

SUBJECT: Learning from Helsinki
TO: Council Workshop Committee
FROM: Development and Growth Management
Community Planning
Report Number: DGM-54-25
Wards Affected: All
Date to Committee: July 10, 2025
Date to Council: July 15, 2025

Recommendation:

Receive for information development and growth management report DGM-54-25 providing learning from Helsinki.

Executive Summary

An application for funding to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research – Institute of Population and Public Health (CIHR-IPPH) was submitted in August 2024. Titled *Healthy City-Building in Burlington: Toward Healthy Urban Policy implementation* the application was successful. In late May, 2025 a five-person team representing the City of Burlington including two staff from Burlington and one staff from Halton Region Public Health, the Mayor and a professor at the University of Waterloo participated in a 5-day immersive Healthy Urban Policy Implementation workshop in Helsinki, Finland. The workshop was hosted by Toronto based nonprofit 8 80 Cities which curated a detailed agenda including lectures with key policy makers, academics, architects, designers and NGOs, bike and walking tours, and a wide range of experiential learning. As 8 80 Cities notes in answer to the question “Why Helsinki?” like many Canadian Cities, Helsinki has faced challenges with housing affordability, aging infrastructure, and car-oriented planning. Over the last two decades Helsinki has made strong policy moves to address these issues. The first deliverable as a requirement of the grant is this Council Workshop which includes sharing our experience and learning with public health officials, city staff and elected officials. Through engagement the assembled group will explore current strengths and identify opportunities to adapt the learnings to the Burlington context. A key outcome of this session will be to develop an understanding of opportunities to address issues with an objective of creating a healthier and happier city. The outcomes of this work may also inform the creation of the City of Burlington 2050 Horizon Plan.

Purpose of report:

- To share about the funding opportunity and award
- To share the general outline of the Council Workshop

Key findings:

Staff will share key findings during the presentation that will be made available in advance of the Council Workshop.

Implications:

The outcomes of this workshop and future public engagement may offer useful insights to inform the City's upcoming strategic planning efforts to establish a 2050 vision for the City.

Information Report

Background

In Spring, 2024, led by researcher Troy Glover from the University of Waterloo, the City of Burlington and Halton Region prepared a submission to respond to a call from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Institute of Population and Public Health (CIHR- IPPH) funding opportunity related to Healthy Cities Research Initiative (HCRI) – Implementing Healthy Urban Policy. The following was included in the Funding opportunity details:

(t)he CIHR Healthy Cities Research Initiative (HCRI) is a major initiative led by the Institute of Population and Public Health (IPPH) in collaboration with the Institute of Aging (IA), Institute of Gender and Health (IGH), Institute of Health Services and Policy Research (IHSPR), Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health (IIPH), Institute of Musculoskeletal Health and Arthritis (IMHA), and Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes (INMD). HCRI is designed to deepen Canada's scientific leadership in planning, designing, and building healthy cities. Achieving the goal of leadership in the science of healthy cities requires partnership across many sectors and all levels of government. ([ResearchNet Funding Opportunity Details](#))

The Planning Grants for Implementing Healthy Urban Policy opportunity is composed of an immersive 5-day workshop in Helsinki organized by 80 Cities and a post-workshop planning and knowledge mobilization activity. The grant supports collaboration between city leaders and researchers focused on improving health and wellbeing in urban settings. From the summary of the opportunity:

Teams will benefit from examining how the model city has designed, implemented, and evaluated healthy urban policies such as housing and sustainable growth, healthy and active public spaces for all seasons, and planning the equitable city for all ages and will draw on these learnings to develop action plans and intervention research ideas for their own Canadian cities. The required workshop will explore the connection between improved health outcomes and well-designed, maintained, and programmed infrastructures and interventions, and will emphasize opportunities for using data and research. ([ResearchNet Funding Opportunity Details](#))

Joint Application

In August 2024 the team submitted a completed application entitled *Healthy City-Building in Burlington: Toward Healthy Urban Policy implementation*.

The stated aims set out in the application were to advance healthy urban policy implementation in Burlington by learning from Helsinki's approaches to the following:

- 1- Managing Growth and Change
- 2- Mobility Options

- 3- Community Connections
- 4- Expanding and Connecting public spaces

The application noted:

By integrating these insights into Burlington's urban planning and policy development, the experience will enable the city to implement effective, evidence-based healthy urban policies. The knowledge gained will be disseminated through local workshops and collaborative events, fostering community engagement and ensuring that the benefits of the research are widely shared and applied.

The application was developed to build on the respective roles, research areas and implementation interests of the various team members.

The application committed to two deliverables. It set out that after the completion of the 5-day study tour the team would organize and deliver two specific engagements designed to inspire new ideas and foster collaboration to implement healthy urban policy in Burlington:

- 1- Convening elected officials, public health officials, City staff to share learning and discuss adapting the learnings to the local context; and
- 2- Convening a workshop with residents, community groups and local advocates to collaborate to develop innovative solutions tailored to Burlington's needs, focusing on welcoming new residents, creating connected neighbourhoods, enhancing mobility options and expanding and connecting public spaces.

Status

The team travelled to Helsinki in late May and participated in an intensive urban workshop from May 18 to May 22.

Day 1: Welcome to Helsinki

Day 2: Housing First

Day 3: Cities for People – Healthy Neighbourhoods

Day 4: Transforming Malmi

Day 5: Bringing it all home

For context reference can be made to Appendix A titled 2025 Helsinki Study Tour prepared by 880 Cities. The backgrounder provides a brief overview of the City of Helsinki including discussions related to Governance, Housing, Active Transportation and other initiatives.

The Council Workshop is the first formal opportunity to connect with elected officials and colleagues. The Council Workshop will include:

- A presentation from the Study Group
- Facilitated conversations related to celebrating successes and identifying opportunities that could contribute to a healthy and happier community.

Key Dates & Milestones

August 2024 - Application Submitted
November 2024 – Application Successful
May 2025- Travel to Helsinki
July 2025 – Council Workshop
Fall 2025 – Public Engagement

Implications

The outcomes of this workshop and future public engagement may offer useful insights to inform the City’s upcoming strategic planning efforts to establish a 2050 vision for the City.

References

N/A

Strategic Alignment

- ☒ Designing and delivering complete communities
 - ☐ Providing the best services and experiences
 - ☒ Protecting and improving the natural environment and taking action on climate change
 - ☐ Driving organizational performance
-

Authors:

Denise Beard
Senior Manager, Community Development
905-335-7777 ext 7518

Alison Enns
Manager, Policy and Community Initiatives
905-335-7777 ext 7787

Suzanne Smith
Manager of Healthy Living Programs
Halton Region Public Health
Region of Halton

Troy Glover Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Recreation and
Leisure Studies
Director, Health Communities Research
Network, University of Waterloo

Appendices:

A. 2025 Helsinki Study Tour Backgrounder, 8 80 Cities

Notifications:

None

Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and approved by the Commissioner, Head of Corporate Affairs, Chief Financial Officer, and Commissioner of Legal and Legislative Services/City Solicitor.