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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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What makes a neighbourhood ‘vibrant?’ Arts service organization receives funding – and will use world class, only-in-Hamilton facilities and equipment – to find out

HAMILTON, Ont – Arts service organization CoBALT Connects is the recipient of a significant provincial grant which will partially fund a year-long research project aimed at developing a set of interactive tools for determining and measuring those factors that make neighbourhoods ‘vibrant,’ and which will help advance cultural planning more generally.

“The term ‘vibrant’ appears over and over in municipal cultural planning documents,” said Jeremy Freiburger of CoBALT Connects, which, among other services, provides cultural planning consultation to municipalities. “Everyone seems to understand that this is a desirable goal for communities – that this is a factor which enhances our experiences of living, working, and spending time in a particular area – but there’s little common understanding about how to determine and measure those factors that make a scene vibrant, and that can then be applied in a meaningful way to civic planning.”

Called *Expressing Vibrancy*, the project was made possible through the support of a Government of Ontario grant, which will partially finance the project, and will see the organization working with Business Improvement Areas to undertake a study of eight neighbourhoods in Hamilton including James Street North, Locke Street South, Downtown Dundas, Concession Street, Barton Village, Waterdown, Westdale Village, and Ottawa Street.

The project, led by CoBALT Connects, will be the first to make use of a one-of-a-kind lab operated by McMaster University’s Dr. Jim Dunn, a partner on *Expressing Vibrancy*, who is the Acting Department Chair in the Department of Health, Aging and Society. Dr. Dunn, whose expertise in neighbourhoods, built environments and their relationship to health, has developed a mobile research lab – similar to a Google car – with an urban video recording system developed by Immersive Media, a Canadian company specializing in capturing 360-degree interactive video content. The equipment, which can be mounted to anything mobile, including a pedestrian, will travel through each neighbourhood, capturing street-level activities in a way researchers haven’t yet been able to.

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Captured content will provide a special component of raw data, which will produce an immersive experience of each neighbourhood when it is brought to life in McMaster University's Music and Mind LIVE Performance Lab, a facility that will be the only one of its kind in the world when it is completed later this year. The LIVE Lab, whose founding director is McMaster University's Dr. Laurel Trainor, will marry technology and research by capturing the sights, sounds, and overall feel of an area in the performance hall, constructed to exacting noise control standards incorporating a virtual acoustics system, and by monitoring the subtle reactions of audience members viewing the footage.

The project is also in partnership with the Center for Community Study, an urban planning research organization which will provide supporting data for each of the eight neighbourhoods, and the City of Hamilton, whose cultural planning and neighbourhood development departments will further assist with research and information-gathering.

CoBALT Connects acknowledges the funding support of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport through the Creative Communities Prosperity Fund. It is the only Hamilton organization to receiving such funding this or any year.

-30-

Expressing Vibrancy project partners

- McMaster Institute for Music and the Mind's LIVE Performance Lab: <http://livelab.mcmaster.ca/>
- Center for Community Study (CCS): <http://communitystudy.ca/>
- The City of Hamilton: <http://www.hamilton.ca/index.htm>
- McMaster University, Department of Health, Aging and Society: <http://www.healthagingandsociety.mcmaster.ca/>