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YORKLINK

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 22, 2004 from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information by Committee and Council.

2. PURPOSE

The YorkLink Directory and Web site are well-used and appreciated community resources, serving the Region's residents as well as community service providers. This report will provide an update on the 2004 edition, to be released in February 2004.

3. BACKGROUND

In December 1998, Regional Council approved the development of an annual community services directory to inform residents of available Regional community services and to help agencies deliver these services to the people of York Region by offering a centralized source of information.

The Community Services and Housing Department developed an electronic database to store the data and supplemented the print directory with a searchable, on-line directory. In 2000, the YorkLink on-line directory was launched and 1,000 copies of the print version were distributed to community agencies.

Now in its fifth year, YorkLink continues to provide residents with up-to-date, comprehensive information about local community services. Listings contain descriptions of the services each agency provides as well as contact information. Where applicable, listings also cite the availability of accessibility options such as elevators, barrier-free washrooms and parking spaces for people with disabilities.

The directory of nearly 700 community agencies and organizations is available in print format or through the York Region Web site. Print copies of YorkLink are distributed to members of the general public on an as-needed basis, while the majority of directories are delivered to local community agencies, libraries, schools, government offices, and information kiosks, which use YorkLink to connect their clients with other community services.

Translation services are available to meet the needs of the Region's culturally diverse population. YorkLink translation assistance is available in nine languages: Cantonese/Mandarin, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. YorkLink is a valuable directory, and residents of other communities, including Toronto and Simcoe, also request and use YorkLink.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Highlights

4.1.1 Expanded Listings

By networking with community agencies and other York Region departments, and by monitoring local community publications, the Community Services and Housing Department regularly adds agencies to the directory to provide a wider range of community services to York Region residents.

For the 2004 edition of YorkLink, Community Services and Housing Department staff researched and contacted many unlisted service agencies serving the residents of York Region, inviting them to list their services in the directory. In particular, in order to support the Region's accessibility initiatives, research focused on agencies where the central client-base is people with disabilities. As a result, over 65 new organizations were added to the directory, one-third of which offer services relating to supporting residents with disabilities.

4.1.2 Increased Web Use

In 2003, there was an average of 2,340 visits to the YorkLink Web site each month. This is an increase of over 900 visits per month from 2002. This increase is partly a result of the 2003 redesign of the York Region corporate Web site, which included a more prominent and accessible link to the YorkLink on-line directory, and partly a result of increased promotion of the YorkLink Web site to Regional staff, who use the directory as a resource. In 2004, Web site promotion will focus on external Web site users, including public libraries, schools, and information centres.

4.2 Community Consultation

4.2.1 Usability Survey

In 2003, the Community Services and Housing Department developed and distributed a YorkLink usability survey to determine how customers use the directory and Web site, and how easily information is retrieved. The survey was inserted into 2,000 directories. Respondents answered questions about how easy or difficult YorkLink is to use. Results showed that 99 percent of YorkLink customers find the directory easy to use.

In 2002, 45 percent of survey respondents stated that they refer to the YorkLink directory or Web site at least once a week.

4.3 Relationship to Vision 2026

YorkLink supports Vision 2026 by responding to the information needs of the residents of York Region. YorkLink's mandate is to provide easily accessible and current community services information.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of YorkLink is accommodated within the Community Services and Housing Department's budget. The annual budget for producing and distributing YorkLink is \$54,000. This is unchanged from the previous two years' budgets. Through innovative use of funding dollars and technology, more residents and community service agencies were able to access YorkLink information in 2003 without an increase in printing or distribution costs for the Region.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

All area municipalities are represented in the YorkLink directory. Community agencies from every municipality benefit from the information contained in the directory, as do the municipal governments, which are listed in YorkLink.

7. CONCLUSION

Community consultation has demonstrated that YorkLink is an effective, highly regarded community resource. Now in its fifth year, YorkLink continues to provide residents, school boards, government offices, and community agencies with up-to-date, comprehensive information about local community services.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.