



City of Hamilton Report for Consideration

To: Mayor and Members
Emergency and Community Services Committee

Date: March 20, 2025

Report No: HSC25007

Subject/Title: Community Safety and Well-Being: Gender Based Safety Audit

Ward(s) Affected: (City Wide)

Recommendations

1. That Council **ACCEPT** the YWCA Hamilton Gender-Based Safety Audit Report.
2. That staff be **DIRECTED** to report back to Emergency and Community Services Committee in Q3 2025 with a detailed action plan and any resources required to implement recommendations outlined in the Gender-Based Safety Audit Report.
3. That Council **ADOPT** the Ministry of Solicitor General's definition of community safety and well-being to guide municipal policies, programs, and strategic planning: "The ideal state of a sustainable community where everyone is safe, has a sense of belonging, opportunities to participate, and where individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression¹".

Key Facts

- The purpose of the report is to provide an update to Council in response to a motion passed in September 2023 for the City to undertake a Gender-Based Safety Audit.
- The audit was conducted by the YWCA and took place from January to December 2024 with the goal of providing policy recommendations, operational improvements, and evidence-based actions to enhance service delivery and public infrastructure based on audit findings.

¹ [Appendix E - Definitions | Community safety and well-being planning framework: Booklet 3 - A shared commitment in Ontario | ontario.ca](#)

- This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the audit and highlights safety strengths and opportunities for improvement for both the City of Hamilton and the broader community.
- This report will outline quick wins the City of Hamilton can implement immediately and planned next steps for considering mid-term and longer-term recommendations.
- This work will be aligned with the broader Community Safety and Well-Being Plan to allow for the integration of gender-based concerns to be considered at all stages of policy, planning and service delivery across the City to address identified safety issues.

Financial Considerations

Not Applicable

Background

The Gender-Based Safety Audit (“the audit”) aims to address community safety and well-being, ensuring all residents feel safe especially women, girls, and gender diverse people. This is in direct response to the recognition of gender-based and intimate partner violence as an epidemic as declared by Council within the City of Hamilton on August 18th, 2023. It is also identified as a current focus area for Hamilton’s Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. The following statistics demonstrate the need to complete a gender-based safety audit:

- In the United Nations report “Cities Alive: Designing Cities That Work for Women”², it is stated that “without a gender-responsive approach to urban planning, cities often compound gender inequalities that restrict women’s social and economic opportunities, health and well-being, sense of safety and security, and access to justice and equity.”
- Statistics show that women in Hamilton feel less safe than men, with 34% feeling safe walking alone after dark compared to 63% of men. Women are also more likely to experience unwanted sexual behavior in public³.
- People who identified as women in Hamilton were significantly more likely to experience unwanted sexual behaviour in public than men (34% versus 15%)⁴

The call for a gender-based safety audit provides the City with an opportunity to achieve its goal of promoting equity in planning, budgeting, and implementation of City services,

² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Cities Alive: Designing Cities that Work for Women,” accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.undp.org/publications/cities-alive-designing-cities-work-women#:~:text=Without%20a%20gender%2Dresponsive%20approach,access%20to%20justice%20and%20equity.>

³ Statistics Canada, Safe Cities Profile Series: Key indicators by census metropolitan area, May 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00001/hamilton-eng.htm>

with an emphasis on creating safe, thriving neighborhoods. This initiative is one of many ways the City is working to enhance community-driven solutions to safety and well-being, with the aim of ensuring all residents feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and can meet their needs through use of public spaces and amenities within the community.

In September 2023, Council passed a motion with the following directive:

- a. That the YWCA lead the development of gender-based safety audits in Hamilton working in collaboration with City staff and community partners; and
- b. That staff continue to work closely with the Community Safety and Well Being System Leadership Table to increase awareness of gender-based violence and explore opportunities for further action; and
- c. That the aim of the safety audit review is to collect and compile evidence-based data, inputs, suggestions, and recommendations on barriers to women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals' safety and security in public spaces with a particular focus on the following realms:
 - i. Future LRT Station design;
 - ii. Select HRS stops and operations;
 - iii. City of Hamilton park redevelopment plans;
 - iv. City of Hamilton recreation facilities;
 - v. City Streets and/or intersections;
 - vi. Any other space highlighted by audit participants.
- d. That the goal of the reviews will be to understand women and gender-diverse persons' key safety concerns in city spaces and to bring about improvements to the physical environments to remove hazards and improve feelings of safety along with any policy and/or operational recommendations and evidence-based actions to improve the service delivery and public infrastructure based on the audit findings; and
- e. That staff be authorized to provide one-time funding in the amount of \$100,000 from the Building Safer Communities Fund (ID 679114) to support the safety audit.

Municipalities in Ontario, particularly larger cities like Toronto, have been leading efforts in integrating gender-inclusive planning within urban development. For example, Toronto has been at the forefront with initiatives like the "Gender Equity in the Built Environment" framework, which ensures that safety and accessibility are incorporated into city planning and design. The federal government has also made strides with its "Gender-based Analysis Plus" (GBA+) framework, which considers how different demographics experience public spaces differently, guiding the development of policies and infrastructure.

Hamilton's Gender-Based Safety Audit was led by YWCA Hamilton from January to December 2024. As a local leader in women and gender diverse individuals' programs and services, and an active community organization supporting women and gender-diverse individuals' health, safety and equity, YWCA Hamilton was uniquely positioned to lead this work in relationship with communities and the City of Hamilton. While safety audits are not new, nor is applying a gender-based and/or identity-based analysis to

programs, structures, and systems, combining them together is innovative for the City of Hamilton.

In September 2024, a Communications Update was shared with Council that provided an update on the data collection phase of the audit. This included engagement with equity-deserving populations with a focus on women, girls, and gender diverse individuals through onsite tours, local community gatherings and creative projects. In November 2024, the YWCA hosted an event to bring communities, decision-makers, leaders, and others together to discuss and learn more about the collective efforts to support a safe and healthy Hamilton.

Throughout 2024, the YWCA engaged with a broad cross-section of the community. Connections were also made with the following City of Hamilton Divisions:

- Children's and Community Services
- Recreation
- Housing Services
- Environmental Services
- Transit Services
- Tourism and Culture
- Communications and Engagement

High Level Recommendations

The following recommendations to address gender-based safety concerns have been outlined in the YWCA's audit report and require action by both the City of Hamilton and broader community to be addressed effectively:

- Increase access to training and education around topics such as anti-racism, anti-oppression, gender diversity/identity, cultural competency, and de-escalation.
- Increase and enhance safety and security protocols in public spaces such as through safe infrastructure, enhancements, better security measures, and the upkeep of public spaces.
- Increase accessibility on public transit and local sidewalks/roadways focusing on safer HSR transit and more inclusive travel options.
- Address the root cause of safety through changes in laws, policies, procedures, funding, and structures.

Results of the audit indicate that there are several areas for improvement to infrastructure, policies, programs, services, and supports required to ensure that women, girls, and gender diverse community members feel safe, have a sense of belonging, can fully participate in community, and have their basic needs met.

Analysis

Through the audit initiative, the YWCA prioritized connection with communities who face several systemic and institutional barriers to inclusion in social life. This isolation compounds their lack of safety. As such the audit engaged with women, girls, and gender diverse people from a range of communities including:

- Newcomers and refugees
- Youth
- People who are unhoused or precariously housed.
- People who use drugs
- Faith groups
- Cultural groups
- Preschool children
- Community groups, and more formal organizations.

The audit initiative is closely connected to various departments across the corporation, including Healthy and Safe Communities, Planning and Economic Development, Public Works, and the City Manager's Office (see consultation section for further information). The audit includes recommendations, findings, and actions that will be addressed through two separate responses: one led by the municipality, focusing on corporate-level recommendations, and another led by community partners and residents.

The YWCA worked closely with Indigenous partners to ensure that Indigenous ways of knowing and being were honoured and considered in the audit process. The involvement of Indigenous urban leadership in the audit highlighted the necessity for a distinct, Indigenous-led community safety audit. This process, guided by Indigenous perspectives, should be meaningful, relevant, and action-oriented, addressing the unique experiences and needs of Hamilton's Indigenous community. City staff from the Children's and Community Services Division and the Indigenous Relations Division are committed to actioning this feedback and are exploring opportunities that will honour an Indigenous-led approach to aligning this work with the broader Community Safety and Well-Being plan.

The findings from the audit further reinforce the need for the City of Hamilton to adopt a shared definition of community safety that reflects a holistic and inclusive approach. A common definition will ensure that all municipal departments and community partners are working towards a unified vision where safety is understood beyond law enforcement – encompassing social inclusion, equitable access to services, and the well-being of all residents. By adopting a common definition, Hamilton can create policies and programs that meaningfully address the root causes of insecurity and foster a sustainable, inclusive, and thriving community.

A preliminary review of the audit report recommendations relevant across City departments is underway, and actions that can be immediately implemented without resources have been identified as follows:

Department/Division	Quick Win	Impact
Healthy and Safe Communities		
Recreation	Expand gender-specific programming in Recreation.	Creates tailored, safe spaces for women and gender-diverse individuals, encouraging participation in recreation without fear of discrimination.
Children's and Community Services	Promote EarlyON Child and Family Centres as safe spaces that support child development.	Provides safe spaces for caregivers, particularly women, to access support and resources without fear of judgment or danger.
Public Works		
Transit	Raise awareness of HSR safety measures including evening stop request program and Speak Up Speak Out Campaign	Informs the public about transit safety features, empowering individuals, particularly women, to feel safer and report harassment.
Environmental Services	Promote tree planting and community events	Creates safe, welcoming green spaces that reduce safety risks and fosters social cohesion.
Planning and Economic Development		
Economic Development Planning and Economic Development	Develop a Neighbourhood Safety Plan guide	Provides clear, accessible information on local resources, supporting individuals facing gender-based violence and discrimination
Tourism and Culture	Develop a funding program to support community-led placemaking activities in outdoor public spaces in Downtown Hamilton.	Funds community led projects that create safe, accessible public spaces, which will contribute to safety for the community.

Department/Division	Quick Win	Impact
City Manager's Office		
Human Resources	Continued roll out of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) training for City staff and review of HR courses to address potential gaps as per the Gender Based Safety audit.	Enhance staff awareness of gender biases and discrimination, fostering more inclusive, supportive interactions and policies.

The findings gleaned from the YWCA audit report point to the need for a collective, multi-sectoral, community-based set of actions and approaches to safety that centre relationships, community care, and belonging, and focus on addressing root causes of safety, as well as increasing and enhancing the design of inclusive public spaces.

While some recommendations actionable by the City of Hamilton are currently underway and can be achieved within current department and divisional operating budgets, many recommendations will require additional resources and investment moving forward.

Next steps will include further engagement with identified departments to complete feasibility assessments to inform the development of a detailed action plan that will come back to Emergency and Community Services Committee in Q3 2025.

Community safety drives Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, which outlines actionable strategies to tackle social issues and enhance safety across the community. The recommendations from the audit align with existing Plan priorities and the plan will engage members of the System Leadership Table and community organizations in a systems approach to tackling the identified safety issues which includes both internal and external engagement throughout the action planning phase. This proactive approach ensures gender-based concerns are fully integrated into all stages of policy, planning, and service delivery across Hamilton.

Alternatives

That Council postpone the acceptance of the YWCA Hamilton Gender-Based Safety Audit Report until staff conduct further analysis on its alignment with existing municipal strategies. This approach would provide Council with additional information for decision-making but would delay the implementation of any recommendations.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report aligns directly with the City Council's strategic priorities, particularly under the Safe & Thriving Neighborhood's and Responsiveness & Transparency priorities.

Priority 2: Safe and Thriving Neighborhoods

Outcome 2: Make sure people can safely and efficiently move around by foot, bike, transit, or car.

The integration of gender-based safety audits into urban planning and infrastructure development will directly contribute to safer, more accessible environments for all residents. By identifying areas of concern where women, gender-diverse individuals, and other vulnerable groups feel unsafe, we can make data-driven decisions to improve lighting, surveillance, signage, and pedestrian infrastructure. This approach will help ensure that people can move safely and efficiently, whether by foot, bike, transit, or car. Improved safety features also encourage greater mobility and foster a sense of belonging for all community members.

Outcome 3: Provide vibrant parks, recreation, and public space.

By conducting gender-based safety audits in public spaces such as parks, recreation areas, and plazas, we have gained insights into the specific needs of diverse user groups. The recommendations stemming from these audits can guide improvements in park design, such as better lighting, more visible pathways, and accessible facilities, all of which will foster inclusive and inviting public spaces. The result will be parks and recreation areas where all individuals feel safe and welcome to engage in physical activity, social interactions, or simply enjoy nature, leading to vibrant, thriving community spaces.

Priority 3: Responsiveness & Transparency

Outcome 2: Get more people involved in decision making and problem solving.

The approach utilized by the City to engage YWCA Hamilton as trusted third-party to conduct the gender-based safety audit with the community demonstrates the City's commitment to engaging the public in an open and transparent manner and fosters trust and inclusivity to inform recommendations for improvements to public spaces, programs, policy, and support systems.

In summary, the proposed recommendations will enforce and improve the City Council's strategic priorities by ensuring that public spaces and transportation networks are safer, more inclusive, and conducive to community well-being. These actions are essential to creating an environment where all residents, regardless of gender, can move freely, confidently, and enjoy the amenities the City has to offer.

Previous Reports Submitted

Not Applicable

Consultation

City departments consulted on the project include:

Healthy and Safe Communities Department

Children's and Community Services

Director, Children's and Community Services, Jessica Chase

Manager, Early Years Service System Management, Brenda Bax

Recreation

Director, Recreation, Steve Sevor

Manager, Program Development, Laura Kerr

Housing Services

Director, Housing Services, Michelle Baird

Manager, Homelessness System Operations, Rob Mastroianni

Public Works Department

Environmental Services

Director, Environmental Services, Cynthia Graham

Manager, Parks and Cemeteries, Kara Bunn

Transit

Director, Transit, Maureen Cosyn Heath

Manager, Transit Customer Experience and Innovation, Ali Sabourin

Transportation

Director, Transportation, Carolyn Ryall

Manager, Transportation Operations and Road Maintenance, Mike Field

Planning & Economic Development Department

Tourism and Culture

Director Tourism & Culture, Lisa Abbott

Manager, Placemaking and Public Art and Projects, Peter Fortune

Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC)

Director, Economic Development Planning and Economic Development, Norm Schleeahn

Manager, Business Investment and Sector Development, Jennifer Patterson

City Manager's Office

Director, Communications and Engagement

Manager, Community Initiatives, Cindy Mutch

Human Resources

Director, Talent and Diversity, Jodi Koch

Manager, Diversity and Inclusion, Jessica Bowen

Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A: Hamilton's Gender-Based Safety Audit – YWCA Hamilton

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