Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: **Chair and Members**
               Community and Protective Services Committee

From: **Cheryl Smith, Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services**

Subject: **Neighbourhood Decision Making: 2024 Update**

Date: **May 21, 2024**

Recommendation

That on the recommendation of the Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services, the report dated May 21, 2024, titled "Neighbourhood Decision Making: 2024 Update" **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

The 2023 Neighbourhood Decision Making program saw an increase in the number of ideas submitted and votes cast, particularly in areas of higher social risk. Intentional and targeted engagement based on recommendations from the Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Fairness and Equity Review contributed significantly to the higher participation numbers. This report provides an overview of the 2023 Neighbourhood Decision Making program changes and results, as well as program enhancements for the 2024 cycle to continue to improve program fairness and equity including:
- expanded engagement strategies;
- update to the geographic boundaries and population distribution; and,
- update to the voting process to support the implementation of more ideas.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The Neighbourhood Decision Making Program is aligned with the strategic area of focus Wellbeing and Safety, as presented in the City of London Strategic Plan 2023-2027:
- Outcome: London has safe, vibrant, and healthy neighbourhoods and communities.
- Expected Result: Londoners have a strong sense of belonging and sense of place.
- Strategy: Create meaningful opportunities for all Londoner to contribute to the health and vibrancy of their neighbourhoods, including through resident-led decision-making opportunities.

Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1   Previous Reports Related to this Matter
- [Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Fairness and Equity Review](#) (CPSC June 13, 2023)
- [Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Value for Money (Vfm) Audit](#), (Audit Committee February 15, 2023)
- [London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy: Neighbourhood Decision Making Program](#) (CPSC, June 17, 2019)
- [London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy 2017-2020, Implementation of New Initiatives](#) (CPSC June 20, 2017)

1.2 Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Overview

Neighbourhood Decision Making (NDM) is a participatory budgeting program that was launched city-wide in 2017. The program provides an annual opportunity for community members to directly decide how to spend a portion of the municipal budget in their neighbourhoods.

The purpose of NDM is to engage, empower, and connect residents, by bringing neighbours together around community-driven projects that enhance and strengthen their neighbourhoods. The program provides opportunities for community members to participate in their neighbourhoods, learn about how municipal government works, and make decisions that directly impact their lives. It provides opportunities for the City to learn about what people want in their neighbourhoods, work collaboratively across service areas to assess and implement ideas, and to support community members through a defined and consistent process.

Londoners of all ages can propose and vote on ideas in their neighbourhoods. There is $50,000 available per geographic area. The maximum available budget per idea is $30,000. Once submitted, ideas are vetted, and if feasible, added to a ballot for a public vote. Civic Administration then works with residents to implement the winning ideas based on the number of votes received.

The purpose of this report is to:
- outline program enhancements and results from 2023;
- share program enhancements being made in 2024; and,
- report next steps for 2024 program implementation.

1.3 2023 NDM Program Enhancements and Results

On June 27, 2023, the Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Fairness and Equity Review report was approved by Municipal Council. Results showed that overall, the program is fair and equal in terms of ideas submitted and budget distributed across the city. Findings did however suggest that voting rates and the number of winning ideas could be improved in some areas. In response to findings, program enhancements to improve equity and fairness were implemented in 2023. This included enhancing community engagement efforts to focus on areas with high social risk in addition to areas with low participation.

In 2023, new engagement activities included:
- partnering with Neighbourhood Resource Centres to share information with residents, assisting residents with idea submission and offering five additional in-person voting days and locations throughout London.
- offering in-person voting at 10 City of London Community Centres from Monday to Friday of Vote Week; and,
- providing informational and voting pop-ups facilitated by City of London Community Connectors who speak Arabic, Urdu, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Mandarin and who are members of Black and Indigenous communities.

Enhanced and targeted engagement contributed to a significant increase in program participation. In 2023, 100 more ideas were submitted (a 41% increase), and 1,800 more individuals voted than in 2022 (a 43% increase). In addition, areas with a high Social Risk Index[a] (7-9) were more likely to have submitted ideas. Six out of nine areas with the highest Social Risk Index score (7-9) had above average numbers for ideas submitted. The top five Planning Districts with the highest number of submitted ideas coincided with the top five planning districts with the lowest average income.

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[a] Social Risk Index: The index is comprised of nine indicators that when combined, show the socioeconomic framework of each geographic area. The nine indicators include: % Movers 1 year ago, % Income from Government Transfer Payments, % low income after-tax 2015, % Speaking neither English or French, % Immigrated from 2006-2016, % Without high school graduation certificate age 15+, % Owned occupied private dwellings, Unemployment rate, age 15 years and over, % Of total lone parent families.

The following chart outlines the annual and cumulative program participation results.

	Ideas Submitted	Ideas on Ballots	Individuals Who Voted	Total Votes	Successful Projects
2017	314	149	4,900	11,480	14
2018	226	143	7,114	12,281	17
2019	216	104	10,852	20,691	20
2020	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2021	230	86	4,750	10,396	18
2022	234	78	4,187	9,944	24
2023	330	109	5,978	12,229	15
Total	**1,220**	**669**	**37,781**	**77,021**	**108**

Note: 2020 cancelled due to pandemic

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

In 2024, the following program enhancements will be implemented to continue to improve program equity and fairness:
1) expand engagement strategies based on lessons learned and successes;
2) update the geographic boundaries and population distribution to better reflect growth in the city; and,
3) update the voting process to allow more ideas to be implemented.

2.1 Expand Engagement Strategies

In 2024, the community engagement strategy for NDM will continue to be informed by demographic data, including application of the social-risk index. Community engagement to support idea submission and voting among equity-denied groups and residents in areas of higher social risk will be enhanced by:
- promoting the program at cultural and neighbourhood events;
- building on and establishing new collaborations with community organizations that have established relationships and reach; and
- working with Community Connectors who speak Arabic, Urdu, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Mandarin and who are members of Black and Indigenous communities to develop and execute engagement strategies informed by their expertise and experience.

To leverage the above engagement strategies, idea submission will open in June rather than August, providing more time to promote the program and support residents with idea submission and voting, where support is requested or required.

2.2 Update Geographic Boundaries and Population Distribution

For the purposes of NDM, the city is divided into five geographic areas based on population, consideration of major road, rail and river arteries, Neighbourhood Association boundaries, and resident identified neighbourhood boundaries. These geographic areas are called: Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southwest, and Southeast. The current boundaries were established in the first year of the city-wide program (2017).

An analysis of geographic boundaries and population showed that slight boundary adjustments would more equally distribute population and keep more resident identified neighbourhoods whole. To rebalance the population of the geographic areas for the 2024 cycle, the boundaries have been adjusted. Below is a summary of the boundary adjustment impacts:

- The Northwest geographic area is smaller (Cherryhill and Proudfoot area removed) at 86,500 population from a former population of 97,500.
- The Northeast geographic area did not change.

- The Central geographic area increased in population from 75,700 to 89,000 and now includes the Cherryhill and Proudfoot area, including Eagle Heights Elementary School, from the northwest and Southcrest Planning District (Kensal Park and Berkshire Village) from the southeast.
- The Southwest geographic area decreased in population by almost 13,000, from 106,300 to 89,000. Prior to the boundary adjustment, this geographic area had a notably higher population than the other four (4) areas, due to high growth in the last five (5) years.
- The Southeast geographic area now includes all of the Hamilton Road Planning District which was previously split in two (2). The overall population of the Southeast geographic area increased by 10,000, from 70,000 to 80,000.

See Appendix A for a map of the past and adjusted boundaries that will be used in 2024 onwards.
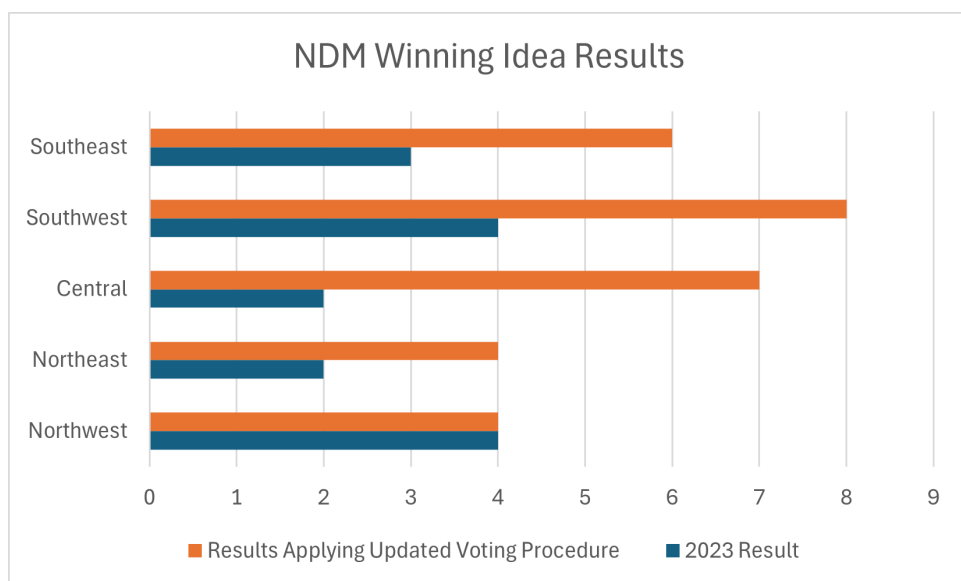
2.3 Update Voting Process

Enhanced engagement strategies have resulted in higher program participation; however most feasible ideas submitted are not successful. In order to continue to enhance the fairness and equity of the program, and help more residents experience successful outcomes, the NDM voting process will be updated in 2024 to provide residents with the opportunity to vote for more ideas.

The current voting process allows residents to vote for up to three (3) ideas in any one geographic area, with no single idea being valued at more than $30,000. In order to increase the number of ideas being implemented, in 2024, residents will have the opportunity to:

1) vote for one larger idea that can be implemented for $15,000 to $30,000; and
2) vote for up to three (3) smaller ideas that can be implemented for under $15,000.

When votes are counted, the project with the most votes that is valued at $15,000 to $30,000 will be implemented. The remaining budget in each geographic area will be utilized to fund the projects with the most votes that are valued at less than $15,000.

Analysis of 2023 voting results showed that this adjustment would have resulted in 29 ideas being implemented rather than 15, with increased diversity of winning ideas across categories (Parks & Trails, Art, Culture & Events, Transportation & Roads). The bar chart below shows the impact of this model compared to 2023 winning idea data.

This change will build on program equity and ensure that as more residents participate, the program can offer more tangible results.

2.4 Next Steps

The idea submission phase for the NDM program will launch in June 2024, including implementation of the program updates included in this report. Idea submission will close in September 2024. The voting process will take place over a one-week period in November 2024.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

Annual funding to support the Neighbourhood Decision Making Program exists in the Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services budget. Through the 2024 – 2027 multi-year budget process, $250,000 was allocated to this program annually.
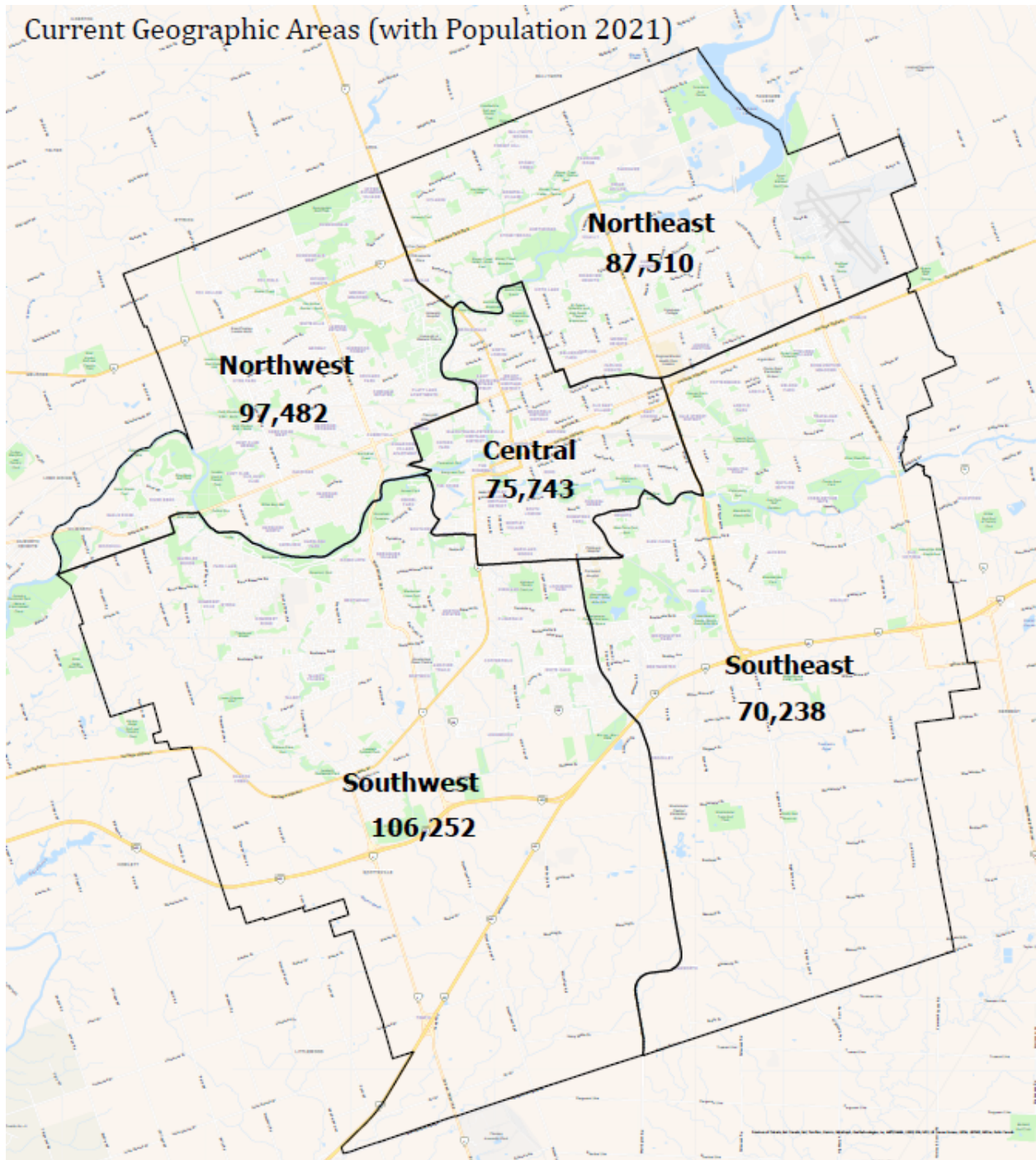
Conclusion

In 2023, NDM saw an increase in the number of ideas submitted and votes cast, particularly in areas of higher social risk. Enhanced resident engagement efforts guided by the Neighbourhood Decision Making Program Fairness and Equity Review contributed to the growth of the program. The 2024 program update will include enhanced resident engagement, revision of program geographic boundaries and revision of the administrative procedure for voting. Each of the program updates are grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion, with emphasis on supporting the participation of equity-denied groups and residents that live in areas of higher social risk.

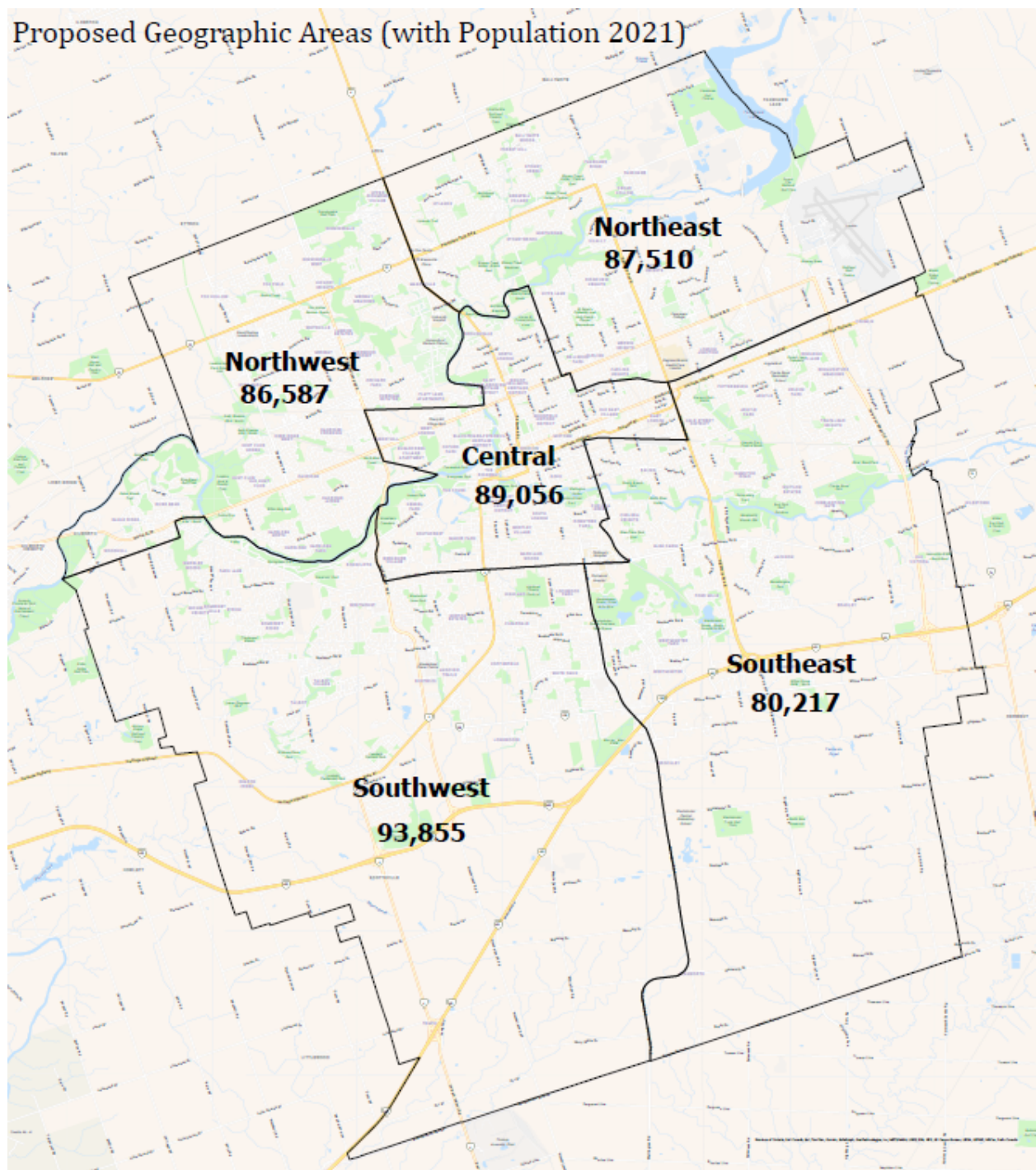|	
Prepared by:	**Jennifer, Manager, Neighbourhood Development and Support**
Submitted by:	**Kristen Pawelec, Director, Community Development and Grants**
Recommended by:	**Cheryl Smith, Deputy City Manager, Neighbourhood and Community-Wide Services**

Current Geographic Areas (with Population 2021)

Northeast
87,510

Northwest
97,482

Central
75,743

Southeast
70,238

Southwest
106,252

Current NDM Geographic Areas	Pop 2025	Pop 2030
Central London	81,541	87,702
Northeast	94,590	103,427
Northwest	105,730	114,409
Southeast	74,825	79,410
Southwest	116,235	127,358
Grand Total	472921	512306

Proposed Geographic Areas (with Population 2021)

Northeast
87,510

Northwest
86,587

Central
89,056

Southeast
80,217

Southwest
93,855

Proposed NDM Geographic Areas	Pop 2025	Pop 2030
Central London	96,320	104,170
Northeast	94,601	103,447
Northwest	94,326	101,757
Southeast	84,968	89,637
Southwest	102,706	113,295
Grand Total	472921	512306