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YORK REGION 2006 CENSUS AWARENESS INITIATIVE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, March 22, 2006, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the strategies outlined in this report be adopted to help raise the awareness of the 2006 Census to York Region residents.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the new Federal Government approach to the 2006 Census, issues related to the approach and how the Region can help attain a higher response rate.

3. BACKGROUND

May 16, 2006 is Census Day in Canada. During the two weeks prior to this day, Statistics Canada will mail out a Census questionnaire to each and every household in Canada.

The methodology for Census questionnaire distribution has changed this year to the form of a mass mail out, as opposed to the door to door canvassing by an enumerator of previous years. The key issue with this new format is that there are no longer Census enumerators to help the large multicultural population in Canada with any language problems that may arise in completing the Census forms. Both the City of Toronto and the Region of Peel have noted this same issue and have reported to their respective Councils.

The Greater Toronto Area in particular has a very large recent immigrant population who speak neither English nor French who may not be aware of the Census program and the value of Census data. There is a general concern that large numbers of the immigrant population with minimal Official Language skills may discard the Census forms.

Statistics Canada is embarking on a number of initiatives to help raise awareness of the 2006 Census. A series of Census Information Sessions for individuals working with new immigrants are scheduled and a session was held in York Region on February 23, 2006 at the United Way of York Region office in Markham. Statistics Canada is also offering phone centre help in 44 languages and a Census booklet on how to fill out the

questionnaire will be available in 65 languages. Promotional materials will be available to distribute to raise awareness and multilingual Census Help Centres will be located at local shopping malls. Statistics Canada will inform the Region of the location of these York Region Census Help Centres prior to Census Day. Statistics Canada is also conducting targeted ethnic mass media advertisements throughout the GTA through media releases and specific newspaper advertisements.

The Region of York is home to a large number of new immigrants whose first language is neither English nor French. The Region can complement Statistics Canada's 2006 Census awareness initiatives to help raise public awareness and highlight the importance to residents of contributing accurately to the Census questionnaire. A complete Census, with the most accurate data possible, is an invaluable resource for making future policy decisions affecting the economic and social programs throughout the Region.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Accurate Census data is of great value to the Region, the nine area municipalities and other public and private agencies. Accurate data on the most recent economic, social and demographic conditions and trends is required for making key policy and program decisions and to implement numerous projects and initiatives. For example, the Region and the local municipalities will benefit by obtaining their fair share of the gas tax revenue under the "Federal Gas Tax Sharing Program" from accurate census data.

Census data provides information on the characteristics of the Region's population and its economy. This base information is used to plan for the provision of both hard and soft services such as roads, sewers, health care and day care facilities. This data also provides base information for the Region's long term population and employment forecasts (for example, accurate population per unit data) that play an important role in planning for infrastructure projects, housing needs, land requirements and various health and social programs.

Regional Staff are concerned that new immigrants in York Region will not understand the importance of Census information. As such, it is recommended that the Region embark on a public awareness initiative, which complements Statistics Canada's program, to raise the awareness of the importance of the Census and to facilitate access to language assistance in completing the 2006 Census form. This will contribute to providing a higher response rate and more accurate data with which to base our policy and program decisions on.

The Region's initiatives will occur in addition to Statistics Canada's campaign outlined above. Attention in raising awareness will be placed on where and how to find help, particularly for those persons where language may be a barrier. The following steps are recommended:

- Advertise strategically to promote Census participation throughout the Region
- Post an information link on the Region's main web site.
- Provide call centre personnel and Corporate Communications with wording to assist callers with general Census questions.
- Send a letter and this Staff Report to key human service agencies within the Region asking for their assistance and input on raising awareness of the Census.

Planning and Development Services and Corporate Communications will continue to work closely together to manage all these initiatives.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Communications have agreed to manage the advertisement campaign. Planning and Development Services will assist where needed in any graphic and text requirements. Costs for this exercise can be accommodated in the approved 2006 Budget. Other financial implications are more indirect and take the form of staff time, staff material preparation, meetings and preparing media alerts.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region uses statistics from the Census for many purposes, examples being updating the Region's Population and Employment Forecast Model, and for making decisions on key human service requirements based on demographic profiles of all its local residents. Gas Tax transfer funding will also be based on Census information. Therefore, it is in the interest of all nine local municipalities to have the most accurate Census data possible. Key future decisions on service delivery and local municipal requirements will be based on the 2006 Census. Regional staff have contacted area municipal staff with a memo and this report and will assist to coordinate activities to promote the 2006 Census.

7. CONCLUSION

Census data is very important to the Region of York. Accurate data is relied on for making key policy decisions by the Region and other levels of government (federal/provincial/local) for service delivery and infrastructure requirements and for government transfer payments. It is the single best resource for obtaining an accurate profile of our residents. The recent change in the methodology of questionnaire distribution has raised concerns on the potential impact that may result on data quality and Census awareness.

Therefore, the Region of York is preparing to help raise the awareness of the Census to minimize the potential negative impacts of the new Census delivery methodology through the following tasks:

- Advertise strategically throughout the Region.
- Post an information link on the Region's main web site.
- Provide call centre personnel and Corporate Communications with wording to assist callers with general Census questions.
- Coordinate methods of raising Census awareness with other Regional Departments.
- Send a letter and this Staff Report to key human service agencies within the Region asking for their assistance and input on raising awareness of the Census.
- Corporate Communications to communicate to York Region residents the importance of Census participation through Corporate Media Releases (with added emphasis to media targeting the ethnic population)

Staff will contact area municipal staff and assist to coordinate activities to promote the 2006 Census.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.