Perceptions of Extreme Heat and Cooling Centres in Downtown Hamilton

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Extreme Heat. Getty Images.

Overview

With climate change, Ontario has seen an increase in extreme weather - namely, prolonged heat events.[1] This has significant implications for public health and service provision in the City of Hamilton.[2] In addition to formal cooling centres provided by the City, residents also find informal places and ways to cool down, such as going to the mall or parks with lots of shade.[3] Hamilton residents living in older homes and apartment buildings have first-hand experience living in extreme heat during the summer, because their houses are built to retain heat and often lack air conditioning.[4] The Beasley Neighbourhood Association (BNA) has been very engaged in the issue of extreme heat and cooling centres in their neighbourhood.[4] The purpose of this study is to determine where people go during extreme heat events, what characterizes the places they choose to go to, and gain detailed accounts of their experiences at these informal cooling centres.

Objectives

1. Determine where people go during extreme heat events, and what characterizes these places
2. Gain detailed accounts of their experiences at these informal cooling centres
3. Contribute to the field, and potentially inspire municipal action on urban heat

Reporting

Our project began with participant recruitment, both through posters around the Beasley community, and through a recruitment speech by our Community Project Champion at a Beasley Neighbourhood Association Meeting. We recruited a total of 9 participants, and conducted 30-60 minute interviews. Throughout this study, we interviewed residents, mapped locations they frequented, and conducted thematic analysis to understand perceptions and experiences. In particular, health and safety were seen to be major concerns when it comes to extreme heat events. Through our research, we have come to the conclusion that the City of Hamilton's actions regarding heat are not ideal, and do not serve the population adequately. Our recommendations are to review and revise the existing policy to better meet the concerns we have outlined. As well, we recommend including the voices of Beasley and, by extension, the city of Hamilton, in the creation of future public emergency response policy. Our group appeared as a delegation before City council, explaining our findings with the hope of inspiring municipal action on these topics.

Collaborators

We would like to give special thanks to Matt Thompson, our Community Project Champion and Beasley resident, who supported and helped facilitate our work. Furthermore, we would like to thank all of our community participants for their time, without which this research would not be possible. We would also like to give a big thank you to the Sustainability 4S06 instructional team, for their unending support, and providing us with the opportunity to conduct this research.

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