

# Appendix A

## Partnerships and Engagement: From Waste to Well-being

January 24, 2020

# Introduction

We learned during development of the original SM4RT Living Plan (2013) that waste reduction is at its core a cultural shift – a change in beliefs, values, practices and attitudes that ultimately result in behavioural change.

Over the initial five years, there was a strong willingness to create change through an initiative like SM4RT Living. We witnessed collaboration around textiles, the Blue Box Working Group, and waste recycling messaging and food waste as priorities.

Repair Cafes throughout the Region provided residents with the option to repair vs replace and the Lendery in partnership with local libraries offered a place to borrow vs buy. Our Good Food campaign blossomed from meal planning to healthy eating, simple recipes and local farms and food literacy.

The Review and Update to the Plan builds on lessons learned from the first five years and incorporates community and stakeholder ideas on moving forward over the next five. Ascentia was retained to conduct engagement and research with residents, community and municipal partners. The research explored approaches to inspiring the change needed to reach the goal set out by the SM4RT Living Plan. The scope of work included planning and execution of creative engagement sessions at public events, two workshops with the Region and local municipal waste staff and a forum for current and potential community partners. Their scope of work included facilitated sessions with the internal project team and outreach and education staff to gather insights on successes and challenges and build our capacity to support future work. Outcomes of the work informed recommendations for partnerships, engagement and research to support the plan's implementation.

## Alignment with York Region's Strategic Plan

The name and concept of SM4RT Living, has an intention beyond waste management. This intention became evident during an assessment of SM4RT Living against York Region's Vision 2051 Goal Areas.

This is what emerged during an initial planning workshop with the Region's staff.

*Currently the SM4RT Living initiatives align the most with Sustainable Environments. This makes sense as these are the roots of waste management and where the current programming lives. There is also currently synergy with Good Government, as the manner in which SM4RT Living has been introduced and has been working on developing trust, with the focus being on piloting and partnerships as efficient use of resources. This goal can be further developed by continuing to build the case for SM4RT Living that connects to all strategic goals. This will require different forms of partnerships, evolving the relationships with the local partners, and expanding community partners.*



*While SM4RT Living currently aligns primarily with Sustainable Environment and Open and Responsive Government, it has a solid foundation from which to grow into other areas. SM4RT Living is positioned for its evolution over the next five years into Healthy Communities and Economic Vitality.*

*With a longer-term view, SM4RT Living has found a natural connection to health and this is a key way to move from the waste management focus to the broader lifestyle one. Economic Vitality offers significant opportunities for evolving SM4RT Living especially with the gradual introduction to the circular economy. This opens the door to realigning current relationships (for example the linkage between agriculture and nutrition) and creating new connections. The evolution of waste to SM4RT Living can set the foundation for reframing waste as a vehicle of economic vitality.*

It was therefore decided that migrating up the circle would bring a more vibrant SM4RT Living approach in which health and economic initiatives could be the motivating factor yet the outcome is waste reduction.

There were early inklings that while much of the focus and energy had been put into managing solid waste, we need to explore root causes of why there is so much waste being generated in the first place.

This question began to haunt us and took us to the next stage of the process.... research into the changing lives of people in York Region to see if we could get a sense of the changing dynamics of people's lives and where potential 'sweet spots' may be for evolution of stakeholder actions.

## Changing Lives of People

The changing lives of people in York Region are diverse. The Region has reports and statistics and analysis from all different types of viewpoints, health, transit etc. We

decided to start with the staff to explore how we could approach this broader view of SM4RT Living and further examine the core drivers of waste.

To do this we applied one of the tools that we have developed to get 'under the surface' of the typical responses to questions about our lives: Burrs Buzz and Flow.

- **Burrs** are the feelings of what is bugging you, what's not working, what's getting under your skin. Like nature's burrs these are often the seeds of exciting and authentic new ideas and actions. This stage helps to identify the **root problem** or issue that is looking for a solution.
- **Buzz** is all about what's hot, what makes you go 'wow', where there's a hum, what great things are happening on the fringe that is growing into the mainstream. This stage helps to identify **areas of excitement** that offer new possibilities.
- **Flow** is when you are "in the zone", when everything is clicking the way it's supposed to be, when everything just seems to fall into place – sometimes in spite of you. Flow is the outcome of **putting the burrs and the buzz together**.

This session rendered some significant insights.

People are looking for solutions to the burrs or pain points as they are chronic issues/disturbances.

These are the 'case for change' that SM4RT Living can address. People are much more likely to engage in actions that help them with:

- Money and security
- Family responsibilities and obligations
- Aging
- Social pressures
- Busy Lives and Not Enough Time – stress and fatigue
- Fear of the Future – fear around our children's future, global crisis and instability
- Health Issues – mental health, physical health substance abuse and caring for others.

The 'buzz' for this process was provided through a range of ideas that had been researched by Ascentia. These ideas touched on new technology, new products, and new ways to consume. These trends also represent a new way of thinking.

The top 3 trends participants selected as most interesting were:

1. **A Reframing of Leftovers:** A non-profit that recovers unserved food from catering businesses and turns it into frozen meals. The recently voted second best restaurant in the world, started a soup kitchen in Milan that served meals to the homeless using food donated by a supermarket because it was close to its sell-by date, was misshapen or damaged.
2. **Mindfulness and Meditation Will Now Be Part of the Curriculum.** Schools in England have started to tackle the problem of kids acting out in a new way by

introducing meditation and mindfulness practices. This program is being done under the mental health study that the British government is running up until 2021

3. **Amazing Construction Technologies That Could Change the World.** Generating power from tiles you walk on, solar paint with the ability to gather energy from the sun, or wireless electricity that requires no need for batteries to hold the power. Building with diamond nanothreads, which are 20,000 times thinner than a strand of human hair, “printing” a cobblestone road, or using Lego-like smart bricks that snap together. **Smart Bricks**, inspired by Lego, are building blocks that have knobs on the top, and they connect exactly like Lego pieces do. Air filters made from Biosolar panels with plants that suck carbon dioxide out of the air and produce fresh oxygen at a rate 100 times faster than trees while creating microscopic organisms that can be harvested to be used in food.

The Flow activity involved blending elements of these trends to create new ideas/possibilities that would address pain points and achieve SM4RT Living outcomes for future living.

A range of unique possibilities were generated from community energy solutions, to new types of stores for innovative clothing redesign, to teens meet waste and mindfulness, to a farm comes to lunch program at schools that is livestreamed.

Pain points identified serious issues people are facing in their daily lives. We began to wonder what is was the connection between these issues and consumer patterns that are driving waste generation and how do we get people’s attention about waste management given these priorities in people’s lives?

This workshop demonstrated the ability of people to co-create dynamic new ideas that tackle significant issues in two hours. Every one of the ideas has a SM4RT Living connection. We also learned that the more waste can be seen as solving social issues, the greater the traction that will be built.

## Community Research

Burrs, Buzz and Flow had given us a taste of the changing dynamics of people’s lives and a need to understand the connection to waste. To do this we knew we had to create different forms of community research through new types of engagement. Given the focus of SM4RT Living, these new engagements had to be designed to explore the changing dynamics of peoples’ lives while:

- tapping into the significant number of people for whom waste is not even on their radar; and
- exploring how to shift the conversation so that SM4RT Living helps solve specific issues in people’s lives.

### Some Definitions

In our work we use a wide range of different theories and approaches that are based on sociology, anthropology, psychology and brain and healing sciences. There are two

major theories/practices that have emerged as key to any type of strategic change initiative – social innovation and conscious design.

**Social innovation** has many definitions but is at its core a process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues. The innovation side is trying often very different approaches to finding these solutions than the conventional thinking.

This is reflected in two key principles we work with - the goal of the social innovation is to establish and mobilize a new audience that is ready for change rather than convincing and converting the masses; and the focus is on the innovation that is happening in the cracks between the sectors: environmental and social; government and corporate as an example. It is within those cracks that new possibilities can be found. Innovation has always been found 'on the fringe' not in the mainstream.

This is very different from the community-based social marketing approach that is normally used for environmental initiatives which targets specific demographics with information and action explicitly geared to their perceived needs and interests.

Conscious design is human-centered and needs-based design that balances form and function with softer aspects of people's lives and their influence on how humans interact with the world around them.

It is a methodology that specifically looks below the surface or 'iceberg' of the current reality to identify and plan for long term and unintended consequences. This approach allows us to get a sense of emerging situations that can be used to help shape and give momentum and sustainability to the change initiatives.

Both social innovation and conscious design have been instrumental in identifying new approaches and solutions to what have in the past been chronic issues. We felt these were highly relevant to the issues related to waste.

## The Flares

The first step in designing any kind of community research/engagement using social innovation is to determine the 'flare'. A Flare is an idea or question that draws people who are interested in a new way of thinking and new possibilities. This involves using **psychographics**- values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles rather than **demographics** – age, race, ethnicity, gender, marital status, income, education, and employment. The outcome is the development of a new blended audience that crosses typical demographic boundaries such as culture, age and socio-economic factors.

When we asked the staff to identify flares that could be sent up to attract people to engage with the Region using a new thinking and possibilities, and the pain points in people's lives, a total of 86 flares were identified in record time. There was a strong theme that ran throughout – every one evokes a form of change.

The idea of drawing out a crowd by sending up a flare that attracts people who want to probe into key aspects of their lives is not something one normally sees in environmental engagements, and yet they make absolute sense when designing

engagements that are exploring the changing nature of peoples' lives. In looking at these flares, we saw a thread that connected them all – a desire for wellbeing. The question became – what was the SM4RT Living connection?

## The Pilot Engagements

Pilot engagements were developed that would explore new ways of conducting community-based research. The aim was to identify the most effective ways to motivate people to shift deeply held patterns of lifestyles and consumption; and explore ways of engaging people across the Region in a meaningful way.

### Guiding Principles

1. Create a set of modules that test a range of approaches to engagement that work with the **flares to shift mindsets**
2. Create opportunities and explore new possibilities for SM4RT Living that help them **solve key issues in their lives.**
3. Design simple experiences that **spark and inspire people to change** across the cultures and ages and give them a voice.
4. Design experiences that **create an emotional connection using all six senses.**

### Design Considerations

1. **The flares** are used for the design, promotion and conducting of the experiences to entice people to come and play.
2. **Festive, fun and colourful** are the signature and essence of the promotion, experiences, activities and interactions.
3. Experiences and their promotion must be **like nature – provides a sense of belonging through diversity** of age, ethnicity and gender using multiple formats, levels and ways so it is a friendly and comfortable experience for all.
4. People **feel valued, that their participation matters**, that their participation has value and their actions can create impact.

## The Music Shop

This engagement was held at the Markham Music Festival in June to explore the connection between waste and shopping. We know people love to shop and this practice has even been referred to as 'retail therapy'. The Music Shop brought the focus on shopping at home and the opportunities for giving items new life and purpose rather than the current view of second hand and repurposing.

Rather than having the standard setup at the event, a table with brochures and a few demonstration features, a bohemian environment was created as a flare that drew people in who were intrigued by the look. Inside children and adults alike were encouraged to make and decorate shakers with toilet rolls, craft paper, seeds and bird food. Kitchen items were provided to use as instruments. There were also questions posted to tap into experiences of repurposing. Examples ranged from simple crafts including using yogurt containers for making sandcastles, to using large water containers as greenhouses; making old oil drums into a BBQ and transforming an old piano into a bar.

We saw eyes light up when seeing how simple activities like making a shaker could be a fun family activity, with an additional purpose of feeding the birds when its life as a shaker was over – all by ‘shopping at home’. We saw real energy come into the conversations when people spoke about their creativity when giving old stuff new meaning.

Creating items and toys from around the home was just the start. People also explored turning old TVs into unique storage, and reinventing ottomans. This is giving new life to everyday items. People were also surprised at how shopping at home could reduce waste going to the landfill while preventing the excess water, energy and materials needed to create the new item, all of which mitigates climate change. It can create financial savings for some and create economic opportunities for others all while getting that well needed consumer therapy.

There was another inkling starting to emerge. If there was a desire to see how we could give new life to things, how could this be applied to people? How could giving new life to things help deal with human pain points other than providing guilt free retail therapy, and financial savings? Could this idea of giving new life to both things and people become a shift that could improve wellbeing AND reduce waste? These were questions we continued to explore through the next two engagements.

## The Fashion Shop





The Fashion Shop was the next step to explore the connection between waste and lifestyles. It was not too long ago that socks were darned and clothing mended yet, with the inexpensive 'fast fashion,' it is easier to buy new than buy the thread...this is a key indicator of our consumer drives.

Fashion is a hot topic and plays a key role in the lifestyles of many. We were welcomed by the City of Richmond Hill to bring our 'pop up' Fashion Shop out to share with their residents on a summer night before the outdoor movie night.

Participants were invited into our pop up shop and asked to pick a trend card off the display tree. We started a conversation around whether or not they thought it was a good idea and if they would use such a trend. This was identified with a happy or sad face that then could be expanded on in a comment box on the card. The concept was to test the willingness to the following changing trends and to discover how these would be used and if not, why not.

1. **Zero Waste Clothing** - clothes made from scrap material
2. **Not Your Moms Swap Meet** - online swap meets
3. **Feeling Creative** - 39 ways to upcycle your t-shirt
4. **Wearable Technology** - patch that turns enzymes in sweat into power
5. **Uptown Thrift** - Online brand shopping at 90% off
6. **Cycle Fashion** - Honey comb helmet that packs up tight for transport.
7. **Subscription Shopping** - Custom made fashion just a click away
8. **Peace of Mind Shopping Mall** - Posh mall with only recycled items
9. **Intelligent Shopping** - Online stylist that remembers your choices

**SUBSCRIPTION SHOPPING**

Did you know.... you can have custom made fashion so you don't waste time and money on clothing you won't wear? Whether it is 'StitchFix' or 'Frank and Oak' you can look great without the fuss. Have their stylists put together an ensemble for you and have it delivered right to your door.

*Shopping never fit so well  
and wasted so little!*

**WHY CHANGE?**

**SLOWING FASHION DOWN**

That the average consumer bought 60% more clothing in 2014 than in 2000, but kept each garment half as long? There are growing solutions such as rental and subscription fashion where you get like-new attire.

We also shared statistics on the current situation with respect to fashion and waste and new trends in fashion. Examples of 'zero waste fashion' were presented as ways to keep that favorite piece in their wardrobe alive.

In summary, many residents were already aware of these new forms of accessing fashion, and over 92% were in support of the trends that were shared. These conversations, and the written feedback we received, demonstrated a very thoughtful response.

What this told us is that new fashion thinking has entered the mainstream and we need to capitalize on that. More importantly there are people across cultures and generations who are interested in learning more, and connecting to other people who also want to be part of mobilizing new solutions for fashion and waste.

Showing people how separate scraps of material could transform into a piece of wearable art excited the imagination. As a take away, children created reusable bags from old T-shirts.

This popup explored how fashion helps shift our lifestyles, which isn't a huge stretch. How we access fashion and the opportunity to share new trends and get feedback demonstrated a desire to go beyond a clothing swap. We could see the shift during the conversations that to buy new and recycle or donate the old does not help the growing landfill.

SM4RT Living was beginning to expand beyond conventional waste management in order to find new solutions to the systemic waste issues, and the dots between waste and wellbeing were increasing.

## The Jam Session



The first two engagements provided insights in terms of the connection between waste and our consumer mindset.

The Jam Session at 360 Kids was a multi-generational exploration of what SM4RT Living could mean by two diverse groups having true authentic conversations about their lives- struggles and resilience.

360 Kids is a community-based organization in Richmond Hill whose Mission is to help youth overcome crisis and transition to a state of safety and stability. Their Vision is that 'Every kid has access to a safe home', but equally importantly their focus is to surround kids in crisis with care. Every Bite Matters (EBM) is a 16-week paid employment program for youth who face barriers to employment and have interest in culinary skill development.

The Richmond Hill Community Hub combines affordable housing with commercial offices and youth services, and is home to families and seniors. The seniors who came to the session were looking for social interaction and connection. Rather than initiating something on our own, it was much more efficient and impactful to dovetail with an existing program to conduct this engagement.

The goal of this engagement was to explore the nature of people's lives and where the opportunities lay for the principles of SM4RT Living to take root.

We structured the conversation while the jam was being made. Given that working with our hands often allows us to generate more impactful conversations, jam making became both the ambiance and the vehicle of the conversation. As we started to prepare the strawberries the conversation began.

Questions typed on specially designed notes in envelopes were randomly picked by members of the group. Below are the 'conversation starters' and a summary of what was shared

1) How do you define waste? (Don't just think of things)?

The idea that television, internet and smart phones were wasting time created a debate. It was finally agreed that it was only a waste of time if you did not get any benefit from it, and that stress relief was a benefit. The young people in the conversation also said much of their education and knowledge came from the internet and the phone while the seniors still turned to books,

2) Have you ever have got yourself into a big, sticky mess? How did you get yourself out of this jam?

This question showed differences between generations more than the last question. One senior saw his sticky mess as a bad marriage while the youth had late curfews and missed classes. The similarities however came in how they got out of the mess. Everyone knew they needed help to get out of the mess yet the young people felt they had to solve it on their own.

3) Talk about the things that you feel are going right in your life right now.

A feeling of being protected helped or led by those that have left this world, especially ancestors, was included in what was going right. The 360 Kids program was another

key thing that was going well since it gave them the support and community needed to deal with the negative, "I have a facility that I can use and feel welcomed at, showers and food".

4) Talk about the things that you feel are not going as well as you'd like. Time, money and health are the trifecta of troubled things. The topic of money spun back into the idea of waste. The senior's advice was to save money now and watch what you spend it on. The concept of needs versus wants spoke to the youth more than saving money. One of the young people spoke of the greatest thing going wrong that everyone should be worrying about...climate change. This led to a strengthening of the conversation around spending wisely and reusing what you can.

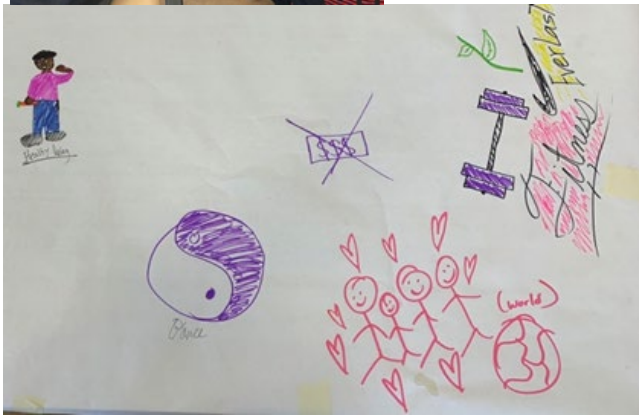
5) What new ideas do you feel would prevent waste? Preservation of things and not being quick to throw things away. Remembering a time when you kept things and fixed them and did not just throw it away. Things are not meant to last today. Food waste was a big topic and how fast-food restaurants throw away food at the end of the day - why don't they keep it and hand it out to homeless people?

6) How would you describe a fruitful life?

This question could not have created a greater diverse list of answers. However, some of the top things to create a fruitful life are having clear goals and a vision, a family you can support and a strong community to support you.

7) What are some of your best childhood memories?

Childhood memories included family traditions, family time, family gatherings and memories of cooking with family members. There was the cultural aspect of food that reminded them of the place they grew up (Mediterranean, Mexico, Jamaica).



At the end of the Jam Session, the participants drew pictures of what they believed SM4RT Living to be. These pictures had some similarities, like family and community, while others held personal beliefs and cultural practices. These depictions could be sorted into personal goals of SM4RT Living, like personal fitness, being healthy, mental balance, and monetary success; and extended goals of family, community, shared cultural practices and harmony with nature. SM4RT Living for this group was seen as synonymous with wellbeing and good living.

## The Network of Municipalities

While the community research was being undertaken, the local municipalities were also well along the way to developing a collective SM4RT Living Plan with a strong focus on waste management. Given what had been learned about the need to broaden the base of action, it was decided to explore ways of doing this through two workshops that focused on both the 'what' and the 'how' of the SM4RT Living Plan that would shape the next five years of waste management (and beyond).

This is a highly complex task as the municipalities are themselves highly diverse but do share significant compelling needs that actually unite them. To identify where these divergent and unifying dynamics were, in the first workshop the representatives were asked to undertake a fun yet revealing activity of developing a character that reflected their Town/City. The character was given a name, along with personality traits; distinguishing features, interests and values, nature of family and friends, and life goals. The outcome of this activity was fascinating and truly highlighted the dynamics at play in each of the municipalities. In many cases, two characters were developed as the Town/City couldn't be confined to one.

This persona activity set the context and stage for the planning activities that followed. A case for change emerged from the first workshop that solidified the need to evolve beyond the traditional waste management and bring new life to SM4RT Living.

Waste is a very complicated topic as it is embedded in consumer driven economic and social models. While there are some exciting new technological advancements on the horizon, action needs to evolve from steps in a plan to a movement around changing our consumption drives, patterns and outcomes. This will impact every aspect of the lifestyles of the residents of York Region, including industry, business and communities. This is beyond the scope of traditional waste management and requires diverse partners and stakeholders to step up and play a role. SM4RT Living could well be the vehicle to champion this shift by connecting waste management to the bigger picture and advocating and supporting new partnerships to develop the circular economy in York Region.

There were other considerations, in support of this 'call to action' that emerged from the first workshop that helped to shape the SM4RT Living Plan.

- There are significant differences across the nine municipalities including divergent dynamics: new technological thinkers and traditionalists living in the same community; the needs of families vs. retired communities; high energy urban vs. laid back rural living.
- One example of how these differences play out is the impact of growth and how various municipalities are dealing with the demands of both the 'old' who tend to be more resistant to change and want to keep the status quo for their sense of belonging and the 'new' who represent the desire to see change especially in order to feel a sense of belonging. This dichotomy is one where some truly innovative social infrastructure work needs to be done.
- Those who have already connected to the messaging of SM4RT Living and other environmental initiatives are 'in motion'. They need to be supported and helped to implement the SM4RT Living Plan. For the population of York Region for whom waste is not even on their radar, a very different type of change strategy is required. This involves positioning SM4RT Living as a vehicle that could help them solve a problem in their lives i.e. their pain points.

- New possibilities exist today that can help mobilize this evolution of SM4RT Living, such as innovations in health, mindfulness and wellness, food and shifting values.
- The concept of second hand needs a makeover and people are confused and disengaged from recycling.

## The Movement to Prevention – a New Frontier for Waste

The case had been made that change was required, and that SM4RT Living needed to evolve, but how? One of the most significant shifts that happened to SM4RT Living was the movement from merely reducing waste to actually preventing it. But what does this mean?

Over the course of the various engagements and workshops, the real root of the waste problem had emerged. It wasn't just a matter of managing the waste differently; the growing waste dilemma requires digging deeper than what ends up on the curb and at the depot. It begins with understanding why the levels of consumption that generate the waste are there in the first place.

When this was discussed with the municipal representatives at the second workshop, lights went on. It was believed that prevention was a much clearer message and one with urgency. When asked what prevention means to them, half responded with a shift to 'conscious shopping'. That is, focusing on a change to consumer behaviours that begins with the question "do I really need this? It is common to equate status with material belongings, so it is more of a belief system that needs to be addressed than a faulty behaviour. The home becomes the gatekeeper, the deciding place for what comes into the home in the first place and what does or does not end up in the garbage.

Practical steps to approach prevention at the household could include:

- Meal planning before grocery shopping to reduce food waste
- Purchasing items with limited to no packaging
- Bring your own bag / containers to the bulk store when shopping
- Inventory your clothing and household goods before purchasing additional items

Discussions with the municipal representatives focused on the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to improve packaging and product design that is more recyclable and durable for reuse. The circular economy was introduced as a way for us to think like nature – to restore and regenerate rather than throw away. A circular economy isn't all about preventing waste, but also understanding the value that is embodied in our resources.

With the SM4RT Living Plan taking on the goal of prevention as well as managing waste, along with an expanded understanding of the role of SM4RT Living in shifting lifestyles, it was time to explore how the Plan could be mobilized through a range of partner opportunities.

# The Partnership Forum

The Partnership Forum was where everything came together. The Forum was designed for a range of partners including community organizations, businesses, and sustainability teams from local municipalities to identify how SM4RT Living Plan priorities could be achieved through a range of mutually beneficial community partnerships. The focus of the session was to share a series of project ideas that had emerged from the review and update process as key opportunities. There was also a desire to introduce fresh thinking into an emerging strong Regional Plan to help us all move forward together.

Initial project specifications had been drafted in advance, and the members had the opportunity of 'getting to know' the projects through a dating process:

- Speed dating to assess where the interests lay;
- First date to determine compatibility with the potential partners and how partners could benefit from the projects;
- Second date to identify how the project could evolve given future trends;
- Third date which focused on what would be needed for the partners to 'commit' their energy and efforts to the project.

There were a number of significant outcomes from this session, in addition to the actual project profiles developed by the partners that demonstrated a true appetite for change. Through the session, the projects that were shaped brought new depth to the concept of SM4RT Living. Solid waste was not the focus of the projects, but the outcomes could be tied to waste prevention. Underlying the projects was a 'humanizing' of SM4RT Living, and the desire to link SM4RT Living to social issues. The concept of wellbeing ran throughout.

The majority of the Partnership Forum was spent exploring 5 types of projects that met the needs of the partners and could help to mobilize the SM4RT Living Plan. There were real gems in each of the projects that likely would not have emerged through a traditional process; for example

- The Small Business for a Circular Economy was presented as an incubator or accelerator where businesses could get together to get support. What emerged was the grassroots branding of 'Go Circular' that would organically define what a circular economy would look like rather than the typical incubator;
- The Voices of the Unheard Project was a broad concept to hear from those who were not represented at the Partnership Forum, to learn about what they need and what they do. One discussion led to the voices of the unheard around food, how we value food and expect others to value it. For example, how do we expect someone to value food when we donate only our dented cans? How can we give a platform to these voices of the unheard related to equal access to good quality food?
- The SM4RT X-Change Project focusing on sharing of information and exchanging of skills to build the community, rather than just fixing stuff. What emerged was a place for engaging people and having them meet their neighbours and build their own social network. It could be a virtual space to trade and share information;



- The Community Fund Project was presented as seed money set aside for community projects. The conversation evolved into identifying the need to go beyond the typical money side of the Fund and thinking about other currencies such as physical space, and the social infrastructure side for building social capacity to support community needs;
- The Community Hub Project was presented as a physical place and spaces that form a web of circular connection. Through discussions this project evolved to a multi-use and flexible system built on a well-defined business plan that is co-designed by the community, but whose glue is people actually talking to each other.

These are just a few examples of what make these projects different from what would normally emerge from typical waste management projects. There was a ‘sound of change’ that was evident at all the engagements but truly evident in this Forum. It started with silence, then moved into nervous laughter, then an outright buzz. What is at the core is that there was such enthusiasm to develop these projects in ways that would meet a wide range of partner objectives and those of SM4RT Living. They shared something very important - the desire to explore the changing lives of the community and the types of needs that were both overt and hidden – with SM4RT Living as a key vehicle to prevent waste of both things and people.

This is a key learning for SM4RT Living. One of the reasons people wanted to get involved in projects is because they saw an opportunity to meet their needs, but also a critical need these days– to learn something new, and be part of a larger initiative. When this happens, people take ownership, which is an important goal of SM4RT Living – moving out into the community in new ways and in different forms of relationships.

## Next Steps for SM4RT Living

Community research and engagement have shown us that the current approaches to waste reduction through recycling and repurposing won’t get us into the realm of prevention. Recycling is a way to continue on, business as usual; if you recycle you can continue to shop and consume. With the minimalist movement, climate awareness and rising mental health issues, there is a growing understanding that *things we purchase do not fill needs*.

Our research demonstrated a need to reframe waste with a broader perspective in which the physical waste represented lifestyles that are no longer sustainable. It is fundamentally about what we as a society value and how we take care of that.

There is a new Goal for SM4RT Living: ‘a world where nothing goes to waste’. This is a bold and compelling intention that is going to require bold action. Through our recommended actions we want to change the story from reducing waste to preventing waste and creating wellbeing for our residents.

### Recommended Actions:

1. **Innovative research and engagement** – Building on the sessions delivered for the review and update, incorporate ideas from waste and wellbeing into creative

engagements that can be used to share the concepts of SM4RT Living and the connection to broader social issues.

2. **Stakeholder Advisory Group** - The Stakeholder Advisory Committee that participated in shaping the SM4RT Living Plan provided a diversity of perspectives and expertise to the plan. The review and update identified opportunities to re-establish that group as a vehicle to support implementation in the community. There are two key areas requiring the multi-stakeholder perspective: 1) sowing the seeds of SM4RT Living movement by sharing their perspectives with York Region and driving change within their own sphere of influence, and 2) identifying meaningful measures of success.
3. **Strong partnerships** - Community partners have been a key ingredient in the successful projects launched in the first five years of the plan. The Review and Update identified the need to broaden and deepen the range of partnerships supporting the plan. Shifting the Region's role from leading partner into mentoring, facilitating and supporting other groups to develop and delivery projects aligned with SM4RT Living and their own priorities is also recommended. Internal processes and staff skill development should be aligned to support this shift.