities, the perception that they can easily access these services is of key importance.

 Nature

Many residents boast about Kelowna's natural playground and the man made green spaces designed for commuting, exercise and leisure. The array of park types and locations is highly valued and green spaces are recognized for their contribution to neighbourhood aesthetics and liveability.

 Mobility

The ability to move freely through one's neighbourhood is of key importance to residents. In neighbourhoods where well developed sidewalks, linear paths and trails exist, facilitators noted that residents would frequently speak highly about this infrastructure and the ease of access to it. In neighbourhoods where plans are in place to develop such infrastructure, residents expressed anticipation and a belief that these would enhance their quality of life and provide greater opportunity for neighbourly interaction.

Social Connection

Kelowna citizens value friendly, familiar and frequent social interactions with their neighbours. Facilitators noted that these interactions seemed to happen on two levels: connection and engagement. Connection was most often observed between neighbours through their gestures of recognition, conversations regarding mutual interests and neighbourhood information sharing, and stories of neighbours offering limited assistance to each other. In some cases, neighbourhood engagement could be identified through descriptions of interdependence and willingness to work together to make where they live even better. Facilitators learned that residents of Kelowna experience frequent neighbourhood interactions and value living in a friendly neighbourhood where they experience both connection and engagement.

Drivers of Attachment

Facilitators identified five themes as integral in supporting high levels of resident attachment: aesthetics, leadership, safety, social offerings and relationships.

Aesthetics

Residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood's aesthetics are an important component in overall attachment to a neighbourhood. Through discussions at engagement events and reviewing survey responses, facilitators learned that residents identify an area's natural beauty, peace and quiet, historical significance, and housing quality and upkeep as key characteristics impacting their neighbourhood's overall aesthetics.

Leadership

During engagement events, facilitators' observed that a leader often existed in neighbourhoods where residents appeared to have high levels of connection and engagement with each other. These leaders were identified as people who would intentionally work to provide opportunities for neighbours to connect, enact residents' ideas, and/or would speak on behalf of the residents in the area.

Safety

The perception of safety is critical to fostering attachment. Safety for many residents is strongly related to infrastructure that supports safe travel through traffic control, sidewalks and bike-lanes, and linear paths. Safe travel to and from open spaces and paths is identified as critically important to resident attachment.

Social Offerings

The quantity and quality of social offerings and the space available for formal and impromptu social gatherings impact neighbourhood attachment. Facilitators noted that neighbourhoods with higher reported levels of attachment tended to discuss neighbourhood initiatives planned and implemented by neighbours for neighbours.

Relationships

Facilitators also recognized a link between the strength of relationship between neighbours and between residents and the Municipality and their overall attachment to the City. As relationships are strengthened, resident levels of neighbourliness and engagement increase.

Art Exercise

The art exercise provided another means for residents to express what they valued about their neighbourhoods. The major themes emerging from the surveys and community observations were reflected in the puzzle piece art work.

Figure 2: Example from Art Exercise

Conclusion

Neighbourhoods are unique and yet, when the data collected from community engagement events is compiled, similarities emerge. Initial analysis suggests that attachment level is supported through multiple avenues. Information from the community engagement events provided insights into attachment levels. In neighbourhoods with higher levels of attachment, residents:

- reported the presence of an individual or group that organized a social offering and the neighbourhood level;
- perceived their surroundings to be aesthetically pleasing and/or had ease of access to nature and natural amenities;
- identified their ability to access community events and opportunities for social engagement; and
- experienced actions of neighbourliness which fostered a greater sense of social connection, belonging, and engagement.

In all, residents reported a high level of attachment to their neighbourhoods. This attachment has been cultivated by the physical and natural amenities and services in their surrounding area and through social interactions within their neighbourhood.