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THE FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES QUALITY OF LIFE IN CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, May 25, 2005, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This report be distributed by the Office of the Regional Clerk to the nine local municipalities, the Human Services Planning Coalition and the York Region Funders Alliance for their information and use.
2. The brochure entitled “Quality of Life in York Region”, attached as *Attachment 1* to this report be distributed.

2. PURPOSE

This report outlines information regarding quality of life in The Regional Municipality of York. It is based on the three thematic Quality of Life reports prepared by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to date. The three reports are “*Incomes, Shelter and Necessities*”, “*Dynamic Societies and Social Change*”, and “*Growth, the Economy and the Urban Environment*”. This report also recommends that a brochure be released for public information summarizing the content of the three FCM reports.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 York Region’s Involvement

The Quality of Life Reporting System (QOLRS) was developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to measure, monitor and report on changes in social, economic and environmental factors to assess the quality of life in Canadian urban municipalities. There are 72 indicators of quality of life which form the basis of the QOLRS.

York Region has been a participant in the QOLRS since 1998. On behalf of York Region, Community Services and Housing Department staff participates on FCM’s Quality of Life technical team. As part of this role, staff coordinate the collection of York Region service data from Regional departments, school boards, area municipalities and other community organizations for inclusion in the report. As, well, the Community Services and Housing Department provides support to Regional Councillor Brenda Hogg in her

role as Chair, Quality of Life Technical Team. The Technical Team determines project priorities and assists in the research and development of new indicators.

3.2 FCM Definition of “Quality of Life”

FCM defines quality of life as follows: “Quality of life is enhanced and reinforced in municipalities that:

- develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
- protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
- offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
- promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
- enable residents to meet their basic needs; and
- support rich social interaction and the inclusion of all residents in community life.”

The indicators are organized under the following general categories:

- Demographic and background information
- Affordable, appropriate housing
- Civic engagement
- Community and social infrastructure
- Education
- Employment
- Local economy
- Natural environment
- Personal and community health
- Personal financial security
- Personal safety

Twenty Canadian municipalities, including York Region, participate in the QOLRS. This represents about 40 percent of Canada’s total population. The municipalities range from some of Canada’s largest urban centres and the suburban municipalities surrounding them, to small and medium-sized municipalities. Participating communities include Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax (Regional Municipality), Halton (Regional Municipality), Hamilton, Kingston, London, Niagara (Regional Municipality), Ottawa, Peel (Regional Municipality), Quebec (Regional Municipality), Regina, Saskatoon, Sudbury, Toronto,

Vancouver, Waterloo (Regional Municipality), Windsor, Winnipeg, and York (Regional Municipality).

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Information Should be Used with Care

The following is a summary of the findings of the three thematic reports recently prepared by FCM. *Attachment 2* to this report provides the data for York Region contained in the FCM reports. The full text of the reports and the tables containing the data for all QOLRS municipalities can be found at <http://fcm.ca/qol3/archives.html>

Some caution should be used when comparing York Region to different communities since the communities range from very urban to largely suburban and rural.

Much of the data compares 1991 to 2001. It should be noted that the analysis in this report is based on point-in-time information for 2001, versus a 10-year trend.

The tables included in the following sections indicate York Region's ranking in relation to the other QOLRS municipalities for the indicators in the theme reports.

4.2 Incomes, Shelter and Necessities

Theme Report #1 – “*Income, Shelter and Necessities*”, released by FCM in 2004 focuses on a set of trends between 1991 and 2001 related to personal incomes, shelter and the affordability of basic needs. This report places particular emphasis on the following two factors contributing to quality of life: promoting a fair and equitable sharing of common resources, and enabling residents to meet their basic needs. The report also provides an analysis of demographic groups more vulnerable to the effects of falling incomes, high rates of poverty and more severe housing affordability challenges. These include singles, single-parent families, recent immigrants and the Aboriginal population.

Table 1
Income, Shelter and Necessities
York Region in Relation to Other QOLRS Municipalities

Indicator	Lower	Average	Higher
Income gap			X
Children in low-income families	X		
Percentage of Lone Parent families	X		
Diversity of Housing starts	X		
Renter households on Social housing wait lists			X
Social housing wait time			X
Renter households spending 30% or more on shelter		X	
Rental vacancy rate	X		
Percentage change in rent			X

4.2.1 Summary of Key Report 1 Findings

The indicators in Table 1 above are consistent with the findings of the Region's report "Housing and our Economy" prepared in 2004. The report noted the lack of rental housing and limited stock of more affordable multiple dwelling housing in the Region, suggesting that these were factors influencing many workers to live outside of the Region.

4.3 Dynamic Societies and Social Change

Theme Report #2 – *"Dynamic Societies and Social Change"*, released by FCM in 2005, focuses on two of the six factors of quality of life included in FCM's definition – opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes, and aspirations, and support for rich social interactions and the inclusion of all residents in community life. The report describes two demographic trends in QOLRS municipalities – a rapidly ageing population; above-average growth in children and youth population; and growing cultural, ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity.

Table 2
Dynamic Societies and Social Change
York Region in Relation to Other QOLRS Municipalities

Indicator	Lower	Average	Higher
Increase in seniors population			X
Increase in 0-14, 15-24 and 25-34 age groups			X
Decline in labour force participation			X
Post Secondary education attainment			X
Immigrant unemployment rate	X		
Non-immigrant unemployment rate	X		
Voter participation	X		
Percentage of female municipal councillors	X		
Volunteerism rate	X		
Increase in charitable donations			X
Supply of subsidized child care spaces for low-income children	X		
Student-teacher ratio	X		
Class size		X	
Population age 15+ with less than Grade 9 education	X		
Premature Mortality rate	X		

Indicator	Lower	Average	Higher
Teen Mothers	X		
Suicide rates	X		
Work hours lost due to illness/disability	X		
Young offenders	X		
Property Crime	X		
Violent Crime	X		

4.3.1 Summary of Key Report 2 Findings

The indicators in Table 2 above generally show that York Region residents are relatively safer, healthier and better educated than residents in the other QOLRS municipalities. The community involvement indicators, however, would seem to indicate that the Region's residents are less engaged than residents in the other QOLRS municipalities.

One apparent anomaly in the indicators is the relatively low unemployment rate combined with a relatively higher decline in labour force participation rate. The higher decline in labour force participation may be explained by the quickly ageing population in York Region and the growing number of children in the Region..

The indicators also support information contained in the Region's report "*Our Children: A Preliminary Status Report on York Region's Children*", 2004, which noted the increasing waiting list for child care fee assistance. The FCM report shows that York Region has a lower supply of subsidized child care spaces for low-income children than most other QOLRS municipalities.

4.4 Growth, the Economy and the Urban Environment

Theme Report #3 – "*Growth, the Economy and the Urban Environment*" was released on May 11, 2005. The report focuses on two of the six factors of quality of life underlying FCM's Quality of Life Reporting System – developing and maintaining a vibrant local economy, and protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment. The report explores the parallels between relatively strong population and economic growth which occurred during the second half of the ten-year period between 1991 and 2001, and corresponding pressures on the environment more evident during this second period.

Table 3
Growth, the Economy and the Urban Environment
York Region in Relation to Other QOLRS Municipalities

Indicator	Lower	Average	Higher
Growth rate			X
Household growth			X
Low density Housing starts			X
Building permit value			X
Employment growth			X
Average household income			X
Decrease in bankruptcy rate			X
Solid waste recycling		X	
Waste diversion	X		
Use of public transit	X		
Walking/cycling commuters	X		
Commuting distance			X
Ozone level			X
Population not served by municipal water			X
Water consumption	X		
Population served by water but not sewers			X
Sewer servicing without secondary or tertiary treatment			X
Water body closures due to health concerns	X		

4.4.1 Summary of Key Report 3 Findings

The indicators in Table 3 above generally reflect the high rate of growth that has occurred in York Region, and the relative health of the economy in relation to other QOLRS municipalities. The report also illustrates and confirms the reliance in York Region on the automobile rather than other modes of transportation, such as public transit, walking and cycling, all of which reduce road congestion and stress on the environment. Also of note, is the lesser degree of waste diversion and recycling in relation to many other QOLRS municipalities.

4.5 Overall Key Findings about York Region's Quality of Life

As noted previously, some caution should be used when comparing York Region to different communities since the communities range from very urban to largely suburban and rural.

Much of the data compares 1991 to 2001. It should be noted that the analysis in this report is based on point-in-time information for 2001, versus a 10-year trend.

York Region's continuing leadership in this initiative is beginning to provide us with important, comparative statistical data about the changing state and trends in York Region's population that can be used in long-term strategic planning. From the three reports, the following key points can be made about the quality of life in York Region:

- 1) Where education, employment, health, crime, income, and water consumption are concerned, York Region compares favourably to the other QOLRS municipalities.
- 2) Areas where indicators show there are some challenges include income gap between the "have and the have-nots", diversity of housing starts, wait times for social housing, rental vacancy rate, rental affordability, voter participation, volunteerism, waste diversion, subsidized child care, and use of public transit.
- 3) The Region is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Canada, and it's growing in a complex way. The population is rapidly becoming more ethno-culturally diverse, the income gap is widening, and the population is generally ageing. We're not the same type of community we were twenty or even ten years ago. Regional government is facing the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population.
- 4) The findings of the reports are consistent with the findings of reports to Planning and Economic Development Committee and Community Services and Housing Committee that examine recent census data.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

One of the goals of Vision 2026 is "Residents will continue to enjoy the high quality of life that attracted them to York and will have a strong sense of belonging and commitment to their communities". Vision 2026 recognizes that implementation and monitoring are important components of a plan's success and states that "to ensure Vision 2026 is successful, we must measure how goals are being achieved and to monitor the appropriateness of these goals as we advance, or as circumstances and trends change. The FCM Quality of Life Monitoring System provides a total of 72 indicators which can be used to measure and monitor quality of life in York Region and in relation to other Canadian municipalities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Membership in FCM's Quality of Life Reporting System is \$5,000 and is paid annually from the Community Services and Housing Department's budget. As the contact for York Region, the Community Services and Housing Department coordinates the collection of York Region service data from Regional departments, school boards, area municipalities and other community organizations for inclusion in the report on behalf of York Region. Membership also provides access to all data purchased by FCM for use in the report, including data from such sources as Statistics Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

There is no additional cost in preparing this report. The cost of developing and printing the brochure is within the Community Services and Housing Department's budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

By providing a framework to monitor quality of life, the reports are of value to local municipalities as a tool to:

- Identify and raise awareness of issues affecting quality of life in Canadian communities;
- Better target policies and resources aimed at improving quality of life; and to
- Establish municipal governments as a strong and legitimate partner in public policy debate in Canada.

The QOLRS provides municipal governments with a valuable national forum for sharing experience and expertise.

This report and copies of the attached brochure will be shared with each of the nine area municipalities in York Region for their information and use.

7. CONCLUSION

The three thematic FCM reports present a series of findings that are similar to those outlined in various recent Regional reports. The Quality of Life Reporting System provides an opportunity to compare the quality of life in York Region to itself and other municipalities in Canada over time, and according to a number of indicators that have been pre-established.

Overall, the quality of life in York Region compares favourably to the other QOLRS municipalities in the areas of education, employment, health, crime, income, and water consumption. Areas in which the Region compares less favourably than most other

QOLRS municipalities include income gap, diversity of housing starts, wait times for social housing, rental vacancy rate, rental affordability, voter participation, volunteerism, waste diversion, use of public transit.

The FCM quality of life indicators assist in identifying and confirming the needs and strengths of York Region. This comparative statistical data along with other data can be used by the Region and its municipalities to actively plan for the short and long-term needs of its rapidly growing and diversifying population.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report)