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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WEB-BASED COLLABORATION ENVIRONMENT

The Finance and Administration Committee recommends:

- 1. receipt of the communication from Sheila Birrell, Town Clerk, Town of Markham, March 22, 2006, forwarding a resolution adopted by the Council of the Town of Markham at its meeting on March 21, 2006; and**
- 2. adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, February 28, 2006, from the Commissioner of Finance:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the development of a web-based collaboration environment as described in this report as a priority for the Region.
2. IBM Canada Ltd. be retained to assist regional staff in the development, testing and implementation of this collaboration environment at a cost not to exceed \$25,000 inclusive of all hardware, software and professional services.
3. York Region join the Town of Markham in developing a Business Plan for a portal to serve the residents and businesses of the Region at a cost not to exceed \$75,000.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek approval of Regional Council to:

- a) initiate and implement a “sandbox” web-based collaboration environment that permits same place, same time virtual meetings, discussions, emailing, instant messaging, presentations and reporting over the Internet, as part of the OneYork Initiative, and
- b) participate with the Town of Markham on the joint portal initiative by first completing a business plan for the portal.

3. BACKGROUND

As part of the 2014 Commonwealth Games bid by the Region of York, IBM Canada donated, for a temporary duration, two servers and the associated software to enable the creation of a collaboration environment which was intended to be used primarily for the Commonwealth Games. Due to the constraints of the time lines imposed by the Commonwealth Games, and the learning curve associated with servicing and producing the desired environment using IBM resources, it was not possible to use the web-based

collaboration environment created for that purpose. Nevertheless, significant funds were expended to create that environment in its rudimentary and initial phase.

The collaboration environment is made up of servers and software that permit same place, same time meetings, discussions, emailing, instant messaging, presentations, reporting, etc over the internet. Collectively, these activities constitute the “sandbox” environment in which the Region can “test and experiment” with other collaboration partners and stakeholders.

The Chair of the e-Government Sub-Committee was a driving force behind keeping the servers and software from IBM which are recommended to be used for a broader collaboration environment in any subsequent regional or area municipal joint initiative. As a result, the Township of Markham has approved the acquisition of the server equipment that was temporarily donated to the Commonwealth Games. The Region is now recommending contracting with IBM to get the necessary training and professional services to make the collaboration environment a true sandbox. This will enable the Region to demonstrate the technology both internally and to its partners and other stakeholders.

As a second initiative, the subject of developing a portal for the Town of Markham jointly with York Region was discussed by the General Committee of Markham Council. The following recommendations of staff of the Town of Markham were approved by their Council on Tuesday, February 28, 2006.

That the following recommendations be adopted:

- 1) In 2006, work with the Region to create the governance, define portal requirements and begin implementation in 2006 on a Shared Portal Solution.*
- 2) The process should be open to other OneYork partners at the right time*
- 3) An RFP should be issued to ensure that the portal that provides the best value is selected.*

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

There is an obvious ramification to the creation of this sandbox as a collaboration tool since it would be an early adoption of a specific technology that was demonstrated to the Region in the context of the Commonwealth Games. Clearly, any portal technology that either the Region or any of the area municipalities would embark upon, jointly or separately, will contain similar collaboration tools. While such portal technology may be at least a year or more away, the investment in the collaboration tools requested in this report will be insignificant in comparison to the multimillion dollar investment in portal technology that will be ultimately required. The participation in this initiative will demonstrate the effectiveness of using such collaboration tools and will position staff to appreciate the value of such tools as the Region progresses with its joint venture on portal technology adoption.

The proposed collaboration environment will facilitate early integration and use of the sandbox for a rapid response to initiatives and opportunities that may arise that could use such collaboration tools, for example in the context of the Pan American Games or other similar multi-stakeholder involvement. In essence, such collaboration tools provide a web-based collaboration that would reduce the need for stakeholders to travel to a common destination or to a common meeting room to discuss joint issues.

ITS staff believes that a portal for the Region should be developed jointly with area municipalities as most of the direct “retail” services are delivered at the local level as opposed to the “wholesale” services provided by the Region. Staff are therefore supportive of the recommendations from the Town of Markham. Staff believes that the first step in such joint portal initiative is the development of a business plan. There are obvious administrative, organizational and funding considerations for the joint portal project which will be brought forward in due course. For the time being, staff are recommending approval of Regional Council for the initiation of the portal initiative through the development of the business plan.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It may be necessary to develop a full system, including a backup system to the proposed collaboration environment either at Markham or at the Region, together with the associated software. It is anticipated that approximately \$25,000 would be required inclusive of professional services to bring this environment to a state of completion for demonstration.

The initiation of the business plan for the Portal will commence through an RFP which will be prepared jointly with the Town of Markham following approval of the recommendations of this report. The Town of Markham has established a budget of \$75,000 for this purpose and it is recommended that the Region contribute an equal amount.

Costs associated with developing the joint Business Plan for the portal have been identified in the 2006 ITS Capital Budget. Costs associated with implementing the web-based collaboration environment can be accommodated within the same budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The collaboration environment may be made available to all local municipalities who may participate on joint One York initiatives. Similarly, an open invitation will be made to all local municipalities to join the development of the Business Plan for the Portal.

7. CONCLUSION

The Region and Area Municipalities will need collaboration tools similar to the one described in this report to respond to emerging opportunities to collaborate on projects and services. Such collaboration tools reduce the need for travel, improve productivity, demonstrate the state-of-the-art in adoption of technology and provide a building block for future advances in moving the Region to become a center for best practices in technology utilization. Furthermore, the development of a business plan for a portal for the Region and the area municipalities will highlight the importance of portal technology as another important channel of service to the residents and businesses of the York Region.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.