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2005 YORKLINK DIRECTORY

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, February 17, 2005, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council authorize the release of the 2005 YorkLink Directory.

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 2005 Edition, to be released in March 2005.

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 sixth year, YorkLink continues to provide residents with up-to-date, comprehensive information about local community services. Directory 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. In 2005, 4,500 copies of the YorkLink directory were printed. Print copies 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 and Web sites, 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 2005 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. As a result, over 40 new organizations were added to the directory.

4.1.2 Increased Web Use

In 2004, there was an average of nearly 4,000 visits to the YorkLink Web site each month. This is an increase of approximately 1,200 visits per month from 2003 and an increase of over 2,000 visits per month from 2002. This increase is the result of continuing improvements and the increased promotion of the YorkLink web site to external web site users, including public libraries, schools, and information centres.

4.1.3 Community Outreach

In April 2004, the Community Services and Housing Department was invited by Labour Community Services, a Project of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, to train students in the Union Counsellor Program on the use of the YorkLink directory. Labour Community Services has identified YorkLink as the key source of community information for Union Counsellors working in York Region.

4.2 Community Consultation

4.2.1 User Survey

In 2004, the Community Services and Housing Department developed and posted a brief YorkLink user survey on the YorkLink web site. The survey asked users why they visited YorkLink and how they found out about the directory.

Results showed almost 60% of respondents who visited YorkLink were residents. About 20% of site users were community agency employees or volunteers. The remaining respondents were government employees or students.

When asked how they found out about the YorkLink Web site, 31% of respondents found out about the on-line directory through the York Region Web site, 16% through word of mouth, 14% through an Internet search engine, and 11% through another organization's web site. The remaining 28% of respondents found out about the on-line directory through such sources as other York Region publications or local newspapers.

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 three years' budgets. Through continued marketing, community outreach and an increased web presence, the Region was able to meet the increased demand of residents and community service agencies to access YorkLink information in 2004 without an increase in printing or distribution costs for the Region.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

All area municipalities are represented in the YorkLink directory. Residents, community agencies, school boards, and government 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 sixth 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.