




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
DATE:	December 23, 2024
SUBJECT:	City of Hamilton's Participation in the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative Innovation Track Program (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Anita Fabac Acting Director, Planning and Chief Planner Planning and Economic Development Department
SIGNATURE:	

Overview

As a key initiative identified by the Mayor, the City of Hamilton was one of twelve (12) international municipalities selected to participate in the prestigious 2023-2024 Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative Innovation Track Program (BH Program). This Program equips interdisciplinary city teams with tools to design, test, and prototype innovative solutions to pressing city challenges. The BH Program emphasizes creative problem-solving approaches that help cities address their toughest internal and external challenges. The 2023-2024 cohort included twelve (12) municipalities from Canada, the United States, and Italy. Examples of projects undertaken by other municipalities in the program are provided in Appendix "A."

Objective

Hamilton's participation in the BH Program focused on improving the development approval process. The goal was to identify and implement innovative practices and technologies to streamline and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of development application reviews. This objective aligns with the Mayor and Council's commitment to facilitating the approval of 20,000 new housing units by the end of 2026, a key strategy to address housing affordability and availability.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe, and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Project Team

The Hamilton BH Project Team was a cross-departmental group comprising staff from:

- Planning and Economic Development Department,
- Public Works Department,
- City Manager's Office - Government Relations & Community Engagement Division.
- Mayor's Office

The BH Project Team engaged with over 40 internal and 20 external stakeholders, including developers, consultants, and residents. This collaboration generated 821 ideas for improvement, which were refined into a portfolio of eight initiatives for action. From this portfolio, two initiatives were selected for prototyping.

Pilots

Pilot 1 – First Wave Portal

- **Objective:** Develop an artificial intelligence (AI) platform to provide data-informed development and planning assistance, with clear communication of requirements and expectations.
- **Key Features:**
 - A proof of concept has been awarded to software company Achistar AI.
 - The software reviews applications to determine if they meet the City's requirements for items such as zoning and minimum information needed to complete an Ontario Building Code review.
 - The software can also be used to used in an information portal to provide property-specific information on complex matters like zoning and flood mapping in a plain language format.
- **Pilot Timelines:**
 - Testing and validation: September 2024 to January 2025
 - Develop an AI for Development Application Road Map: Q1 to Q3 2025
 - Report findings and Road Map: Q4 2025

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe, and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

Pilot 2 - All4One

- **Objective:** Establish a cross-departmental team that works collaboratively on development applications, with a dedicated point of contact for each application, piloting affordable housing projects.

- **Key Features:**
 - Accelerated approval process: Conditional Site Plan approval within 30 days of receiving an application (Standard process takes approximately 60 days) and reduce the time it takes for proponents to clear conditions and advance the development through to building permits.
 - Pilot focus: The concept will be piloted on 3 to 5 Site Plan Control applications for affordable housing projects in collaboration with the Housing Secretariat.
 - Development of a “playbook” outlining roles and expectations for both city staff and proponents

- **Pilot Timelines:**
 - Pilot applications: Q1 to Q3 2025 (Test 3 – 5 applications)
 - Report findings and make recommendations: Q4 2025

Next Steps

A detailed report on Hamilton’s participation in the 2023-2024 Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative Innovation Track Program, including the current status, the implementation plan, and outcomes will be presented to the General Issues Committee in January 2025.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” - Examples of Municipal Projects from the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative Innovation Track Program

Examples of Municipal Projects from the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative Innovation Track Program

Waste Management, Public Spaces, Infrastructure - Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

The Issue: Various behaviors encourage accumulation of waste in public space, which particularly impacts residents from the city’s lower income district. Current waste management negatively affects public health, the environment, city pride and confidence in City Hall.

The Outcome: In-depth research revealed the accumulation of trash can be attributed to inconsistent collection routes and schedules, high single-plastic usage, and lack of communal responsibility. The team’s portfolio addresses the interconnectedness of these factors.

Government Legitimacy and Trust – Providence, Rhode Island

The Issue: The problem is Providence constituents have needs that can only be met by navigating a system that does not empathize with their experience. This is a problem for constituents who do not see their identity represented within city staff. This is a problem because people experience the city as exacerbating disparity in access to health, wellbeing, and quality of life.

The Outcome: Providence created 10 prioritized ideas focused on understanding community needs and adjusting city hall to meet their needs. This is represented in hosting satellite city hall, expanding languages spoken at the city to communicate better with residents, creating non-traditional business hours, and creating a municipal services liaison.

Housing and Homelessness – Paterson, New Jersey

The Issue: The problem is homeless people are not connecting to available shelters and related services that will help them take the first steps toward securing long-term housing. This is a problem for the individuals and families who find themselves without shelter for reasons such as economic hardship or drug addiction and persist without shelter for reasons such as lack of awareness of or access to support or lack of trust in other people and services to help them safely and effectively. It is also a problem for those members of our community who are negatively impacted by the actions of people dwelling more permanently on the streets of Paterson. This is a problem because if people cannot or will not take the first steps toward securing long-term housing, they may lose hope of meeting their basic needs and of having a positive impact on our community through their contribution to it.

The Outcome: The team came up with over 300 ideas. They tested 3 of these ideas with a group of 30 users. The suite of ideas included everything from passes to facilitate the use of services (IDs, vouchers, etc.) to employment training and emergency care treatment programs.

Business Attraction, Commercial Revitalization – Somerville, Massachusetts

The Issue: The problem is the uncertainty of the market, regulations and customer behavior make it difficult for business to plan and respond to change successfully. This is a problem for all businesses that rely on in-person activities and transactions, and especially for those who don't have the resources in place to plan for the pandemic or were already experiencing financial difficulty before COVID-19 emerged. This is a problem because businesses have had to close and or may be taking on long term debt to survive. This makes the city less vibrant and creates a loss of connection with residents and businesses.

The Outcome: The team's 6 ideas focused on providing additional city resources (from permitting help to networking to an educational video library) to current and aspiring businesses in Somerville. This included a city point person for all business inquiries to help residents ease of government access and a potential Event Planner for businesses to network with each other and garner more business.