



COMMUNITY HUBS

Influencer Series

HEAR FROM KEY INFLUENCERS ON COMMUNITY HUBS

KAREN PITRE, SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PREMIER ON COMMUNITY HUBS

Community hubs are the centre of public discourse around healthy and vibrant neighbourhoods. As suburban and rural neighbourhoods are challenged by a lack of local services, community hubs are growing in popularity as a way to provide a “one-stop shop” to address local needs. The Province, municipalities, community organizations and funders are taking innovative approaches to developing community hubs.

The SPACE Coalition’s Community Hubs Influencer Series intends to capture the important work that these players are doing to move the community hub agenda forward and support the development of sustainable hubs. Each edition features an interview with a champion or stakeholder that is leading this work.

For our first interview, we reached out to Karen Pitre, Special Advisor to the Premier on Community Hubs, to discuss her extension and reflect on her work from the past year. Key themes include: building local capacity, engaging stakeholders and removing policy barriers. See her thoughtful insights below.

What is the most frequent request or comment about community hubs?

People intuitively understand the value proposition behind community hubs given the benefits. They can be a means of optimizing the use of existing public buildings, can improve access to a greater range of services and there’s a reduced stigma that can sometimes be associated with single-purpose facilities.

What we heard in the course of our engagements is that launching a community hub can be difficult given the amount of



Karen Pitre with Susan Fletcher, Chair of the SPACE Coalition

work required to build effective partnerships and barriers to integrating service delivery. That's what we're trying to address through our work – policy barriers that can restrict local leaders from developing successful community hubs.

Until when has your mandate been extended, and what are your priorities for the next year?

Through the 2016 Provincial Budget, my mandate will be extended until March 2017. I am grateful that I will continue to be supported by the Community Hubs Advisory Group.



Moving forward, I will continue to lead and advise government on the implementation of the Community Hubs Strategic Framework and Action Plan. Priorities for the coming year include:

- *Working with local experts to develop a Resource Network for community partners*
- *Advising on a permanent governance structure within government based on the recommendation in the Action Plan to "formalize a structure to be responsible and accountable within government for overseeing the implementation of the Community Hubs Framework and Action Plan."*

How can the community support your work?

There are a number of elements of the Action Plan where we're expecting to work with partners and stakeholders – each recommendation is different. The Implementation of the Resource Network requires further work with community agencies to design and develop the necessary supports that are needed.

The Toronto District School Board is dealing with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation's retro-active assessment of Razor Management's "championship field" at Monarch Park Collegiate for \$700,000 of back property taxes. If MPAC broadens its scope from commercial uses (Razor Management) to all non-school uses, it could increase the costs for community hubs as some, maybe many, activities in community hubs are not "educational." How can we help you preserve school-based hubs as exempt from property taxes?

The challenges posed by property taxes is something we've heard more recently from stakeholders. It's a relatively new issue and we want to ensure the financial viability of community hubs. The Community Hubs Secretariat is working to track policy challenges and barriers at the local level so we can do further analysis. You can help by providing us with real life examples of where there are challenges and barriers. Details are important in these cases. You can reach us directly at community.hubs@ontario.ca.

What is the status of the implementation plan? Will there be an opportunity to provide public comments on it? Has anything shifted or changed from your recent update on the website?

The government has accepted all of the recommendations and is moving forward with implementation. Recommendations have been assigned to lead ministries and we've begun acting on all of the recommendations outlined in the Action Plan.

Some key points of progress since August include:

- *The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has released a redesigned Community Health Capital Program policy that provides for an expanded eligibility and a streamlined capital approval process for community health care providers.*
- *The Ministry of Education has consulted on Ontario Regulation 444/98, which deals with the disposition of school property, and is proposing amendments to enhance community engagement prior to decisions related to school property.*
- *The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing recently hosted six regional forums with experts from the municipal sector, non-profit organizations, local service providers, school boards, the health services sector, provincial ministries and others to share ideas on how to improve planning integration.*

And in addition to this series of discussions, we have been engaging with a variety of other stakeholders with the objective of finding opportunities to partner, collaborate and innovate around community hubs. We understand that the Province needs to take on a leadership role, but that community hubs continue to be driven locally.

