

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

REPORT 6-2005

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Services Committee held in Committee Room 4, Regional Municipal Building, Thorold, Ontario, on March 7, 2005, commencing at 3:15 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Committee: Councillors Hildreth, Chair; Regional Chair Partington; Almas; Bailey; Baty; Casselman; Marshall.

Staff: Mr. Trojan, Chief Administrative Officer; Mr. Ventresca, Acting Commissioner of Community Services; Ms. Pilon, Legislative Assistant.

Staff

Part-time: Mr. Hutchings, Director, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities; Ms. Watson, Manager, Community Services.

Other: Councillor Collins

There being a lack of ordinary quorum at the meeting, the Committee Chair determined that the ordinary quorum for the meeting be reduced to five members, pursuant to Part II, Section 11.7 of the Procedural By-law 7174-93.

PRESENTATIONS

55. Community Services Quality Council

Mr. Ventresca; Ms. Mindorff, Co-Chair and Ms. Speck, Co-Chair of the Community Services Quality Council provided the Committee with an overview of the Community Services Quality Council, which has been in existence since 2003 and has a number of influential members.

The Committee was advised that the Community Services Quality Council brings together a representative community group of consumers and advocates to address service issues for Community Services (Seniors, Children's, Employment, Poverty and Housing), that provides a dynamic forum to enable citizens to provide advice on community needs for service and corresponding service plans, as well as to provide feedback on the quality of services.

The efforts of the volunteer members on the Community Services Quality Council have to date contributed to the transparency in the processes of the Community Services Department; shared information; provided input on departmental brochures; participated in the Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities and Children's Services Client Survey and individually lobbied for a transportation strategy for seniors across Niagara.

Councillor Hildreth on behalf of the Committee thanked Ms. Mindorff and Ms. Speck for their presentation.

At this point in the meeting a quorum was achieved.

56. Newcomer Employment Strategy – Niagara Project Advisory Group

Ms. Mindorff, Peace Bridge Newcomers Group; Dr. Kilty, Brock University; Ms. Carvello, one of Dr. Kilty's students; Mr. Dolan, Niagara Catholic District School Board, English as a Second Language and Ms. Stewart, St. Catharines Employment Help Centre, all members of the Niagara Regional Newcomer Employment Advisory Group, were in attendance to provide the Committee with an overview of the Newcomer Employment Strategy.

Ms. Mindorff advised the Committee that the Niagara Regional Newcomer Employment Advisory Group will be identifying barriers, by asking potential employees and employers: If unsuccessful, what has kept you from obtaining employment? If successful, what has helped you obtain employment?

The group will be establishing a model that will improve the existing system for employers and employees. The group has completed a literature review and is now developing a funding proposal. There have been two factors identified, one being that the larger cities have identified the benefits with a means of measuring those benefits and have successfully developed strategies by engaging the leaders and the knowledgeable individuals in the community (human geography; labour markets; economics; housing and education) the second factor relates to those cities who have been successful, have taken a proactive approach that is based on the benefits of diversity.

Ms. Mindorff noted that there are several primary barriers that hinder the newcomers in finding employment they are language, transportation and housing. The Committee was advised that there are seven levels of English as a Second Language training and most of the newcomers are at a level three when they arrive.

Dr. Kilty noted that most professions require enhanced language training in addition to work life style training, which involves mentorship in most cases.

The Committee asked that Ms. Mindorff craft a resolution for the Committee's endorsement that would provide the Niagara Regional Newcomer Employment Advisory Group with the support they require.

(Refer to Staff Directions)

COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

57. Employment and Newcomers in Niagara:
Social Assistance Caseload Information and Cost Analysis

Mr. Hutchings and Ms. Watson provided the Committee with an overview of the report which illustrates that in the last quarter of 2004, six percent of the total cases that exited from social assistance were represented from the Newcomer population. The report also notes that exits from social assistance due to employment were twenty percent higher for the newcomer group than the general social assistance population.

Mr. Hutchings noted that international immigration is an increasingly important economic phenomenon that provides the advantage of addressing labour shortages anticipated within the next ten years.

The Committee noted that the integration of newcomers into Niagara's community and labour force is a benefit to Niagara.

Moved by Councillor Marshall
Seconded by Councillor Bailey

That Report COM 29-2005, March 7, 2005, respecting Employment and Newcomers in Niagara: Social Assistance Caseload Information and Cost Analysis, be received for information.

Carried.

58. Region's Role in Implementing the Provincial "Best Start" Initiative

Mr. Ventresca provided the Committee with Region's role in implementing the Provincial "Best Start" Initiative. A Ministry of Children and Youth Services initiative with a ten year approach to ensuring that all children are ready and eager to achieve success by Grade 1. The proposed integrated approach involve Pre-school; quality child care; Junior and Senior Kindergarten; parenting programs; Public Health; Children's Mental Health; Infant Development; Pre-School Speech and Language/Infant Hearing; direct linkages to Child Welfare and Children's Treatment Centres.

Mr. Ventresca reviewed the implementation plan for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the program, which would begin in 2005 and come to fruition in 2015.

The Region's role as Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) is to work with community partners to establish a "Best Start" Network, (including Terms of Reference and membership); identify existing community "planning bodies" that could form the "Best Start" Network; prepare a transition plan to use existing vacant child care spaces for families with children in Junior and Senior Kindergarten; identify capital planning for renovations to accommodate spaces for 2005-2006; prepare an implementation plan with a proposed multi-year roll out, as per the Region's CMSM's role as child care service system manager; integrate enhanced early identification and intervention programs (i.e. Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Preschool Speech and Language and Infant Hearing Screening) into the "Best Start" initiative.

Community Services plans for Niagara's "Best Start" Network involved communicating developments and the Region's plan to Children's Services stakeholders (i.e. mass e-mailing) and solicit input and feedback; meet with identified planning bodies to evaluate alignment with "Best Start" Network framework for membership; facilitate inaugural "Best Start" Network meeting and the compilation of Terms of Reference; collaborate with District School Boards and facilitate the achievement of the objectives for "Best Start" as identified by the Province.

The Committee noted the ambitious agenda that staff is tasked with adhering to, to initiate the Province's "Best Start" initiative, an initiative that has several uncertainties, such as future funding and the number of spaces available or that can be built.

Moved by Councillor Casselman
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That the oral report respecting the Region's role in implementing the Provincial Best Start Initiative, be received for information.

Carried.

59. Request for Capital Budget Allocation and Financing Approval for the 2005 Community Services Capital Program

Moved by Councillor Marshall
Seconded by Councillor Casselman

That Report COM 30-2005 (CSD 36-2005), March 7, 2005, respecting the Request for Capital budget Allocation and Financing Approval for the 2005 Community Services Capital Program, be received; and

That a capital budget allocation in the gross and net amount of \$500,000 be approved for the Community Services Capital Program as submitted in the 2005 Capital Budget and summarized in Appendix 1.

That approval be given to fund the projects with \$500,000 from the Seniors Services Capital Reserve fund.

That the Regional Clerk be directed to ensure that the appropriate By-laws are prepared for presentation to Regional Council.

Carried.

(Please note that Report COM 30-2005 (CSD 36-2005) can be found behind the JNT RPTS Blue Book Tab)

CORRESPONDENCE

60. Moved by Councillor Bailey
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That Correspondence Item CSC 4-2005, a memorandum from Dominic Ventresca regarding "The Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program", be received for information.

Carried.

MINUTES

61. Report 2-2005

Councillor Collins advised the Committee that the item noting the Ontario Governments de-listing of Physiotherapy will affect only certain groups.

Moved by Councillor Marshall
Seconded by Councillor Baty

That Report 2-2005, being the minutes of the Accessibility Advisory Committee Ontarians with Disabilities Act meeting of February 16, 2005, be received; and

That the letter from the York Region (February 1, 2005) respecting York Region's Clause No. 1 of Report No. 1, recommendation No. 8, requesting Niagara Regional Council's endorsement of said recommendation, be forwarded to Regional Council for consideration.

Carried.

(Refer to Staff Directions)

STAFF DIRECTIONS

Staff was directed to:

- Explore the benefits of a Social Planning Council in Niagara, using Waterloo as an example. (Refers to Minute Item 56)
- Highlight the items for approval in any minutes presented to Committee for approval. (Refers to Minute Item 70)

ADJOURNMENT

Committee adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to meet again on Monday, April 4, 2005, at 3:00 p.m. in Committee Room 4, Regional Headquarters Building.

Jill Hildreth
Chair

Janet Pilon
Legislative Assistant

Pam Gilroy
Regional Clerk/
Associate Director of Corporate Strategy