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UPDATE OF THE INCLUSIVITY ACTION PLAN AND SUPPORT FOR THE WELCOME RESOURCE CENTRE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, January 15, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the York Region Welcome Resource Centre model as the centralized location for local immigrant information and core services.
2. If the funding proposal submitted to the Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration for the creation of the York Region Municipal Immigrant Online Information Portal is successful, the Regional Chair and Regional Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary agreement to receive the funds.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an update on the Human Services Planning Coalition's (HSPC) York Region Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP) initiative.
- Request support and recognition for the Welcome Resource Centre model.
- Receive authorization to sign a funding agreement to create a Municipal Online Information Portal.

3. BACKGROUND

In recognition of the significant increase of immigrant population, the HSPC in 2003-2004 identified the issue of ethno-cultural diversity as a priority for all human services. An HSPC task group was formed, and an Inclusivity Summit with 180 representatives from different human service agencies, regional governments, school boards, hospitals, police, ethno-cultural organizations and York Region residents was held in January 2005.

On May 18, 2005 the HSPC officially launched its IAP, a region-wide community based approach to promote inclusivity.

An inclusive community accommodates diversity every day in every way. Diversity can take many forms, including disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, colour and culture. Ethno cultural inclusivity is the focus of the IAP project because of the rapid

growth in number of immigrants choosing to live in York Region. Ethno cultural inclusivity is achieved when people of different ethno cultural backgrounds live, learn, work and play together in a way that fulfils and generates the feeling and even more importantly, the reality of belonging to local communities.

The IAP is planned and executed by a Steering Committee and six working groups comprised of membership from 47 organizations and 88 participants. The working groups were established from the results of the Inclusivity Summit which identified three key themes for action: improving communication, creating awareness and promoting representation. The six working groups are:

1. Welcome Resource Centre
2. English Language Development Programs
3. Raising Awareness
4. Creating Opportunities for children & Youth
5. Volunteer & Leadership Opportunities
6. Organizational Development

The Steering Committee is chaired by Town of Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti. The goal of the IAP is to invest in York Region's capacity to welcome and integrate immigrants and to create social capital for a vibrant economy, a highly skilled labour force and an enviable quality of life.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The IAP aims to promote the commitment of human service organizations in building a more ethno-cultural inclusive York Region.

One of the key functions of the IAP is to provide leadership in government and community relations by raising awareness of identified solutions with community leaders and potential funders. Becoming a more ethno cultural inclusive community requires the efforts of many. Building relationships and fostering new networks are essential to reach this goal.

The IAP has successfully engaged leading human service organizations in York Region who serve the immigrant communities. The municipal planning process under the auspices of the Regional Municipality of York and the HSPC has proven key to entering into discussions and advancing the project's request for funding with provincial and federal governments.

The IAP has also raised the awareness of the need for new funding to implement more settlement and language training services. In November 2005, the first ever Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement was signed which quadruples federal spending on

language training and settlement services bringing an additional \$920 million dollars to assist Ontario newcomers over the next five years.

The IAP has progressed significantly. The following activities are highlighted for the attention of and discussion by the Regional Council.

4.1 Welcome Resource Centre Model

Based on the results of several community consultations with York Region human service providers, a Welcome Resource Centre model was created to enhance the delivery of information and services for York Region immigrants.

The Welcome Resource Centre working group has developed a new way to centralize both services and information for York Region newcomers. Through a coordinated collaborative network of York Region human services providers, immigrants will have better access to information and core services in a timely manner.

Five lead agencies provided their time and expertise to advance the ideas generated in the community planning sessions. These five lead agencies are: COSTI, York Region Neighbourhood Support Services, Job Skills, Catholic Community Services of York Region and the Centre for Information & Community Services.

The Welcome Resource Centre model is a collaborative partnership model. Key components of the model include:

- Multi-sites (up to 5).
- One lead agency acting as the steward for a site.
- Collaborative coordinated management practices.
- One-on-one personal service for immigrants.
- Client focussed – each Centre offers both information and services.
- Core services are delivered from each Centre: Language Programs, Employment
- Partnerships in serving the needs of immigrants. Space is available in the Centres for other organizations/agencies to deliver services (hoteling concept).
- Community outreach through consultation and planning.
- Marketing and branding for the Centres.

The Welcome Resource Centre has been built on partnerships based on a client focussed system. Services will be delivered through collaboration and participation of service delivery organizations in York Region.

In order for the Welcome Resource Centre model to be successful, it needs to be recognized by members of the York Region community as the place for newcomers to get accurate information and access to services. The Regional Council's recognition and support are critical.

4.1.1 The First York Region Welcome Resource Centre

Since April 2006, the IAP Welcome Resource Centre working group has been discussing funding support with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) representatives.

As a result of these discussions, COSTI has recently signed the first funding agreement with CIC to develop the first York Region Welcome Resource Centre located in Vaughan (Jane St. –Rutherford Rd) scheduled to open in April 2007. The agreement identifies \$1.3 million dollars over a 17-week period for COSTI to:

- Design the physical infrastructure and conduct leasehold improvements.
- Develop partnership protocols.
- Consult the community.
- Create a marketing and Centre branding strategy.
- Hire key staff.
- Develop business practice protocols necessary for the coordination of service delivery.
- Develop the implementation plan and costs for services to be delivered from the five Centres.

4.2 Establishment of the IAP Project Team

The Region has signed an agreement with Service Canada injecting \$147,000 into the IAP project to establish a 52 week project team under the Service Canada Job Creation Program. Salaries for eight Job Creation Program participants are paid directly by Service Canada and not included in the grant total.

The Job Creation Program participants will work directly with the IAP Working Groups to assist in the development of resource materials and inventories, hosting community planning sessions, conducting best practice reviews and making recommendations for practices and procedures identified by the Working Group.

4.3 Municipal Immigration Online Funding Proposal

The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration (MCI) distributed a call for proposals for municipalities to apply for funding of up to \$300,000 to develop a portal of newcomer information featuring their communities.

Immigrants planning to come to Ontario will be able to use accurate, current and relevant information to make informed decisions on where they want to settle. Newcomers living in York Region will have access to information to enhance their settlement process. Although this will be a collaborative community project, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration will only provide funds to municipalities.

A key action of the IAP initiative has been to create a coordinated, integrated, user-oriented and system-wide response for newcomers settling and integrating into York Region communities.

Interest and input for the Municipal Immigrant Information Online funding application was generated from local municipalities, immigrant services providers, including the new Welcome Resource Centre group, community groups and Regional departments.

The proposed project will:

- Support the economic and social integration of new immigrants and prospective immigrants in York Region by providing user-friendly, seamless access to information and services.
- Create the York Region Immigration Portal as an online gateway that most effectively informs prospective immigrants and newcomers about opportunities, government services and community supports existing in the Region.
- Maximize resources available across institutions, saving duplication of effort, while allowing individual organizations to look after their own clients. The proposed portal acts as a champion and model, and tangibly promotes and validates the benefits of a 'higher order' of collaboration amongst stakeholders.

MCI expects successful funding applicants to be able to sustain the project after the one time funding ends. The sustainability plan of the project includes:

- The Regional Municipality of York will host the portal on its servers, provide technical maintenance and support a Steering Committee as the governance body of the portal.
- The Welcome Resource Centre will develop a plan for managing and updating the content and operating the portal, subject to funding available.
- The partners will provide updated portal information, technical support, expertise to promote the portal and, if possible, contribution to the operational costs.

The application was submitted on December 20, 2006.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

Vision 2026 addresses immigrant issues and inclusivity in a number of goal statements.

The initiatives of the IAP focus on both labour market integration and building a connection, a feeling of belonging between immigrants and the York Region community.

Feeling of belonging and economic connection to the community will ensure immigrants continue to be valued contributors and not become marginalized. A community, which isolates immigrants, is more likely to experience the consequences of this isolation through an increase in social difficulties including harbouring of negative feelings and a propence towards hostility and violence.

This project ensures York Region is ready for 2026, by creating solutions that directly and indirectly facilitate an immigrant's ability to build connections to the community.

York Region will become a place where immigrants can contribute their rich experiences, skills and abilities to both the social and economic prosperity of York Region, thereby

advancing the goal of creating ‘quality communities for a diverse population’ as well as creating a “vibrant economy”.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The agreement signed with Services Canada is sufficient to establish a 52 week project team and begin to implement the working group activities.

The funding agreement between COSTI and CIC will be sufficient to further develop the Welcome Resource Centre concept and create the infrastructure required to establish the first Welcome Resource Centre in Vaughan.

The proposal submitted by the IAP to the Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration to coordinate the development of the municipal immigrant information portal requests \$300,000. The \$300,000 is one time funding and doesn’t include sustainability funds. The Regional Municipality of York will sustain the portal technology and the Welcome Resource Centre will develop an action plan to sustain the portal content.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The IAP will positively impact the entire York Region community. Partnership with local area municipalities is an important and necessary foundation for the IAP. Becoming a more ethno-cultural inclusive community will take the efforts of many and provide significant value to residents of all local municipalities.

The task of planning and implementing the York Region Immigrant Information Portal demands vision, sharing, co-coordinating and expertise. The partners need to be committed to the principle of integrating resources and combining efforts toward the achievement of an effective, sustainable online communication and service delivery solution targeting newcomers and prospective immigrants.

If the Municipal Immigrant Information Online proposal is successful, participation will be requested from local municipalities to develop and design the online information.

7. CONCLUSION

Human services are those programs and services that support a safe, healthy community and maintain and promote its quality of life. The HSPC provides the forum for all human service providers to collaborate on actions that will increase funding and service delivery effectiveness and efficiency.

The IAP is important to both immigrants living in York Region and to the health and safety of the York Region community. By working towards a more ethno-cultural inclusive community, immigrants will be able to live, learn, work and play in a way that fulfills and generates the feeling of being connected and most importantly the reality of belonging. Building a sense of well-being will result in positive immigrant contributions to York Region's social and economic prosperity and an enviable quality of life.

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The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.