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OUT OF THE COLD PROGRAM IN YORK REGION

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends:

- 1. That the deputations from Mr. Steve Borlak and Mr. Arie Cohen of Interfaith Mosaic/Thornhill be received; and,**
- 2. That the recommendation contained in the following report, October 6, 2003, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing be adopted; and**
- 3. That Staff be directed to convene a meeting with Interfaith Mosaic/Thornhill to discuss ways in which the Region can provide assistance to the volunteers in this group.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The following report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This purpose of this report is to inform Council of an ongoing issue regarding the Out of the Cold (OOC) Program operating in York Region but serving largely Toronto residents. This program was previously affiliated with the Toronto OOC organization.

3. BACKGROUND

Out of the Cold York Region (OOC) has existed for the past five years. The seven York Region providers are an inter-faith association of different religious organizations who came together to assist the Toronto-based OOC Programs with the overflow they were experiencing.

The program's goal is to help homeless and socially isolated people in the winter months. On a rotational basis, each site serves hot meals and provides warm clothing to approximately 45 people per night. Each site is open one night per week for a period of 6-8 weeks each winter. In addition to serving meals at these location, they also operate an overnight program whereby approximately 20-25 of the guests that come for dinner stay overnight.

The sites serve approximately 90% Toronto clients and 10% York Region. Toronto clients are transported from the Finch subway station to the OOC sites and are returned there after spending the night.

York Region has not provided any operational or per diem funding to these programs, as these were programs of the Toronto shelter system. However, Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) funds in York Region were allocated to a number of the member faith communities in order to assist them in making upgrades to their facilities to meet security and fire safety requirements and other basic needs.

Until 2002 the City of Toronto provided approximately \$120,000 in annual funding to the OOC organizations in York Region for transportation, cleaning crews for the facilities and overnight security at the sites.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

During a meeting in May, 2003 involving staff from the City of Toronto and York Region, and OOC representatives, it was learned that Toronto has a strategy in place to support their homeless population this coming winter within their own city boundaries.

Toronto is proposing that they no longer send homeless clients to the York Region OOC programs, and that they will cease funding York Region sites.

At the meeting Regional staff offered to support the OOC in refocusing their program, contingent on their being able to substantiate the need for services in York Region. City of Toronto staff offered assistance to the group with this exercise in strategic planning.

The immediate concern for the York Region Out of the Cold is that the volunteer infrastructure will be lost and the OOC Program in York Region will close.

4.1 OOC Representatives' Concerns

Although OOC representatives were aware that the City of Toronto might not continue funding the transportation to/from York Region sites, they were not aware of this new strategy by Toronto that entirely eliminates the use of York Region OOC sites until the May 20, 2003 meeting.

Homeless Support Services Inc. (HSSI), the agency contracted by the City to deliver the OOC Programs, had reported to the York Region Out of the Cold representatives that they were applying for charitable status and if they secured this, then they would be able to get donations from third parties to set up core funding for their OOC groups, including OOC groups in York Region.

HSSI expects to take about one year to establish this core-funding model. In the interim, York Region OOC is asking York Region and Toronto to support them until this new funding model is in place. York Region OOC representatives are concerned that if they shut down their operations for one year; they will not be able to re-build their volunteer infrastructure again.

The group also feels that as volunteers they do not have the experience and/or capability to do long-term strategic planning for OOC in York Region. If they had to do this, then they would require professional assistance.

Since learning of the City's decision there has been an active lobbying effort by representatives of the umbrella organization, Interfaith Mosaic, which sponsors the York Region program, to secure the financial support to deliver the program based on the current model which includes transporting guests from the Finch subway.

4.2 York Region Response

In response to these requests Regional staff have taken the following actions to assist OOC in York Region in carrying out the strategic planning required to determine the need for such a program in York Region:

- A meeting was held on August 21, 2003 with a number of representatives of the various faith communities who have been involved in the program. Regional staff reiterated the offer of assistance made at the May meeting and indicated that emergency shelter per diems could possibly be made available, subject to Council approval.
- At that meeting, the co-chair of the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness offered to meet with OOC representatives in order to assist them with determining need and submitting a proposal to the Region.
- The co-chairs of the York Region Alliance on Homelessness and Social Isolation met with representatives of Interfaith Mosaic in September 2003. At that time the OOC representatives were not able to formulate a plan to move forward despite the offer of assistance from an experienced York Region agency.
- Presently, each OOC site is independently evaluating options for services this winter. Some groups have indicated that they may try other program options. The Interfaith Mosaic continues to look for funding for the pre-existing program format.
- OOC representatives have consistently been advised by Regional staff that in order to be funded by the Region, their program model must be focused on York Region and they must demonstrate that a need exists in York Region for this program for York Region residents.
- Additionally, the Interfaith Mosaic has not taken advantage of the City of Toronto's offer of internal support to plan for transitioning of their program.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications at this time, as the request for funding has been tabled until such time as the need for the service in York Region has been

substantiated. The OOC sites in York Region have submitted a request of \$120,000 to York Region staff to continue operation for this upcoming winter.

York Region currently contributes a share to Toronto's emergency shelter services through "GTA Pooling".

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The OOC Program provides emergency shelter during the coldest winter months but because of its past focus on transportation to the facilities from the Finch subway there has been limited use of the service by York Region's homeless. The loss of the Program will reduce the availability of emergency shelter options for a small number of York Region residents, particularly in the under-served southern areas.

7. CONCLUSION

The OOC Programs in York Region continue to be in transition. The Region of York could consider providing per diem funding for clients served by these programs. Additional funding request to be contingent on a refocused proposal for services that are designed to serve York Region.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.