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YORK REGION 2011 CENSUS AWARENESS INITIATIVE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated March 14, 2011 from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and the Commissioner of Community and Health Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The strategies outlined in this report be adopted to help raise awareness of the 2011 Census and National Household Survey amongst York Region residents.
2. The Regional Clerk forward a letter to the Clerks of the local municipalities, Community Social Service and Housing providers, members of the York Region Community Social Data Consortium and Community Reference Group, Human Services Planning Board, Community Partnership Council, and the Accessibility Advisory Committee to ask for their assistance in the promotion of the 2011 Census and National Household Survey.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with background information on the upcoming 2011 Census and National Household Survey (NHS), and recommend steps the Region can take to promote participation in the 2011 Census process. The active promotion will help bolster the participation of all residents, including those who are harder to reach, so that as much as possible York Region's make up and needs are reflected.

3. BACKGROUND

Planning and Development Services and Community and Health Services are the primary Regional departments that acquire and report on Census data. Census data is used to identify demographic, economic and social conditions and trends in the Region.

2011 Census will consist of a Census questionnaire and the National Household Survey

In 2006, the Census was comprised of two forms: the short-form and the long-form census; both of which were mandatory. The short-form was sent to all households and gathered information on age, gender, marital status and basic household characteristics as well as mother tongue language. The 2006 long-form census was sent to a 20% sample of households and consisted of questions on the labour force, income, mobility, housing, ethnicity, education, dwelling unit characteristics and a range of other socio-economic characteristics.

For the 2011 Census, there will still be two components: a mandatory Census questionnaire and the voluntary National Household Survey.

- The Census questionnaire is mandatory and will contain similar questions as the former short-form census with two additional questions on language.
- The NHS will contain the same types of questions as the former long-form census.

For the purposes of the 2011 Census, Census Day is May 10, 2011. In early May, Statistics Canada will begin to mail out letters to all households requesting them to fill out their Census form online. A toll free telephone number will be available to request a paper questionnaire from Statistics Canada. Some households will receive the Census forms in the mail, depending on the area in which they live.

In addition, one third of households will also receive the National Household Survey. The NHS replaces the long-form census. The NHS is a voluntary survey whereas the previous long-form census was mandatory. Households in the sample selected for the NHS that choose to complete their census questionnaire on-line will be presented with the NHS questionnaire immediately after submitting their census questionnaire. Otherwise, those households selected for the NHS will receive the survey by mail, about four weeks after the Census questionnaire.

Census data is a key input for making effective service delivery and program decisions

Accurate Census data is required for understanding the most recent demographic, economic and social conditions and trends. York Region, along with the nine local municipalities and many public and private sector organizations make extensive use of Census data. The Census data is used as input to decisions on economic and social policies and programs, some of which rely on the data, in part, for funding opportunities, and for many other purposes such as business development and marketing.

Data from both the Census questionnaire and the NHS will continue to be essential for the planning, monitoring and delivery of a wide range of York Region's services, programs and policies, including social, health and other community services, affordable

housing, growth forecasting, economic development programs, transportation planning for transit projects and others. The data is also a key piece of information that the Region relies on for effective, fact based advocacy to other levels of government.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Census Awareness Initiative is needed to promote participation in the 2011 Census

Since the 2011 Census questionnaire is mandatory and similar to the former short-form census, the level of response is expected to be similar to the 2006 Census. As with past censuses, there continues to be the need to ensure all households respond fully and with accurate information. York Region, along with other parts of the Greater Toronto Area, has a large recent immigrant population who speak neither English nor French. This segment of the population may not be aware of the importance of the Census and therefore, may not respond to either the Census or the NHS. As well, other vulnerable populations, such as isolated seniors, people with disabilities, low income households and First Nations typically have a much lower participation rate.

The September 8, 2010 staff report to the Planning and Economic Development Committee outlined the potential negative implications of the change from the long-form census to a voluntary survey. These concerns include the fact that the voluntary nature of the NHS could result in an unrepresentative sample of the Region's population and an unusable data source. The usability of the NHS data can be assessed only after the survey results have been compiled by Statistics Canada and will depend not only on the number of responses but also whether there is adequate representation from all segments of the Region's population.

York Region-wide promotional and awareness strategies for both the 2011 Census and the NHS will be more important than ever given the concern regarding the response rate and validity of the sample from the NHS. These promotional and awareness strategies are intended to educate and encourage all residents in York Region to participate in the Census process and ensure their voices are heard.

Statistics Canada's 2011 Census promotional strategy is anticipated to be similar to their 2006 initiative

At this time, the full details of Statistic Canada's promotional strategy for the 2011 Census and NHS are not publicly available. It is anticipated that a similar strategy will be employed as was used in the previous Census. Initiatives undertaken by Statistics Canada for the 2006 Census included: phone centre help in 44 languages, a Census booklet on how to fill out the Census questionnaire available in 65 languages and other promotional materials, multilingual Census help centres and targeted ethnic mass media advertisements through media releases and media newspaper advertisements.

Awareness initiative was previously undertaken by York Region for the 2006 Census

For the 2006 Census, York Region undertook a Census Awareness Initiative. At that time, the need to raise awareness of the Census was identified because of Statistics Canada's change to a mass mail-out of the Census forms from the previous door-to-door enumeration and the potential low response rate from recent immigrants with minimal official language skills, isolated seniors, people with disabilities, low income households, First Nations and other vulnerable populations. York Region Census awareness activities in 2006 included: placing ads in local newspapers, posting a web page on the Region's website, providing call centre personnel with wording to assist callers with general Census questions, corporate media releases and other activities.

York Region awareness initiative is needed for the 2011 Census and NHS

Building on the promotional programs that were undertaken for the 2006 Census by York Region and Statistics Canada, it is recommended that the Region undertake a public awareness initiative for the 2011 Census to raise awareness of the importance of the Census and the NHS and to facilitate access to language assistance in completing the 2011 Census and NHS. This will assist in obtaining a higher response rate and more accurate data to better inform policy and program decision making in the Region. A complete Census and a representative sample for the NHS will be essential for making effective decisions on economic and social programs and infrastructure investment in the Region.

The York Region census awareness initiative will be aligned with Statistic Canada's 2011 Census promotional strategy to avoid duplication and overlap, and ensure effective communication with all York Region residents including the vulnerable populations within the Region.

The following initiatives are being proposed:

- Advertise strategically in local newspapers throughout York Region to promote completing the Census and NHS including advertising in ethno-cultural community newspapers.
- Provide Statistics Canada materials in key locations throughout the Region including libraries, community centres, local municipal offices, Social Housing providers, York Region offices and Welcome centres.
- Post a Census and NHS information link on the Region's website and provide a link to the Statistics Canada website.
- Investigate social media opportunities to communicate with the Region's population regarding the 2011 Census and NHS.
- Provide call centre personnel and Corporate Communications staff with wording to assist callers with general Census questions.

- Coordinate methods of raising Census awareness with Regional Departments including Community and Health Services.
- Send a letter and this staff report to local municipalities and key human service agencies in the Region, asking for their assistance in raising awareness of the Census and the NHS, including the York Region Community Social Data Consortium and Community Reference Group, Human Services Planning Board, Community Partnership Council, and the Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- Send out Corporate Media Releases to York Region residents through local media, emphasizing the importance of the Census and the NHS (with added emphasis on media targeting the ethno-cultural community of the Region) and ensure translations of media releases in the top non-official languages of the Region.

While Planning and Development Services will lead this initiative, Community and Health Services and Corporate Communications will work closely with Planning and Development Services to manage these initiatives with Corporate Communications taking the lead on coordinating the major communication activities.

Given that the Census is in early May, work in support of the planned communications activities needs to take place in April and May. The following table summarizes the timelines for the various components of the Census Awareness Initiative.

Table 1: York Region 2011 Census Awareness Initiative Major Tasks/Timing

Task	Timing
Advertise in York Region local mainstream and ethno-cultural community newspapers	Late April and early May
Distribute Statistics Canada Census promotional materials across different locations in the Region	Mid April
2011 Census and NHS information link on York Region website; posting on York Region intranet site	Post in mid April
Investigate social media opportunities to promote 2011 Census and NHS	March
Provide call centre personnel with wording to answer general Census related questions	May
Sending of letter and this staff report to local municipalities and key human service agencies	Early April
Media releases	Late April

The major releases of Census data are anticipated to commence in February 2012, starting with population and dwelling counts, followed by other Census topic areas over the following two years. The anticipated first release data for NHS data is late 2012/early 2013.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs for this initiative can be accommodated in the approved 2011 budget. The costs associated with the Census Awareness Initiative are limited to the advertising costs in local newspapers which is anticipated to be in the range of \$10,000 to \$15,000. Staff time, meetings and preparing materials can be managed with the existing budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region uses data from the Census to advocate and better inform decision-making for a wide range of infrastructure and human service programs, services and policies; many of which directly affect local municipalities, including population and employment growth forecasts prepared by the Region as well as human service program decisions. Local municipalities are also direct users of Census data in their own service and infrastructure planning work. A copy of this staff report will be circulated to local municipal staff asking for their assistance in promoting the Census.

7. CONCLUSION

Accurate data and information from the Census and the NHS are essential for the Region to make effective and efficient decisions for services, programs and infrastructure investments. The recent change to a voluntary survey to replace the former mandatory long-form Census may have significant negative impacts on data quality. In addition, there is also the need to make recent immigrants to the Region and other vulnerable harder to reach residents aware of the importance of the Census and NHS to get a response rate that reflects the true composition of the Region.

A 2011 Census Awareness Initiative is being proposed to help raise awareness of the Census and the NHS. A strategy that builds upon the Region's 2006 Census promotional initiative and is aligned with Statistics Canada's 2011 Census promotional strategy is recommended for the upcoming Census.

Staff from the Community and Health Services Department and Corporate Communications have reviewed and provided input into the development of this report. For more information on this report, please contact Paul Bottomley, Manager, Growth Management at 905-830-4444, Ext. 1530 or John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at Ext. 1525 or Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director of Strategic Service Integration & Policy, Community and Health Services at Ext. 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.