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UPDATE ON YORK REGION'S APPLICATION FOR THE LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS INITIATIVE

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, August 26, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be forwarded for information only to the nine local municipalities, the Human Services Planning Coalition sector representatives, the Inclusivity Action Plan Steering Committee members and the York Region's Welcome Centres lead agencies as outlined in *Attachment 1*.

2. PURPOSE

This report informs Council that The Regional Municipality York has been appointed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to lead the development of a York Region settlement strategy. Development of the strategy will be 100% funded through the federal government's Local Immigration Partnerships initiative. This report also outlines the next steps regarding the negotiation of the federal Contribution Agreement, including the final funding allocation.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region's participation on the Municipal Immigration Committee

Under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (November, 2005), municipalities, for the first time, were formally asked to participate in discussions on how immigrants should be attracted, integrated and settled in their communities. York Region, along with other selected municipalities was invited to join the Municipal Immigration Committee, established to support the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. This Committee is chaired jointly by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the federal and provincial governments. The Municipal Immigration Committee provides a forum for information-sharing, strategic policy and consultation among the three levels of government.

Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy, Community and Health Services Department was appointed by Chairman Fisch to represent the Region on this Committee.

As a result of successful negotiations by municipalities at the Municipal Immigration Committee, the federal and provincial governments agreed to create the Local Immigration Partnerships initiative.

York Region applied to lead a local settlement strategy

On February 6, 2008, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration announced a Call for Proposals to strengthen the role of local and regional communities in serving and integrating immigrants through the Local Immigration Partnerships initiative. This initiative will be funded 100% through Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement.

The Local Immigration Partnerships initiative provides a collaborative framework to develop and implement local solutions for successful integration of immigrants to Ontario. This initiative seeks to help communities put immigration on their overall planning agenda so that communities will positively benefit from the successful social and economic integration of new immigrants.

Local Immigration Partnerships will be implemented in two phases: Phase One includes establishing a Community Partnership Council and developing a local settlement strategy; and Phase Two will be the implementation of the settlement strategy. Phase Two will be implemented through a separate Call for Proposals.

On February 21, 2008, through the adoption of Clause No. 1 of Report No. 1 of the Community Services and Housing Committee, Regional Council authorized the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to submit a proposal to lead Phase One of a Local Immigration Partnership for York Region.

Federal government consultations on Bill-C50 may provide direction to Local Immigration Partnerships

Most recently, the federal government consulted with the Municipal Immigration Committee on the tabled changes to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* as part of the federal budget (Bill C-50).

The consultations focussed on identifying critical occupational shortages, the role of immigration in responding to them, and any barriers to foreign credential accreditation.

It is anticipated that the recommended priorities will be broad based and meet national and provincial labour market needs and not specific to the needs of each municipality. It is not yet clear how the results of the consultations will align with the Local Immigration Partnerships initiative.

The proposed changes to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to narrow the processing of immigration applications. The new law is intended to stop the growth of the backlog and reduce the length of time it takes to receive a decision on an immigration application from six years that it currently takes to six to twelve months. The new law also more closely aligns Canada's immigration system with labour shortages so that immigrants who come to Canada will have more opportunities to find employment in their chosen fields.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has assigned the Region to lead a local settlement strategy.

In March 2008, the Community and Health Services Department submitted a proposal for Phase One of the Local Immigration Partnerships initiative. In July 2008, York Region was notified by Citizenship and Immigration Canada that the proposal was successful and that the Region would be leading the Local Immigration Partnership for York Region.

Key Points in York Region's proposal to lead a local settlement strategy

Proposals submitted by municipalities had to identify a community based organization that serves immigrants as a Project Partner. York Region's Project Partner is the Catholic Community Services of York Region, who in addition to providing a letter of support for York Region's proposal, were consulted in the development of the proposal. The Human Services Planning Coalition's Inclusivity Action Plan Steering Committee members and the Welcome Centre lead agencies supported York Region's interest in becoming the lead for the Regional settlement strategy.

Specifically the key deliverables are to:

1. Establish a Community Partnership Council comprised of representatives from key sectors that help newcomers settle in York Region. The Region will connect sectors that are critical to the successful integration of recent immigrants including settlement services, language training providers, employers, labour market development, educational programs, and community services to create a meaningful, comprehensive settlement strategy reflective of our community needs.
2. Develop York Region's settlement strategy. Based on feedback from the Community Partnership Council and through community consultations, the York Region settlement strategy will identify assets and gaps in programs. The primary focus will be on settlement, language training, labour market integration, and other types of settlement supports that help newcomers to successfully adapt to living in York Region. The Strategy will identify priorities, opportunities and activities to help address gaps, and where appropriate, how to streamline activities and work within the objectives outlined in the Local Immigration Partnerships Call for Proposals.

Next steps are to negotiate a Contribution Agreement

As per Regional Council authorization in February, 2008, (Clause No. 1 of Report No. 1 of the Community Services and Housing Committee) the Commissioner of Community and Health Services, on behalf of York Region, will negotiate and enter into a Contribution Agreement with the federal government. The Agreement will include the funding allocation and staff complement that Citizenship and Immigration Canada will provide to the Region, as well as set out the detailed activities and timelines for the completion of the two deliverables as outlined above.

The Commissioner of Community and Health Services Department will report back as appropriate to Committee and Council on the progress of York Region's Community Partnership Council and the development of the York Region settlement strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding allocation for York Region will be negotiated

The federal government has indicated that it will fund all program administration costs, including staff resources, to establish and support the Community Partnership Council and to lead the development of York Region's settlement strategy. York Region has requested approximately \$500,000 to lead and manage Phase One of this initiative.

The terms of the federal contribution agreement, including the final funding amount and staff complement that will be allocated to York Region, are still under negotiation.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

York Region communities, including local municipalities, residents, community-based organizations and employers, will benefit from a settlement strategy that is customized for York Region.

Most services—social and otherwise—that recent immigrants particularly need to settle in a community are provided by local and regional governments. Managing the funds and linkages that will come with the Local Immigration Partnerships initiative will help provide effective, community-specific settlement support and labour market integration throughout York Region.

Local municipalities will be consulted within the development of York Region's settlement strategy. This will allow for the settlement needs of recent immigrants living in the different parts of the region to be considered.

7. CONCLUSION

Immigrants accounted for approximately 60% of York Region's growth between 2001 and 2006. As of 2006 there were approximately 46,000 York Region residents who had immigrated to Canada within the last five years. A local settlement strategy will help these residents succeed at integrating both socially and economically. York Region will work collaboratively with key community stakeholders to establish a "made in York Region" settlement strategy that is reflective of the unique needs of the Region and secure funding for settlement services.

For more information on this report, please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch, at Ext. 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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