



## CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF COMMUNITY IMPACT

*Community Development Halton recently celebrated 30 years of social planning and volunteerism in Halton. At this event, CDH paid homage to Walter Mulkewich with an award that is called, the Walter Mulkewich Community Development Award. This award will celebrate those extraordinary people who come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems in their community. It seems so fitting that a man who has brought people together to build a healthy, creative community should have an award named in his honour. Walter's imprint on this community is profound and lasting. He has worked and is working for change in our small place in this world, the totality of his acts have rewritten the history of this community and are influencing its journey into the future.*

*In this Community Dispatch, I would like to share with you his remarks at our Annual General Meeting, celebrating 30 years of impact.*

*Joey Edwardh  
Executive Director*

### **Walter Mulkewich: A Celebration**

Good evening and thank you for the work of Community Development Halton on behalf of the citizens of Halton.

Anniversaries are an occasion to look back, reflect and learn from the past and also to reflect about the future. I would like to share some personal memories and reflections about the past along with some musings about the present and the future.

Your history is actually longer than 30 years because there were active Social Planning Councils in Oakville dating to the early sixties and in Burlington to the early seventies and before. For many years the Social Planning Council of Hamilton included Burlington in its work, until 1971 when a community meeting established the Burlington Social Planning Council, a meeting I recall attending. From the beginning, this new Council in Burlington was community driven, responding to local community social needs. It started out with a part time Secretary and a small room for an office at Port Nelson United Church.

It was around 1973 that I had lunch with Larry Ogden and Roly Bird, and Roly would later become Mayor. We decided to stand for election to the Board of the Social Planning Council and very quickly Roly became President and I became Vice President.

I recall two of the first issues tackled were the huge need for affordable housing and subsidized childcare – sound familiar? I think these issues are still current? Volunteer committees led both projects. I chaired the housing task force and Rob McKenzie chaired the childcare task force. I mention this because I think there is a lesson here in involving citizens in research projects and advocacy.

One of the early tasks of the Board was to tackle funding – sound familiar? I should note that historically, the Hamilton United Way included Burlington in its catchment area and

at first did not understand why a separate Social Planning Council was needed for Burlington. We did our homework, consulted with Burlington agencies, and then met with the Hamilton United Way Board. We argued our case that it was underfunding the Burlington Social Planning Council and Burlington agencies and threatened to set up a Burlington only United Way – and we got increased funding. We also went to the City Council and got a larger grant. Our goal at the time was to establish sustainable funding with municipal contribution at 60% and United Way at 40% – currently CDH is at 44% and 30% leaving 26% to be raised elsewhere. The connection to the United Way is important not only because of the funding but because traditionally Social Planning Councils have been important research arms for United Ways and I hope continue to be so.

With increased funding we hired our first Executive Director, Ted McMeekin, now Minister of Municipal Affairs & Housing and we established a real office on lower Brant Street.

The drive towards a Regional Social Planning Council was partly initiated by the Burlington and Oakville Social Planning Councils having joint discussions regarding cooperation. But mostly, it was a forced marriage by municipal governments saying continued funding to both Burlington and Oakville Social Planning Councils depended on going Regional and also including the fledgling Social Planning Council established in north Halton.

Mayor Bird led the way by taking the position that the Region was responsible for social services and regional planning and that the appropriate place for funding was at the Region not the local municipalities, a position I supported. And, other social services were forced to do the same. The next Executive Director was Susan Goodman followed by Elaine Eastman and then Joey Edwardh.

I recall being appointed Regional Council representative on the first Halton Social Planning Council and Volunteer Bureau Board – and if you don't have a Regional Council representative on your Board now you might wish to consider that because that is an important link. It was not an easy process bringing together people from four municipalities, merging two Social Planning Councils with different cultures from south Halton, and bringing in the social planning group from north Halton.

Councillor Mulvale, later Mayor Mulvale of Oakville, who succeeded me as the Regional representative on the Board, we had a late breakfast last week and shared some memories of the challenges in those days:

- We recalled that Dundas Street was like the Mason Dixon Line separating north and south Halton and Bronte Creek the line separating west and east Halton.
- We recalled that there was not only quite a large Halton Social Planning Council Board, but also additional Advisory Boards for each of the four municipalities, a concept that has disappeared - for good or bad?
- And, there was no Halton United Way as attempts to establish a Halton United Way did not succeed. But, United Ways were established in Milton and Halton Hills, although these two United Ways have never been significant contributors to the Social Planning Council, which represents a real gap for a Regional agency. The Hamilton United Way changed its' branding to be the Burlington Hamilton United Way and paid more attention to Burlington. The Oakville United Way continued to be a major player.

At an early point, Volunteer Bureaus were established in both Oakville and Burlington in the seventies as part of their respective Social Planning Councils. I should note that combining Volunteer Bureaus and Social

Planning is not a trend across Ontario, but it has worked in Halton. I should also note that the role and challenges of the Volunteer Bureau in the seventies was somewhat different than it is now. In the seventies, very few organizations had their own Volunteer recruitment staff and recruitment procedures and I think there was a more robust sense of community participation.

I think it is fair to note that the role of the Volunteer Bureau has adapted to changing society and needs by doing much more than linking volunteers to agencies but also to promoting volunteerism and providing information, and providing training and support to local service providers, as well as targeting population groups and corporations. Just looking at the Volunteer Halton website, which is a really good site, reveals the huge service this program of CDH provides the community – a treasure for Halton and its four municipalities which we could not do without.

Social Planning has always been a difficult concept for many people to understand and, yes, for some to accept. Indeed there are many definitions and viewpoints as to what social planning is. My simple layperson definition is that it is a process to assess social issues in a community through research and community participation with a view to improving the wellbeing of the community.

I defined Social Planning as a process. The problem is that people have a hard time understanding processes – but rather want to see results and how those processes benefit them - and this has always been a challenge for social planning, not only to focus on process, but also to demonstrate results from those processes in terms of improvement in the wellbeing of the community – and here is where good communication comes in.

I think that communication has always been an issue social planning has had to deal with. It is about communication to the community, the partners and the funders – but it's about communicating results. My experience in sales and marketing tells me that you do not sell a product - but the benefits of the product. And, I think you need to continually and clearly identify the benefits you are providing specifically to your community, your partners and your funders.

The Halton Social Planning Council rebranded itself as Community Development Halton 10 years ago. Your website lists community development as one element of social planning and is defined as facilitating and supporting “positive change in partnership with community groups and individuals.” Indeed social planning and community development must be interconnected and I am not sure where one starts and the other ends.

Over these past thirty years, CDH, its Volunteer Centre, the various reports and the community involvement have been essential to the wellbeing of the Region.

I want to single out two initiatives in recent times:

- Your work with Poverty Free Halton along with your research on the living wage are particularly important in facing one of the major social issues of this decade, poverty and inequality.
- Your report on “*Where We Live Matters*” and neighbourhoods along with your participatory work in the north Burlington and Acton neighbourhoods is taking a community organizing approach which I do not think anyone else in Halton is undertaking. It is about empowerment, building social capital and building community capacity.

On a personal note, I certainly appreciated the help of CDH in two projects I was involved with:

- The citizen engagement project which I helped to lead in 2010, a project initiated by Mayor Jackson and which was named, Shape Burlington.
- I also appreciated the role of CDH in the Inclusive Cities Project in 2005, a project that former Mayor Maclsaac and Joey Edwardh co-opted me to participate in and which I was pleased to do.

In 2014, I see three big challenges facing our communities, challenges we face with the rest of Canada:

- The increasing inequality gap, an issue you focused on when you helped to host Alex Himelfarb and Trish Hennessy in a public meeting, an issue CDH is active in through several of your projects.
- The climate change challenges as demonstrated by the recent Burlington flood, and increasingly I believe we need to see the challenges of climate change as a social issue and there may be a role there.
- The dual decline of democracy and social capital, two important concepts that are interrelated and need increasing attention. Democracy is more than the percentage of people who vote, which has been declining; it is also about social capital. I really do believe that we have lost some of the sense of social capital as identified by Robert Putnam who succinctly pointed out that we no longer bowl together in bowling leagues.

Let me conclude by talking a bit about social capital and the future.

Social capital is all about the institutions, relationships and networks that bind us together as a society. Unfortunately, the neo-liberal political and social philosophy that has

dominated a lot of discourse since the nineteen eighties has put the focus on individuals rather than social capital. I am not sure we can recreate the kind of social capital that was the hallmark of the great generation that experienced the Great Depression and the Great War and who gave us a progressive society. It is more likely that we can build increased social capital on another model for different times, times that are increasingly characterized by individualism but also new social capital through digital relationships and communication.

In this time of the decline of traditional media, including both print media and television, I think you will need to become more involved and savvy with the world of social media for both communication and research. I believe that you need to strategically expand your presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and more. This is about involving the community, particularly the younger generations, and it is about two-way communication – and increasingly this will be digital.

Yes, the political climate is still dominated by austerity and retrenchment, which affects funding sources and receptivity to your work. This too will likely change, because these things go in cycles, but in the meantime this organization need to find ways to work within that austerity climate, and I think to do so you have to emphasize the benefits of your work and bring in solid support from as many sectors of the community as possible.

It is easy for me to identify three major issues, to throw out some ideas, personal memories and reflections. I could have gone on to talk about other issues such as diversity, youth employment, aging and mobility. Your priorities will need to be identified by the community, in consultation with your funders and community partners, and verified by the rigour of research.

This means remembering the first principles in the history of community social planning and volunteerism – that it is about being community driven. And it is about the courage to take a stand on issues, which you identify.

These are only a few reflections about the past and random thoughts about moving into the future. Again, I want to congratulate and thank CDH for your continuing work and hope you can build on your history as you continue to adapt to the future.



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