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## **Beautiful Alleys Clean Ups, Beautification and Partnerships 2018**

### **Introduction**

Alleys have served as transportation networks for communities across the globe for decades including vehicular and foot transportation. The maintenance and beautification of back alleys are crucial to urban renewal strategy in communities where alleys are collectively used by its residents. Back alleys could also be a great source of green space contributing to the overall look of the community. Alleys also offer the potential for citizen engagement and neighborhood planning resulting in healthy communities.

In Hamilton, the community members took upon themselves the responsibility of alleys maintenance and beautification with support from Keep Hamilton Clean and Green Committee, the City of Hamilton, Hamilton Community Foundation and Neighbourhood Action Strategy. Donations from several local businesses, individual residents and organizations allow us to continue our work.

Beautiful Alleys is a volunteer organized and volunteer led team of people dedicated to maintaining and beautifying their public spaces. The mission is to create safe, enjoyable spaces for people of all ages and abilities regardless of status, gender, race, religion or ethnicity. This community group of volunteers work together to create safe and beautiful green spaces in neighbourhood alleys and laneways. Two cleanup days are organized each year in the spring and the fall and regular maintenance and monitoring is encouraged throughout the year. The goal is to educate and empower people and build capacity so that they can take stewardship of these public spaces.

### **History of Beautiful Alleys**

In 2015, a small action group of the GALA Planning Team rebranded their Alley and Laneway Enhancement Team as Beautiful Alleys. They decided to bring residents together and hold twice annual alley cleanups. Their first cleanup was promoted widely through social media and community outreach and expanded across the city to include residents from eight of the eleven identified Neighbourhood Action Team (NAS) neighbourhoods.

Since that first clean up in April 2016, Beautiful Alleys has redirected thousands of bags of yard waste and recyclables from our landfills through the twice yearly cleanups. In addition, engaged volunteers continue to keep hundreds of alleys clean on a regular basis.

### **Community Engagement and Partnerships**

Residents take pride in accomplishments and an encouraging trend is that each clean-up results in less garbage and fewer alleys because of the ongoing efforts of the residents and the community throughout the year.

The annual cleanups bring several hundred community members together at each event to share a common goal; Beautiful Alleys. Friendships are formed and many communities start initiatives in their immediate neighbourhoods for regular maintenance. Many of the volunteers look forward to these events to meet and bond with neighbours and peers. Many use the events as an opportunity to build community by holding neighbourhood celebrations.

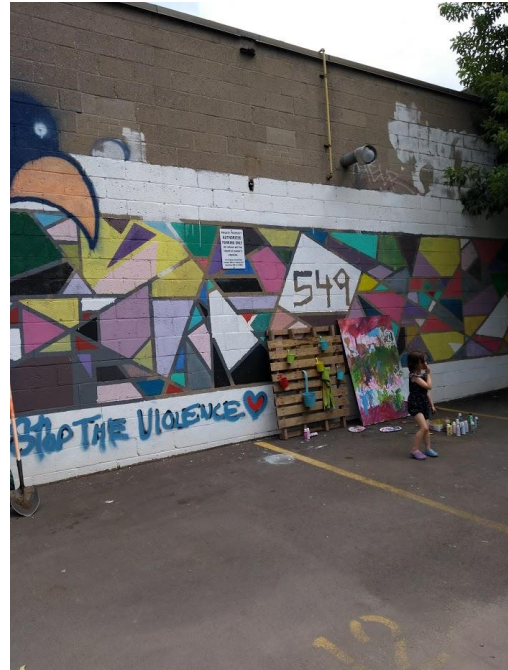
This interest resulted in our area expanding to the Mountain in 2018. The two cleanups brought out dozens of volunteers and resulted in between 30 and 50 bags of debris, recycling and yard waste being collected. Our partnership with Concession Street Business Improvement Area drew interest from local businesses and several art projects were initiated.



We were again encouraged when a group of our regular volunteers started a project in their neighbourhood to maintain and enhance their alleys on a regular basis. The St. Claire Laneway Project has installed artwork and plantings to beautify their alleys and engage their neighbours.



Other areas were inspired as well and worked independently of Beautiful Alleys but always with the goal in mind to create a community and bring their neighbours together. One group created a courtyard and installed artwork in what was previously a neglected area that had been the scene of a violent tragedy.



Beautiful Alleys had long been hearing from residents that they wanted to have the Canadian National Rail line cleaned up. Several years of accumulated debris created an unwelcome and unhealthy impact on the City. The property belongs to CN and is private. There are safety regulations in place and we needed their cooperation to undertake a clean-up project. After a few years of negotiations, CN realized the positive effect this could bring about. They could offer a positive visual impression to the transit users and tourists and it would impact positively on their reputation. No one had ever offered to work alongside them before. In 2018, we organized two rail line cleanups and covered the stretch from the Mary Street Bridge to John Street Bridge. Working with CN staff who provided back hoes and labour, an average of twenty volunteers per cleanup filled four dumpsters amounting to almost twelve tons of debris. The estimated bag weight is 5 kg = 1 bag of litter so 12 tonnes (12,000kg) would equate to approximately 2,400 bags of debris cleaned at the 2018 CN Rail cleanups.

CN rail has since implemented a system to monitor and maintain the areas that have been cleaned to mitigate an accumulation of debris. They have also begun regular clean up actions to clear existing debris and make it easier to maintain. Many of the stretches of CN Rail have been improved and CN Staff is looking forward to working alongside community on future clean-ups.



The positive results with CN Rail encouraged residents along the Canadian Pacific Rail to ask if they would also work with community. In late summer, a partnership was formed and CP Rail worked with fifteen volunteers to clean a stretch between Yonge and Victoria gathering an approximate six tonnes of debris. That six tonnes translates to approximately 1,200 bags of debris. Future projects are planned for 2019.



Beautiful Alleys believes that each alley is unique to the residents who live on it. Some may want bicycle paths, some benches, plants or playgrounds for their children. Some may be looking for opportunities that include extra income or housing in the form of laneway suites. For that reason, Beautiful Alleys looks to build partnerships and offer choices to the residents and the community.

One of those partnerships in 2018 included the option of alternative pathways. A partnership with Friendly Streets and Hamilton Health Sciences resulted in a pilot project that is temporarily called "Hospital Alley". The goal is to create an alternative pathway for pedestrians and cyclists

to bypass the commercial corridors to access the hospital and local businesses. The target area was Cannon Street to Barton Street between Victoria and Wellington.

In September of 2018, we did our first cleanup in the alley. We surveyed the neighbouring homes to talk about future enhancements and maintenance. That clean-up garnered fifteen volunteers from the neighbourhood and staff from the hospital and resulted in bags of debris and yard waste being collected. It was encouraging that residents were eager to discuss future plans to include signage, lighting and artwork.



Beautiful Alleys is much more than a “clean-up” initiative and this is seen in the artwork and enhancement efforts of our members.





Encouraged by the increase in pedestrian and cycling activity, Beautiful Alleys identified that these enhanced alleys created a network of safe access that allowed residents and especially children to bypass the commercial corridor to reach the parks, schools and recreation centres that populate the Gibson neighbourhood. Plans are in place to complete that trail in 2019.

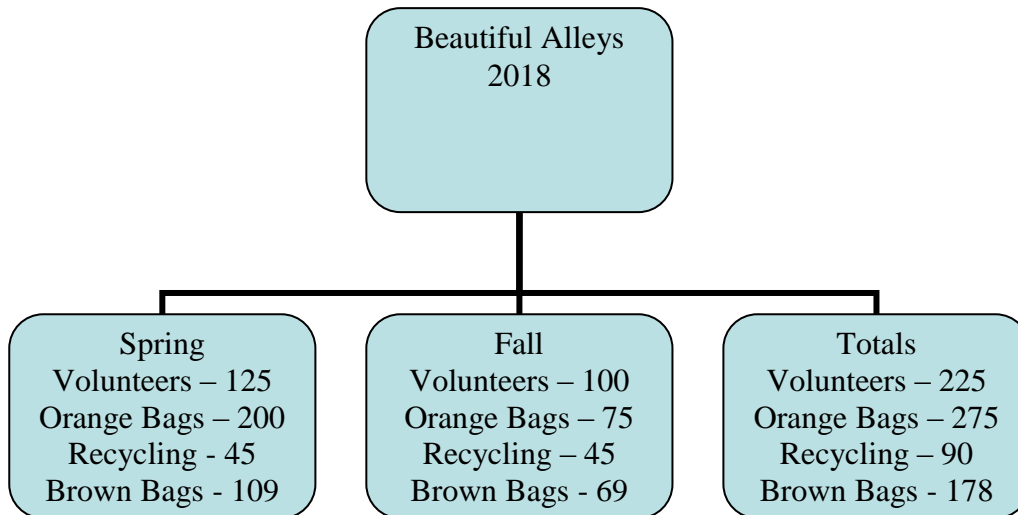
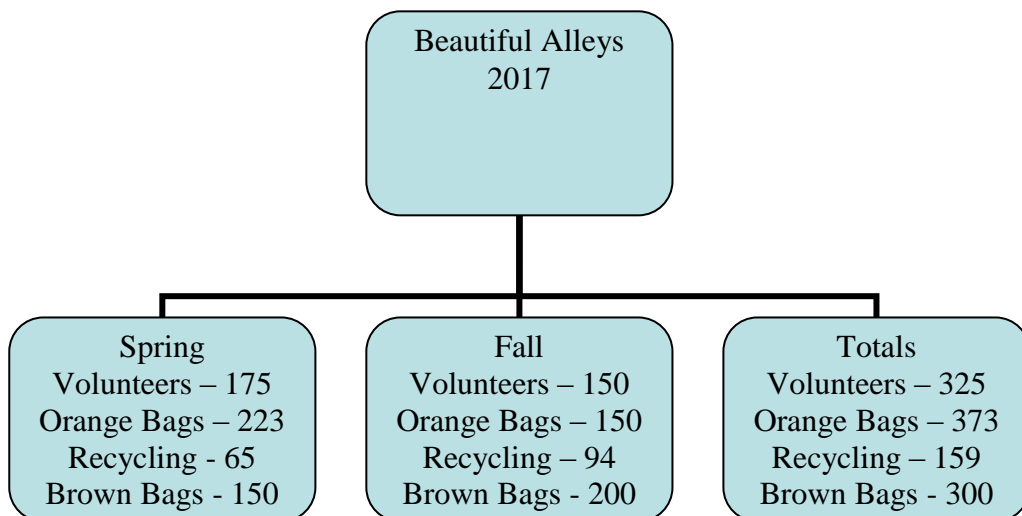
Beautiful Alleys has partnered with Friendly Streets, Hamilton Health Sciences and Environment Hamilton to create alternative pathways that offer pedestrians and cyclists a safe, clean route that bypasses the busy commercial corridors and heavily trafficked streets.

These twice yearly cleanups are supported by various partnerships with the City of Hamilton. Waste Management has implemented policy changes and programs to make regular maintenance more efficient and helped educate the community.

The on-going efforts and results are mainly supported by Keep Hamilton Clean and Green who have supplied thousands of yard waste bags, gloves and garbage bags over the past years. Funding through the Keep Hamilton Clean and Green Grants has enabled us to reward our volunteers with a celebratory gathering following each cleanup. The efforts of Beautiful Alleys and the results would not be possible without their support.

**Reporting Statistics**

Each clean-up has different results that are dependent on the timing, the weather and condition of the alleys. Many who maintain their alleys regularly do not participate and those statistics are not always reported. However, the continued use and maintenance of the alleyways does result in these spaces becoming safe, beautiful and useful public spaces again where safety and cleanliness are not a concern.



This table shows the results of all Beautiful Alleys coordinated cleanup initiatives in 2018:

<b>Beautiful Alleys program</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Orange bags</b>	<b>Clear bags</b>	<b>Yard waste</b>
Alley cleanups	225	275	90	178
CN Rail cleanups	55	2,400	0	0
CP Rail cleanup	15	1,200	0	0
<b>TOTAL (2018)</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>3,875</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>178</b>

It is important to note that the benefit to this project is reflected in an increased awareness and a change in the general perception of alleys overall. As the project matures and more residents take ownership of these spaces, we hope to see the numbers continue to decrease.

### **Looking Ahead**

Continuing in 2018, Beautiful Alleys focused on building partnerships within the community to build on the beautification projects and making more opportunities available to the residents for their public spaces because each alley is unique to the area it is in. We also looked to funding opportunities that would enable us to become sustainable.

- Friendly Streets
- Hamilton Health Sciences
- Environment Hamilton
- Canadian National Rail
- Urban Art
- The Aids Network
- Waste Management
- Hamilton Community Foundation
- McMaster University
- Concession Street BIA
- Canadian Pacific Rail
- City of Hamilton

Keep Hamilton Clean and Green Committee provide us with supplies for each clean-up. Each year, we have access to over 1000 orange bags, 500 – 600 recycle clear bags, 1000 brown yard waste bags plus gloves and tools provided with the Community Clean Trailer. With the support of Keep Hamilton Clean and Green Committee, we provide supplies throughout the year to residents that maintain their alleys on a regular basis. It is difficult to monitor if these clean ups are reported but we can assume that the availability of supplies increases the numbers.

Beautiful Alleys is hopeful that support from the City will result in improved procedures and policy changes to improve the ability of the community members and their knowledge to maintain their public spaces. Our goal for 2019 is to have an Alley Management Strategy in place and to initiate an “Alley Adoption” program that will recognize these members of our community and their efforts.



The upkeep of the alley's cleanliness had a direct correlation to the decrease in garbage collected at the second event. With the continued use and maintenance of the alleyways, the hope is these will become beautiful and useful public spaces again where safety and cleanliness are not a concern.