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2003 – 2006 ACCOMPLISHMENTS COMMUNITY SERVICES AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, August 29, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to highlight the major accomplishments of the Community Services and Housing Committee and Department during York Regional Council's 2003 – 2006 term.

3. BACKGROUND

The Community Services and Housing Department provides social and economic support programs and services to the residents of York Region. The Department delivers these programs and services through three service branches: Family and Children's Services, Employment and Financial Support, and Housing Services. Two additional branches, Business, Operations and Support Services and Policy and Program Support Services, support the three service branches.

3.1 Family and Children's Services Branch

The Family and Children's Services Branch delivers and administers services and programs for children and families, including Child Care Fee Assistance, Early Intervention Services and the Wage Subsidy Program. The Branch provides one-stop access to Child Care Fee Assistance, Early Intervention Services, Pre-School Speech and Language programs and child care information. It manages a region-wide child care service system, establishes local priorities and outcomes, allocates resources, ensures service quality and promotes effective governance and strong accountability structures.

The Branch is responsible for administering lodging housing licensing and compliance monitoring of the domiciliary hostels. It also administers a per diem to domiciliary hostel operators for board and lodging of eligible residents.

In addition, Family and Children's Services manages the funding of a number of family strengthening programs including AOK Early Child Development and Parenting Programs; summer day camps for children of Ontario Works participants and school age residents living in social housing; after school programs located in social housing developments; and training for informal home child care providers and the family resource centre. The Branch is the lead for the development of the Ontario Child Care Management System and provides training and assistance on this system for regional governments across Ontario.

3.2 Employment and Financial Support Branch

Through the Ontario Works program, York Region's Employment and Financial Support Branch provides employment and financial assistance to people in need. Ontario Works is a province-wide program, governed by the *Ontario Works Act*, which provides support to help participants gain employment while providing temporary financial assistance to meet participants' basic needs.

York Region's Employment and Financial Support Branch offers participants a full range of services and programs based on individual skills, experiences and circumstances, supporting participants to meet their employment objectives and become financially independent. Most recipients of Ontario Works are required to participate in one or more employment assistance activities as a condition of eligibility for financial assistance. Exceptions include people with health issues that temporarily or permanently preclude employment activities, seniors over 65 and single parents with pre-school age children.

Although the Community Services and Housing Department does not operate the emergency hostels, the Employment and Financial Support Branch works closely with shelter operators and helps eligible emergency hostel residents by providing financial support for board and lodging while they remain in the hostel. As well, Branch staff regularly visit these hostels to take applications for social assistance under the Ontario Works program.

3.3 Housing Services Branch

The Housing Services Branch administers funding agreements with community agencies and non-profit housing providers of subsidized housing in the Region. The Branch manages the Region's housing company, Housing York Inc. The Branch also implements strategies to reduce homelessness as well as promote the development of new housing opportunities.

The Social Housing Division administers social housing programs to 6,501 social housing units across the Region. Of these units, 1,927 units are owned by Housing York Inc. There are a range of accessible units for residents with disabilities and units suited to seniors, families and singles.

The Branch also implements strategies arising from the York Region Community Plan to Address Homelessness (updated in 2003), develops community planning activities and funds community initiatives to prevent and reduce homelessness in York Region.

3.4 Business, Operations and Support Services Branch

The Business, Operations and Support Services Branch ensures fiscal integrity and provides quality assurance functions for the Department. This Branch supports other branches by assisting with the management of budgets, finance, administration and technology. The Branch also supports program delivery through staff training, fraud investigation, contract review and program audits.

In addition, the Branch manages the Community Services and Housing Contact Centre which provides telephone information, referral, screening and application services for first-call and public inquiry callers.

3.5 Policy and Program Support Services Branch

The Policy and Program Support Services Branch provides strategic policy advice, analysis, and project support to the other branches within the Department, the Corporation, and Regional Council. As well, the Branch manages departmental emergency preparedness and business continuity planning; provides departmental program communication services; produces YorkLink; and manages community investment funding and program evaluation activities.

The Branch is also the corporate lead for the implementation of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001* (ODA) and provides liaison support between the Province and York Region with regard to the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA).

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The Community Services and Housing Department plays an important role in enhancing the social and economic well-being of residents. The Department had many successes in this area between 2003 and 2006.

This report outlines major areas where the Department provided key additional services and supports to York Region's residents. A table outlining these key accomplishments can be found in *Attachment 1*.

4.1 Family and Children's Services Branch

The goal of the Family and Children's Services Branch is to improve access to services for children and improve opportunities for families. This Branch has demonstrated its success at achieving this goal through the following major accomplishments between 2003 – 2006:

- During this three-year period, the number of subsidized child care spaces has increased with Council approval of the Provincial Early Learning and Child Care Initiative, resulting in 236 additional child care subsidies, and Council approval of funding for the implementation of the Best Start Initiative, resulting in an additional increase of approximately 1,000 licensed child care spaces and 400 additional subsidies. As a result, the monthly average number of children subsidised has increased 22% from 2,801 in 2003 to 3,425 in June 2006.
- In May 2006, the Branch completed “Child Care Matters”, the 2005 to 2008 child care service plan for York Region. This plan included Best Start components in response to the federal/provincial Best Start initiative.
- In 2005, the Child Care Infrastructure Plan to increase the number of licensed child care spaces in York Region was completed by the Branch.
- On an annual basis, the Family and Children’s Services Branch reviews the Regional Schedule of Child Care Rates for Child Care Fee Assistance based on an analysis of market pricing in York Region and approved budget and service levels. Council approved an average increase of 3% to the schedule, effective January 1, 2006. The increase will contribute to the availability of subsidized spaces in York Region by encouraging operators to maintain or increase the number of spaces they make available for fee assisted children.
- The Family and Children’s Services Branch increased the monthly average number of special needs children served by Early Intervention Services from 889 in 2003 to 1,066 in 2006.
- Between 2003 and 2006 the number of Family Strengthening Programs grew with the introduction of new programs such as Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY) and Lead Experience and Development (LEAD) the York Region Youth Leadership program. Accordingly, the number of children participating in Family Strengthening Programs increased from approximately 2,849 in 2003 to 8,740 in 2005. It is anticipated that the number of children participating in Family Strengthening Programs will continue to grow with the recent announcement of York Region’s successful application to the Province’s Communities in Action Fund.
- The Branch coordinated and managed contracts for the delivery of the Swim to Survive Pilot Program through partnerships with school boards, all nine area municipalities and the Lifesaving Society. Through the Pilot Program, 2,452 Grade 3 children in selected schools learned three basic swimming skills: roll into deep water, tread water, and swim 50 metres. The success of this initiative informed the province’s decision to make funding available for this program province-wide.

- The Family and Children's Services Branch also improved supports to the Domiciliary Hostels Program through the development and distribution of an Operator's Handbook and the implementation of the Quality of Life Initiative.

4.1.1 Our Children – A Preliminary Status Report on York Region's Children, 2004

Led by the Family and Children's Services Branch, on behalf of the Human Services Planning Coalition, this report addresses a recognized need for baseline data on York Region's children. It is a tool for gauging and comparing progress in improving children's lives in the region by identifying and reporting on indicators of children's well-being. The indicators used in this report were determined by a community reference group, drawing on recommendations from previous documents and the goals of both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Canada's National Children's Agenda.

4.2 Employment and Financial Support Branch

The Employment and Financial Support Branch's goal is to streamline service as well as to enhance skill development and job opportunities for Ontario Works participants. The following key goals were accomplished:

- Between January 2003 and March 2006, over 2,600 Ontario Works participants found employment through education, training, volunteer opportunities and job search supports.
- The Branch introduced a Mental Health Resource Model in collaboration with community mental health service providers. The model uses a team-based approach to case management and referral to support participants in addressing mental health barriers and participation in a full range of employment services and community supports.
- The Branch successfully responded to provincially mandated changes, including:
 - Transitioning from a provincially directed intake screening unit for Ontario Works applicants to a streamlined process using the Department's Contact Centre, enhancing customer service and efficiency.
 - Transitioning from an employment assistance funding model based on participation in different activity levels, to a model that is based on employment outcomes.
 - Development of a *Joint Implementation Plan* with local Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and ministry staff that supports the ministry's increased requirement for ODSP spouses and dependent adults to participate in Ontario Works employment activities.

- The Branch centralized ODSP related cases in its Georgina office to provide a single point of contact for ODSP recipients and ODSP pending clients, and for community agencies providing services to these clients, enhancing customer service and efficiency for all.
- The Employment and Financial Support Branch continually promotes training for staff to enhance their knowledge and skills in assisting Ontario Works participants. Branch staff have completed training in advanced case management, mental health, and dealing with family violence.
- In partnership with local agencies, the Branch developed employment networks and job readiness training courses in key employment sectors. Ontario Works participants completed skill training in the key sector areas of: Hospitality, Forklift, Call Centre, Office Coffee and Vending and Construction Craft Worker.
- The Branch, in collaboration with the Policy and Program Support Services Branch, has participated in discussions and continues to monitor the implementation of the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) and Labour Market Partnership Agreement (LMPA) to ensure effective access to available training and return to work services for Ontario Works clients.
- In the summer of 2005, the Branch launched an Emergency Outreach Project in an effort to prevent homelessness and reduce recidivism rates in emergency shelters.

4.3 Housing Services Branch

The goal of the Housing Services Branch is to increase housing options and develop strategies to reduce homelessness, as well as supporting housing providers in building capacity to manage housing stock effectively. During 2003 – 2006 the following key activities contributed to achieving this goal:

- Armitage Gardens in the Town of Newmarket opened, providing 58 units of new seniors housing, while partnering with Long Term Care to provide supportive housing in 26 of these units.
- Blue Willow Terrace, a mixed-use senior's facility that will include up to 60 seniors' residences, is underway. Blue Willow Terrace is scheduled to be opened in the fall of 2006 in the City of Vaughan.
- Construction was completed on the Sutton Youth Multi-Service Centre which provides emergency shelter and transitional housing for young people, as well as programming and recreational facilities operated by the Town of Georgina.

- In fall 2006, the ground breaking of Tom Taylor Place is planned. Tom Taylor Place will provide a 50 unit low rise rental apartment building on the Stickwood development site in Newmarket.
- Pre-development work on a seniors' residence with up to 85 units on the Vaughan Civic Centre site will also commence in 2006.
- A 15-suite family shelter, currently in the planning stages, to be located in the Town of East Gwillimbury will begin construction early in 2007.
- Partnerships with Private Sector Landlords through the Rent Supplement Programs (Commercial Rent Supplement Program and the Strong Communities Supportive Housing Programs) to provide up to 495 York Region households with rent supplements has been strengthened. The Rent Supplement Programs are vital to increasing the Region's capacity to respond to the needs of the almost 5,500 singles, families and seniors waiting for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) housing.
- In partnership with the Salvation Army across York Region, this Branch helped 804 households maintain their housing through the Region's Homelessness Prevention Program between 2003 and 2006.
- A comprehensive inventory of the social housing units modified for persons with disabilities to enable eligible applicants to make more informed housing choices was developed.
- The Housing Services Branch successfully implemented the 2006 funding benchmark costs and revenues for provincial reform housing providers. Discussions with the Province resulted in direct savings to the Region in the amount of \$500,000 per year.
- In 2006, a comprehensive review of building conditions was completed across the housing portfolio, laying the groundwork for a region-wide asset management strategy and building training and technical support for housing providers in securing the life of critical public assets over the long term.

4.3.1 Preventing Homelessness in York Region – Taking the Next Steps, 2004

The Housing Services and Policy and Program Support Services Branches lead the research project *Preventing Homelessness in York Region – Taking the Next Steps*. This document, which was done with community collaboration, was published in 2004. The report reviews what has been done to address homelessness since The Regional Municipality of York was designated as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) in 1998, describes the scope and risk of homelessness, and recommends future action to prevent homelessness from escalating as the Region continues to grow.

4.4 Policy and Program Support Services Branch

The goal of the Policy and Program Support Services Branch is to provide strategic policy advice, analysis, and project support. As well, it manages departmental emergency preparedness and business continuity, community investment and program communications. Between 2003 and 2006, key achievements included the following:

- The Branch co-ordinated and led the successful implementation of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA) which resulted in the Province of Ontario identifying York Region as a best practice model and developing a case study outlining the Region's accessibility planning process. This case study is currently being used by other municipalities and organizations across the province.
- The Branch developed a regional framework and tool to assist the Region in developing Annual Accessibility Plans. This work resulted in enhanced accessibility for users of regional programs and services through the identification and elimination of barriers in programs and services across all regional departments, including York Regional Police.
- In 2003, the Community Services and Housing Department through this Branch, initiated the Community Development and Investment Fund Strategy (CDIF) to enhance the Region's role in community capacity building and service planning. Since 2003, CDIF has directed \$8.6 million to over 130 projects for the delivery of services. More than 30,000 York Region residents and their families are supported each year. The Strategy also enhances support by helping agencies to work in collaboration with one another, which in turn, is creating a stronger network of community-based supports in York Region.
- As part of York Region's SARS emergency response in 2003, the Community Services and Housing Department's Emergency Operations Centre served 2,152 households and 3,286 individuals in need of emergency social services.
- The Branch annually produces YorkLink which provides comprehensive information about over 700 York Region community service providers and related government agencies. Since 2002, over 100 new service providers have been added to YorkLink. Features added in 2006 include enhanced search functions for both the print and on-line versions, an accessible version for people with visual disabilities, and translation support which is now available in 12 languages. YorkLink is well used – in 2005, approximately 50,000 hits were received on the website and about 4,500 hard copies were distributed across the Region.

4.4.1 Understanding and Anticipating the Needs of Our Residents

The Community Services and Housing Department, through the Policy and Program Support Services Branch, analyzes social and economic trends in York Region. This work is used to increase knowledge of the Region's rapidly changing social make-up, to

anticipate and/or avoid issues, and to improve access to services and program delivery for our residents.

Reports include:

- York Region's Low Income Population, Report Highlights, 2004.
- Housing and Our Economy, 2004, which was done in collaboration with the Planning and Development Services Department, and won a Canadian Institute of Planners Award.
- Community Snapshots: Recent Immigrants Living in York Region, 2006, and interactive maps, which was done in collaboration with business, community agencies and the York Region school boards.

4.5 Business Operations and Support Services Branch

The Business, Operations and Support Services Branch ensures fiscal integrity and quality assurance for the Department, and provides support services to other branches including assistance with managing budgets, finance, administration and technology. Through the Family Support Unit this Branch also assists Ontario Works (OW) participants and social housing tenants to pursue child and spousal support payments and arrears. Successes in the areas of Contact Centre, Eligibility Review and Family Support are outlined below.

4.5.1 Contact Centre

In 2003, the Community Services and Housing Department, through the Business Operations and Support Services Branch, implemented a "first-call" Contact Centre for residents seeking program information, referral, and application services. The services currently provided include:

- General Inquiry (information/referrals/distribution of departmental publications)
- Social Housing Application and Information
- Social Assistance Intake Screening and Participant Inquiry
- Early Intervention Services – Pre-screening
- Child Care Fee Assistance – Pre-screening
- Child Care Support Line

Currently the Community Services and Housing Department Contact Centre receives an average of 10,000 calls per month.

4.5.2 Eligibility Review and Program Audit

In 2004, the Revenue Recovery Management System (RRMS) was developed through the Business Operations and Support Services Branch to track outstanding OW assignments and inactive overpayments.

- From 2004 to 2005 recovery of client overpayments increased by 85% as a result of this automated system.
- Due to our success rate, two other municipalities have purchased licence rights to operate this system.

4.5.3 Family Support

The Family Support Unit of the Business Operations and Support Services Branch is mandated to assist Ontario Works participants and tenants receiving rent subsidies, particularly sole support parents, in their pursuit of child and spousal support incomes. Child and spousal support provides a long term independent source of income for families.

- Between 2003 and 2005, the number of new support arrangements for participants and tenants increased by 64%.
- The Family Support Unit continues to participate in and exceed targets of the Enhanced Family Support Initiative for the third year. This is a Provincial Initiative under Ontario Works which provides 100% funding for one staff.
- During this same time period, the Family Support Unit saw a 21% increase in the Assignment revenues collected.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

Programs and services provided through the Community Services and Housing Department respond to a range of Vision 2026 goals including: Quality Communities for a Diverse Population, Responding to the Needs of Our Residents, and Housing Choices for Our Residents.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report. The costs of implementing the programs and initiatives cited in this report as major accomplishments have been managed within the Community Services and Housing Department's budgets between 2003 and 2006. While representing significant achievements under the current Council (2003-2006), they are part of the Region's ongoing commitment to providing service to its residents, agencies and businesses.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Program and service funding provided by the Community Services and Housing Department is often used to support municipal level program delivery. Residents from all nine municipalities benefit from the full range of the departments programs and services, which, in turn, contributes to stronger communities, overall quality of life and enhanced social and economic well-being.

7. CONCLUSION

Under the guidance of the current Council (2003 – 2006) the Region has successfully enhanced the economic and social well-being of York Region's residents through a variety of Community Services and Housing program achievements. These

achievements, such as a 22% increase in the number of children receiving child care subsidies, the introduction of innovative employment support programs, an increase in our social housing stock of 118 newly constructed units, enhanced homelessness prevention initiatives, initiating the Community Development Investment Fund Strategy and demonstrated leadership with York Region's Accessibility Planning, will continue to benefit individual residents across the region.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the agenda for the September 13, 2006 Committee meeting.)