

Community Safety and Well Being Plan

for the Municipality of Neebing and the Townships of O'Connor, Conmee and Gillies

Introduction

On January 1, 2019, amendments to the Province's *Police Services Act* came into effect which required every municipality in Ontario to have a "community safety and well being plan" ("cswbp") adopted by July of 2021. Such plans must be posted to the community, and must be monitored, updated and reported to the Province.

It was anticipated by the authors of this cswbp that, with the onset (in March, 2020) and continuation (to date) of the COVID-19 Pandemic, that this deadline might be post-poned, but to date, it has not been.

Municipalities are permitted to team up with neighbouring municipalities to create a joint cswbp, applicable to all of them. That is what the Municipality of Neebing and the Townships of Gillies, Conmee and O'Connor decided to do, in the best interests of their communities. In this plan, the four municipalities are referred to as the "Associates" or the "Associate Municipalities". Policing and safety matters, as well as "well-being" indicators are very similar for all of the Associates, and it made sense to combine resources for this project.

The legislation requires the creation of a multi-sector "advisory committee" to provide input and guidance in the formation of the cswbp. COVID-19 has hindered the creation of, and collaboration with, this committee, however, the Associates are committed to meeting Provincial requirements, and will move forward with an appointed advisory committee in 2021, and in future, as restrictions are lifted. In the meantime, the Associates' senior administrative officers (Clerks and Clerk-Treasurers), together with the former Solicitor-Clerk of the Municipality of Neebing, represent several of the sectors and interest groups mandated to be on the Advisory Committee. Accordingly, this plan was prepared by these individuals, and will be updated as an Advisory Committee is formed, and as new 2021 Census information becomes available (anticipated to be available in November of 2021).

According to the legislation, cswbp's must identify priority "risk factors" that impact community safety and well-being, strategies to reduce the prioritized risk factors, and set out measurable outcomes so that the plan can be monitored for effectiveness.

Studies have shown that such planning benefits local communities in many ways. It also allows municipal leaders to focus attention on service delivery that addresses the priority risk factors. Continual monitoring of the plan, including the measurable outcomes, allows for a better understanding of trends, gaps, priorities and successes.

Provincial Framework

The philosophies and theories that lead to the creation of the provincial framework have been tested and tried, and proven true in urban centers. They have not as yet been proven in rural settings. That having been said, the Associate Municipalities accept and are responding to the Provincial requirements.

The framework recognizes 4 categories of “influence” that are impacted and assisted by a cswbp. Each category, as deployed, results in increased costs, both societally and monetarily.

a) Social Development

The first category is “Social Development”. A wide variety of people, agencies and organizations can bring to the table different perspectives and expertise to address social development.

Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen.

Social development means investing in people. It requires the removal of barriers so that all citizens can journey toward their dreams with confidence and dignity. It is about refusing to accept that people who live in poverty will always be poor. It is about helping people so they can move forward on their path to self-sufficiency.

It is the desire of the authors of this plan, and the municipal councils who adopt this plan, that every resident of the Associate municipalities has the opportunity to grow, develop their own skills and contribute to their families and communities in a meaningful way. If they are healthy, well educated and trained to enter the workforce and are able to make a decent wage they are better equipped to meet their basic needs and be successful. Their families will also do well and the communities will see the benefits.

Social development involves learning and education. These facilitate a greater degree of success. Making sure that children get a good start in their education goes a long way to increasing their success later in life.

In addition, a safe and affordable place to live is very important in helping people achieve self-sufficiency. It is the focus of family life; where families can live safely, nurture their children, build community relationships and care for aging parents. Without a decent place to live, it is difficult to function as a productive member of society.

Other investments in people that contribute to the economic prosperity of society include youth programs and services, post-secondary education, job creation, and the promotion of healthy, active living and safe and secure communities.

b) Prevention

The second category is “prevention”. This refers to “proactively reducing identified risks and implementing evidence-based situational measures, policies or programs to reduce priority risks”.

The goal is to address situations before they lead to crime, victimization and/or harm.

c) Risk Intervention

The third category is “risk intervention”. This refers to intervention in situations where risk to the community’s safety and well being is threatened. Risks could involve crime, victimization or other harm.

This intervention is anticipated (based on an appropriate cswbp) to occur before an “incident response” is required.

Multiple sectors of society can work together to intervene in crises situations prior to the need to engage a 9-1-1 response, involving police and other emergency responders.

d) Incident Response

The term “incident response” refers to the activities that take place when a 9-1-1 call is placed. The incident may be “critical” or “non-critical”, but the response is similar in both cases.

Police, fire, emergency medical services, child welfare services, mental health services, etc. may be required, depending on what prompted that 9-1-1 call. In any given community, these resources may not be available for response. This can lead to the “wrong” responders attempting to resolve a crisis issue.

Incident response is “expensive”, both in terms of actual cost to government, and actual risk to those involved. If a person is experiencing a mental health crisis, response by police is quite likely NOT the most appropriate response, and may lead to outcomes that are not desirable. This has been demonstrated in many crisis situations in the past decade (and more).

A cswbp is an attempt to thwart these negative outcomes before they arise.

Community Consultation

Each of the Associate Municipalities canvassed their residents for concerns relating to community safety and well being in early 2020, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey that was distributed is Appendix One to this cswbp.

The response rate to the survey was not ideal – it was far less than statistically representative, however, the majority of those who responded indicated no concerns associated with community safety and well-being. This is consistent with the anecdotal rural Ontario residential living experiences, overall.

As the cswbp develops and is monitored, more surveying will be undertaken to gauge the Associates' communities' experiences and perceptions.

Census Information – Population Statistics

The information in the table below is based on 2016 Census data. New data, based on the 2021 Census, is anticipated to be released in November, 2021. This cswbp will be updated with the new information when it is available.

Census data does not always make statistical “sense”. Several anomalies were encountered, some of which were likely due to “rounding” errata. It is hoped the 2021 census will be more accurate.

Population Distribution:		Income:	
Total:	4011	Average of median personal income before taxes	40,341
Ages 0 to 14:	655	Range of above, lowest to highest	33,728 to 42,965
Ages 15 to 64:	2715	Average of median household income before taxes	83,520
Ages 65+	635	Range of above, lowest to highest	66,944 to 89,856
Ages 85+	40	Number of Individuals in low-income households	325
Immigration, Ethnocultural Diversity & Aboriginal Identity		Home Ownership (own v. rent)	
Canadian Citizens	3823	Owner households	1530
Immigrants	185	Tenant households	55
Non-permanent residents	0		
Identify as visible minority	10	Unaffordable Housing	
Identify as Aboriginal	170	Owner households	180
Educational Attainment (Population aged 25-64)		Tenant households	0
Less than High School	645	Labour Force Participation (ages 15+)	
High school or equivalent	870	In labour force	2185
Post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree	1720	Labour force participation rate (average)	65.8%
		Unemployment Rate (ages 15+ in labour force)	
		Unemployed	195
		Unemployment Rate (average)	7.6%

In summary, the Associates’ communities are, for the most part, comprised of working-age citizens with relatively high education rates. Most people are owners, rather than renters, of their accommodation – and where there are renters, none are in circumstances of

“unaffordability”. On the flip side, 180 of 1530 owner-occupied households (or 12%) identify as living in “unaffordable” housing.

Most of the Associates’ residents identify as Canadian Citizens. A small percentage (0.2%) identify as visible minorities, and 4.0% identify as Aboriginal.

Statistics, such as those compiled by the census data, are important data, but the lived experience is far more relevant to community safety and well being. Continual monitoring and updating with community input will be an ongoing requirement.

Risk Factors

There are many risk factors identified across Ontario that relate to community safety and well being. These include (in no particular order):

- a) Addictions/substance use
- b) Mental health concerns
- c) Crime rates (as well as the nature of the crimes perpetrated)
- d) Housing and homelessness
- e) Poverty and income
- f) Education levels/opportunities

Risk factors for the Associate Municipalities were based (in the absence of an Advisory Committee – due to the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions) on OPP statistics relating to 9-1-1 (and/or other) responses in the Associates’ communities (“c” above), and the authors’ lived experience.

The following commentary relates to the 6 “risk factors” identified above, as they relate to the Associate Municipalities.

- a) Addictions/substance use

None of the Associate Municipalities have (or have reported, or have had their residents report) an “obvious” concern with addictions/substance use issues in their respective communities. That having been said, it is recognized that these issues may be associated with domestic violence, which is of concern, as noted below. It is also recognized that addictions and substance use issues are often hidden behind closed doors, and are not readily “reported” or acknowledged by persons in the throws of them.

It is noted that addiction and substance use issues are closely associated with mental health issues.

b) Mental Health

None of the Associate Municipalities have (or have reported, or have had their residents report) an “obvious” concern with mental health issues in their respective communities. That having been said, it is recognized that these issues may be associated with domestic violence, which is of concern, as noted below. It is also recognized that mental health issues continue to be met with stigma, and are not readily “reported” by persons who suffer from them.

It is noted that mental health issues are closely associated with addictions/substance use issues.

c) Crime Rates/Crimes Perpetrated

The largest number of police responses in the Associate Municipalities relate to domestic violence, traffic-related incidents and break-and-enters in seasonally occupied residences.

That having been said, the number of police responses overall is not comparable to those in urban settings. Comparing statistics between unlike municipalities is not reliable nor recommended by the authors of this cswbp.

d) Housing and Homelessness

None of the Associate Municipalities have reported homelessness issues. It has been demonstrated that the homeless population tends to migrate to urban centers where opportunities to access services and/or potential income-earning prospects are greater.

Housing, however, *may* be an issue in the Associate Municipalities, based on the 2016 Census information. It is noteworthy that survey responses did not identify this as an issue, however, it is equally noteworthy that the survey responses were low (overall), and those who live in poverty are the least likely to respond to such surveys.

Data from the 2016 Census recognized that out of 1530 owner-occupied residences in the Associate Municipalities, 180 (or approximately 12%) are in circumstances of “unaffordability” – meaning more than 30% of the household income is spent on housing costs. Equally noteworthy is that none of the (very few) tenant-occupancies identified unaffordability.

When an owner has an “unaffordability” issue, the “obvious” option is to sell the home. This may not be an option for many – either realistically or emotionally.

The Associate Municipalities will need to work on communicating options (both realistic and emotional), limited as they may be, for people living in owner-occupied homes who have affordability issues.

Affordability in terms of owner-occupied homes can relate to costs associated with:

- the need for capital repairs;
- property taxes; and
- occupancy costs (heat, hydro, internet, telephone, cellular telephone, landfill site fees, etc.)

It is of note that none of the Associate Municipalities provide water or sewer services to their constituents. Such costs would, if applicable, have driven the statistics differently.

Municipalities have no control over individual property owners' needs for capital repairs, or the occupancy costs associated with services that the municipality does not provide.

With respect to a municipal tax bill, some of these owner-occupied residential affordability issues can be directly related to Provincial policies which drive up property taxes, outside of the control of the local municipality's council. These include mandated payments to outside agencies such as: conservation authorities, health units, social service administration boards, Ontario Provincial Police services, and more.

e) Poverty and Income

The 2016 Census data replicated above shows average median incomes (both personally and by household) well above the poverty level (recognized by the Federal government) for all of the Associated Municipalities.

This must be contrasted, however, with the number of individuals (325 out of 4011 or 8%) living in low-income households in the Associate Municipalities, as well as 180 owner-occupied dwellings (out of 1530, or 12%) reporting spending more than 30% of their household income on accommodation (considered to be "unaffordable").

Census data relating to "low income" can be difficult to distill, as the number of family members per household contributes to poverty, despite the fact that a "household income" may appear to be above the poverty line.

The authors recognize that the most vulnerable persons impacted by poverty are children.

Poverty can be addressed in a number of ways – government assistance is one (which has not proven to be an overall answer). Another is to provide assistance for both education and training, as well as accessing job opportunities for employment opportunities that are revealing themselves for the future.

None of these options are realistic for small, northern, rural municipalities to directly supply. It would be improper (and also inequitable) to allow the property taxes levied against one property owner to subsidize the needs of another. The Associate Municipalities are not in a position to supply these services, however, they can (and do) convey information to their constituents on the services available through other orders of government.

The issues of poverty and income are Provincial matters, and is best left to the Province to make decisions on services addressing these issues.

f) Education Levels/Opportunities

It is well beyond the scope/jurisdiction of the Associate Municipalities to provide education opportunities for their constituents.

This is something to which the Associate Municipalities encourage the Provincial government to respond.

There are countless examples of individuals from impoverished backgrounds who have risen to the challenge, and achieved higher education on scholarship bases. Scholarships that are privately endowed need to be encouraged and incentivized. Provincial and Federal scholarships should also be encouraged.

Summary: Risk Factors

Of the known identified risk factors across Ontario municipalities, the following are risk factors to community safety and well being for the Associate Municipalities which may potentially be within their control through a cswbp:

- a) Domestic Violence (which could be related to addiction/substance use and/or mental health concerns);
- b) Housing affordability for owner-occupied residences;
- c) Traffic safety; and
- d) Break-and-enter thievery for un-occupied (seasonally) residences.

Response: Strategies to Reduce Risk Factors

- a) Domestic Violence (which could be related to addiction/substance use and/or mental health concerns)

The Associate Municipalities, working together with appropriate social agency partners, will provide information to educate the public on resources for people to access based on domestic violence, addiction/substance use and/or mental health concerns.

The Associate Municipalities are aware of, and note that, domestic violence is “on the rise” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

b) Housing affordability for owner-occupied residences

All of the Associate Municipalities work hard at keeping property tax rates in an affordable range. That having been said, there are elements of a municipal budget that are completely outside the jurisdiction of the Associate Municipalities, including mandated payments to boards and agencies of the Province.

The sole element of “housing affordability for owner-occupied residences” that the Associate Municipalities have any semblance of control over, is the property tax bill.

The Associate Municipalities always have, and will continue to, work towards efficiencies in order to keep those elements of the property tax bill that they have control over, affordable.

For all other household costs that may make housing unaffordable, the Associate Municipalities have, and will continue to, relentlessly lobby the Provincial government for equitable and reasonable policy changes that would make the levies that municipalities are mandated to pay to Provincial agencies fair.

The Associate Municipalities have, and will continue to, make available to homeowners information associated with: cost reduction strategies, energy efficiency recommendations, grants available for home renovations, and more.

c) Traffic safety

Motor vehicle collisions with other motor vehicles, with immobile objects (i.e. telephone poles, rocks, ditches), with pedestrians (rare) and with wildlife (deer, moose, wolves, bear) continue to be among the highest (statistically speaking) calls for police assistance among the Associate Municipalities.

The Associate Municipalities have always, and will continue to, provide information to the public on the merits of conformity to posted speed limits, and other associated information that may have an impact in curbing the number of incidents in this regard.

Speeding remains a concern for all of the Associate Municipalities and their constituents. Posted speed limits are often ignored, because residents and/or passers-through recognize that policing is limited in rural areas, so their “chances” of being ticketed are slim.

Some of the Associate Municipalities have invested in signage that reports to a motorist the speed at which they are travelling. This has been shown to address speeding by some (but not all) drivers.

The Associate Municipalities will continue to communicate the dangers of speeding to their constituents.

d) Break-and-enter thievery for un-occupied (seasonally) residences

This is not an issue for some of the Associate Municipalities, who do not have many “homes” which are only seasonally occupied. It remains an issue for other Associate Municipalities.

Addressing this issue is a province-wide (indeed, country-wide) matter.

For Associate Municipalities for whom this is an issue, the merits of private home security systems continue to be communicated.

Measurable Outcomes

For the identified priority risks, the only measurable outcome is police statistics related to these matters. The Associate Municipalities will continue to track these statistics and report to the Province, as required.

In particular, the Associate Municipalities will continue to monitor all of these statistics, in order to (a) report on the progress of this plan; and (b) recognize new/emerging issues which have an impact on this plan.

Conclusion

In general, Rural Ontario remains a safe and affordable place to live and raise a family. Community safety and well-being in rural municipalities, including the Associates, is very positive.

Municipal leaders for the Associates will continue to monitor their communities’ concerns and the statistics associated with the risk factors identified in this cswbp, and respond to any issues that arise.

As the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions are lifted, the Associate Municipalities will move forward with the required Advisory Committee, and this cswbp will be reviewed, amended and updated with the input of that Advisory Committee.

APPENDIX ONE: Community Survey

(Note: some communities may have adjusted some of the questions to suit their particular needs; each community adjusted the questions to be directed to their own community rather than all four of the Associate Municipalities.)

1. What is your postal code?
2. What does community safety and well-being mean to you?
3. Overall, what do you feel are the 5 most pressing community safety and well being issues in Neebing, Gillies, O’Connor and/or Conmee? (Check the box beside each of the five you feel meet this description). Please keep your responses to the needs/concerns *within these 4 communities* rather than a more broad response for Thunder Bay District or Ontario.

	Access to appropriate and affordable food (also known as “food security”)
	Access to services (government offices, banking, personal support, etc.)
	Accessibility for persons with disabilities
	Addictions and/or Substance mis-use
	Affordable housing
	Age-friendly initiatives
	Aging in Place
	Child protection (i.e. Children’s Aid Society involvement)
	Community belonging – sense of place within the Community
	Co-ordination between services in the Community
	Crime Prevention
	Criminal activity by individual actors (rather than by gangs)
	Criminal gang activity
	Discrimination against people based on their addictions or substance misuse
	Discrimination against people based on their age
	Discrimination against people based on their gender or gender identity
	Discrimination against people based on their mental health
	Discrimination against people based on their race
	Discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation (i.e. homophobia)
	Domestic violence/intimate partner violence
	Fraud (such as: identity theft, door-to-door sales/fraud, electronic communications fraud)
	Healthy Childhood Development
	Homelessness
	Human trafficking
	Injury prevention
	Mental Health - adults
	Mental Health – youth/children
	Opportunities for employment and employment skills development
	Personal and overall community security and safety
	Poverty and income

	Support for youth that are vulnerable and/or at risk
	Traffic/road safety
	Other(s)

4. In your opinion, what ideas should be included in, and/or what are the things that we need to consider in creating, a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan that will enhance safety and well-being in the communities of Neebing, Gillies, O'Connor and Conmee?

5. Select any of the following that apply to you, circling each municipality that properly completes the sentence:

	I live in Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee
	I own property in Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee, but do not live there
	I work in Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee
	I have relatives that live in Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee

6. Select the sentence that best describes your feelings about community safety in one or more of our four communities (circle the name of the community you are commenting on):

	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is an extremely safe community to live in.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a fairly safe community to live in.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee cannot be described as either "safe" or "unsafe" to live in, but is safe in some aspects, and unsafe in other aspects.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a more unsafe than safe community to live in.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a relatively unsafe community to live in.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is an extremely unsafe community to live in.

7. Select the sentence that best describes your feelings about community well-being in one or more of our four communities (circle the name of the community you are commenting on):

	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is an extremely healthy community from a well-being perspective.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a fairly healthy community from a well-being perspective.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee cannot be described as either "healthy" or "unhealthy" to live in from a well-being perspective, but is healthy in some aspects, and unhealthy in other aspects.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a more unhealthy than healthy community to live in from a well-being perspective.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is a relatively unhealthy community to live in from a well-being perspective.
	I feel that Gillies Neebing O'Connor Conmee is an extremely unhealthy community to live in from a well-being perspective.

8. Answer each of the following statements with “true” or “false”, indicating which community you are responding about.

	True	False	Statement	Community
(a)			I feel safe when I am in this community within a building.	Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee
(b)			I feel safe when I am in this community within a vehicle.	Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee
(c)			I feel safe when I am in this community walking outdoors or visiting a park or other public space, accompanied by one or more other persons, at any time of night or day.	Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee
(d)			I feel safe when I am in this community walking outdoors or visiting a park or other public space, alone, during daylight hours.	
(e)			If something happened within this community that threatened my personal safety, I would know who to call for assistance, or to whom I should report my concerns.	Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee

9. Please select the age group that best describes you?

	10-19
	20-29
	30-39
	40-49
	50-59
	60-69
	70-79
	80 or older
	Prefer not to answer

10. Please indicate which of the following best describes you (choose all that apply):

	Domestic Student
	International Student
	Home-owner in Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee (circle appropriate one)
	Home-renter in Neebing Gillies O’Connor Conmee (circule appropriate one)
	Member of a residents’ group or a community association (including social media groups based on community)

	Member of a Faith community
	Employed in or representative of a non-profit service provider
	Employed in or representative of a government service provider
	Employed in the business sector
	Business owner
	Retiree or other non-working individual (i.e. person receiveing WSIB or ODSP benefits)

11. Please indicate your (individual; not household) level of income:

	\$0
	Under \$10,000
	\$10,000-\$24,999
	\$25,000-\$49,999
	\$50,000-\$99,999
	\$100,000-\$149,000
	\$150,000 or more
	Prefer not to answer

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