

7

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE YORK REGION IMMIGRATION PORTAL

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated October 29, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Regional Clerk distribute this report to all local municipalities for their information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the progress being made in regard to the implementation of the York Region Immigration Portal (YRIP).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 General

In late 2006, the provincial Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) distributed a call for proposals to municipalities to develop a Municipal Immigration Information On-line program (commonly referred to as an 'Immigration Portal'). This proposal call represented a second wave of funding to municipalities to develop immigration portals. London, Windsor, Ottawa, Sudbury, and Ottawa were successful recipients of the first wave of funding.

As reported to Council at its June 2007 meeting, York Region engaged in a collaborative process with a wide range of community stakeholders serving immigrants and newcomers to gain support for a funding application in response to the proposal call. The necessary documentation was submitted to the Ministry by the end of 2006. The Region received notification in March 2007 that it was one of eight municipalities which were successful in obtaining funding in this second wave of allocations. The one-time grant to the Region is \$300,000 with an expected launch date of the portal of March 31, 2008.

3.2 Objective's of the Portal

As identified by MCI, the main objectives of the YRIP are to:

- Support the economic and social integration of newcomers to York Region by providing user-friendly, seamless access to settlement information and services.

- Function as an online gateway that most effectively informs prospective immigrants and newcomers about opportunities, government services and community support within York Region.
- Maximize resources available across institutions, save duplication of efforts, while enhancing individual organizations to serve their own clients.

The primary effort of the YRIP implementation in York Region is to support the above program objectives, and to promote local municipalities in York Region as a destination of choice to prospective immigrants.

Further, the YRIP has been adopted by the Human Resources Planning Coalition (HSPC) as an important compliment to its Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP). A key IAP objective is to create a coordinated, integrated, user orientated and system wide response for newcomers settling and integrating into York Region communities.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The YRIP Implementation Project has made significant progress since the last report to Council in June 2007 in areas related to setting up a project governance structure, deciding on content and design of the YRIP, and securing the technical solution.

4.1 Setting up a Community Based Governance Model was a Vital First Step

An important first step in the YRIP Project Implementation was to draw the community into the development of the Portal. The YRIP is viewed as a community based tool and gateway and as such requires the placing of a wide range of stakeholders throughout the governance structure of the project.

4.1.1 Continuing the Communities Involvement in the Project was Important

The Region held an information session regarding the YRIP implementation on May 30th, 2007 at the King Campus of Seneca College. The session was attended by 75 representatives of a broad array of stakeholder groups in the community. The information session discussed the concept of Portals, the objectives of implementing an Immigration Portal in York Region, and the general process for going forward.

As a result of the information session, 25 people representing a wide array of community stakeholders expressed an interest in involving themselves in a volunteer capacity in ensuring the implementation of the YRIP would be successful.

4.1.2 The Governance Structure for the Project is in Place

At its September 19, 2007 meeting, HSPC approved the composition of a Steering Group for the YRIP. The Steering Group has ten members representing:

- Regional representatives from Planning and Development Services, IT and Health Services
- HSPC
- Local Municipalities
- The Welcome Centre
- the School Boards
- Community Information Provider's, and
- Consumers

The Terms of Reference for the Steering Group and an overall work plan for the project implementation have been approved.

Two further committees are in place under the direction of the Steering Committee: the Content/Information Committee, and the Technology Committee. The Content Information Committee has a wide range of community membership and oversees the content development process further described in Section 4.2. The Technology Committee has representation from Planning and Economic Development, Finance, (Information Technology Services) as well an external member from the York District School Board with experience in portal technology.

4.2 Content is the Main Focus of the YRIP Implementation

The main focus of the project is to ensure that the information contained in the portal is useful, comprehensive enough to allow immigrants to live, work, and learn in York Region in a meaningful way, and presented in a user friendly fashion.

4.2.1 Solid Ground Work has been done to ensure the Portal Content is Complete, Useful, and Understandable

Project staff has reviewed the portal/websites of the five municipalities approved in the first round of funding to discern their strengths and weaknesses. Staff from these municipalities have also been interviewed regarding their best practices. Website information in York Region offered to immigrants and newcomers has been reviewed to identify possible future links to the YRIP.

4.2.2 Further Steps will be Taken to Ensure Content Objectives are Met

In order to complete the solid start in the area of content development, the following next steps are planned:

- Focus group sessions with immigrants/newcomers to validate the information being considered for the Portal.
- Dialogue sessions with Resource/Information providers regarding content provision. It is expected the YRIP could act as a catalyst for resource/information providers to expand their information availability to newcomers/immigrants in linguistically and culturally appropriate manner.

- YRIP content to be tested by members of the Content Committee, and immigrants/newcomers to ensure the objectives of content completeness, usefulness and ease of understanding are met.

4.3 The Procurement of Technical Solution for the YRIP is Underway

A Request for Proposal (RFP) was released on October 23, 2007 for vendors to supply software and design expertise for the YRIP. Feedback was received from Legal, Information Technology Services and Supplies and Services prior to the release of the RFP. The RFP responses are due on November 12, 2007, after which they will be reviewed by the Technical Committee.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications to the Region in the implementation of the YRIP project. The costs associated with this project are covered in the one-time funding grant from MCI in the amount of \$300,000. Project costs will not exceed this amount.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The YRIP will positively impact the entire York Region community. Local municipalities play an important role in providing services to newcomers/immigrants. The YRIP will allow local municipalities a gateway to promote themselves as a destination of choice and allow their newcomer residents to more easily integrate into their communities which will in turn promote inclusivity and continued economic growth and prosperity to all residents of York Region.

7. CONCLUSION

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the York Region Immigration Portal. Contributions by various Regional departments, local municipalities and members of the community, including our Human Services Planning Coalition partners have allowed this significant progress to be made. With these continuing contributions it is expected the YRIP will be completed as planned.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.