

NO: R182

COUNCIL DATE: July 26, 2010

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **July 26, 2010**
FROM: **General Manager, Planning and Development** FILE: **6600-01**
SUBJECT: **Changes To Statistics Canada 2011 Census**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning and Development Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report as information; and
2. Authorize the Mayor to forward a letter on behalf of Surrey Council, together with a copy of this report and the related Council resolution, to the Honourable Tony Clement, Ministry of Industry and Minister responsible for Statistics Canada, requesting that the decision with respect to the 2011 Census to replace the mandatory long form questionnaire with a voluntary household survey be reversed.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to advise Council of changes to the Statistics Canada 2011 Census questionnaire which will affect the quality of census data and to identify key concerns with respect to the Statistics Canada 2011 Census questionnaire that will affect the City of Surrey.

BACKGROUND

On June 26, 2010 Minister of Industry, Tony Clement, announced that Statistics Canada will replace the mandatory "long form" questionnaire portion of the 2011 Census with a new voluntary National Household Survey ("NHS"). The long form is a more detailed questionnaire filed by one-fifth (20%) of Canadian households during the Census and its completion was mandatory in prior Census years. The new voluntary NHS will be sent to one-third (33^{1/30}%) of Canadians several months after the Census and its completion is voluntary. It is a well known fact that voluntary surveys do not typically generate a very good response rate. As such, it is unlikely that a voluntary survey form sent to 33% of Canadian households will generate the same number of returns as the mandatory survey sent to 20% of Canadian households. Further the distribution of the responses from the voluntary form will not necessarily be statistically significant at the community or neighbourhood level.

The long form Census survey included questions on demographic and household topics including demography, activity limitations, language, citizenship and immigration, ethnicity, religion, aboriginal identity, mobility, education, labour market, place of work, income and housing.

Statistics Canada has indicated that the NHS will include questions on similar topics. Like the long form survey, the information collected in the NHS will provide data to support government programs directed at target populations. Approximately 4.5 million households across Canada will receive the NHS questionnaire. The first NHS data is expected to be released in December 2012.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities ("FCM") has raised concerns on this issue and has called on the federal government to ensure that a reduction in Census information quality does not occur from these changes. The FCM has outlined its position in a letter to Minister Clement (Appendix I).

Metro Vancouver staff has also outlined concerns and has recommended, through the Metro Vancouver Housing Committee, that Metro Vancouver Board request the Minister of Industry and the Chief Statistician at Statistics Canada to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form and request that Provincial ministries and local government organizations do the same (Appendix II).

DISCUSSION

Municipalities, researchers and businesses have raised concerns that the change to the Census may harm the quality and reliability of Census data. Municipalities rely on census data from the long-form to understand the changing needs of their communities, and to make a wide range of planning decisions. The data gathered through the long form helps to identify neighbourhoods that require the delivery of programs such as immigrant services, low-income housing, child care, recreation and transit. Local governments also use this information to track demographic changes and measure the effectiveness of particular municipal programs over time.

Replacing the mandatory long form survey with a voluntary survey will likely reduce the quality and usefulness of the Census data for three main reasons, as follows:

1. Vulnerable population groups that rely most on government programs such as recent immigrants, aboriginal Canadians and those in lower socio-economic groups, are the least likely to return a voluntary survey. This will result in missing or undercounting these populations and skewing the quality and reliability of the data. Since certain transfer payments and senior government programs are allocated on the basis of demographic information the reliability of the data is crucial;
2. The change in data collection methodology will make it more difficult to report on Census data by municipal boundaries or by neighbourhood. This decision will hinder the ability of municipalities to plan programs and target spending; and
3. Changing a mandatory survey with a voluntary one will make it impossible to compare data from one Census to the next. This makes it difficult to track trends in a number of key areas, such as transit use and commuting patterns, income or housing conditions. As an example, the City of Surrey is developing a set of indicators to track the implementation of the Sustainability Charter. Many of these indicators depend on data derived from the long form Census survey. A voluntary survey, even one with a large sample size, does not provide directly comparable and reliable data.

A large number of local government, academic and social service organizations have expressed concern with the Census changes. It is unclear at this time whether these concerns will have an effect on the federal government's decision. Staff will continue to provide Council with updates on the Census and the NHS as information becomes available.

CONCLUSION

The announcement that the Statistics Canada 2011 Survey will replace the mandatory long form questionnaire sent to 20% of Canadian households with a voluntary questionnaire sent to 33^{1/3}% of Canadian households will affect the quality and reliability of key information that is useful to local governments, social service agencies and researchers. This change will make it more difficult to monitor conditions and community trends over time and may affect the delivery of social services where they are most needed.

Based on the above discussion it is recommended that Council authorize the Mayor to forward a letter on behalf of Surrey Council, together with a copy of this report and the related Council resolution, to the Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Statistics Canada, requesting that the decision with respect to the 2011 Census to replace the mandatory long form questionnaire with a voluntary household survey be reversed.

Original signed by
Jean Lamontagne
General Manager,
Planning and Development

SJ:saw

Attachments:

Appendix I FCM Letter to Minister Tony Clement dated July 8, 2010

Appendix II Metro Vancouver Report to Housing Committee dated July 23, 2010

July 8, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Industry Canada
300 Slater Street, 16th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C8

Dear Minister:

As you know, on June 26, 2011 Statistics Canada announced that it has discontinued the mandatory long-form questionnaire in favour of a voluntary National Household Survey (NHS). As the minister responsible for Statistics Canada, we are writing to urge you to consider the consequences of this decision.

Federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments all use the data that is gathered on the long-form to target and evaluate the effectiveness of public services and investments. In fact, over 25 pieces of federal legislation alone require Census data in order to allocate funds and target and evaluate services, with many more examples at the provincial, territorial and municipal levels. Municipalities use Census data, particularly long-form data, to target which resident groups and neighbourhoods require public services like immigrant settlement support, low-income housing, child care and transit.

Making the replacement for the long form voluntary will likely reduce the quality of the census data for two reasons:

- **Sample size:** The NHS will likely generate fewer responses than the long-form Census questionnaire. Although the NHS sample size is more than twice as large as the long-form Census (4.5 million households versus 2 million), the response rate for a voluntary survey is much lower for a mandatory survey like the Census. Even at a 30 per cent response rate, which is higher than Statistics Canada expects from most voluntary surveys, the NHS will only generate 1.35 million responses. The long-form questionnaire enjoys a response rate of over 97 per cent which translates to 1.94 million responses – over 40 per cent more than the NHS. This difference in sample size is significant when using data at a municipal and neighborhood level: a smaller national sample size means fewer samples within local areas, which reduces the quality and availability of data from these smaller areas. FCM has been engaged with Statistics Canada and various federal government departments in an effort to make local area data more accessible and affordable to municipal governments – a welcome effort that recognizes how important federally collected data is to good municipal government. The change to the Census will reduce the quality and availability of local area data that municipalities rely on to improve service and performance.

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- **Respondent profile:** The people who tend to rely most on many municipal programs, such as recent immigrants, aboriginal Canadians and those in lower socio-economic groups, are the very ones who would be least likely to fill out a voluntary survey. This will result in undercounting these population segments and reduce the quality of available information on these groups who are often hard to serve.

The value of this data needs to be weighed against what is asked of citizens to complete the long-form:

- For most households, the long-form questionnaire requires on average less than 20 to 30 minutes to complete, much less than completing an income tax return.
- Statistically, the average household will receive the long-form once every 25 years (once every five Censuses).
- Statistics Canada is highly rigorous in protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of individual long-form responses.

To keep Canada strong, we need to know how the country is changing, where people live, work and raise their families. The census helps us do that. With good quality data, we can do a better job serving taxpayers: we can see where we need to run new bus routes, build affordable housing, or set up support programs for new Canadians. These changes in the census will likely hurt the quality of Census data available to municipalities. That will make it harder for us to serve our citizens. The federal government needs to explain how it will make sure that doesn't happen.

Sincerely,



Hans Cunningham
President

HC/at:sd


metrovancover

Greater Vancouver Regional District • Greater Vancouver Water District

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Greater Vancouver Sewerage and Drainage District • Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation

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Housing Committee Meeting Date: July 23, 2010

To: Housing Committee
From: Janet Kreda, Senior Housing Planner, Policy and Planning Department
Date: July 6, 2010
Subject: **Metro Vancouver's Opposition to the Elimination of the Mandatory Long Form from the 2011 Census**

Recommendations:

That the Board:

- a) Request the Honourable Tony Clement, Ministry of Industry and Minister Responsible for Statistics Canada and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.
 - b) Request UBCM and FCM to write to Minister Clement and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada urging them to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.
 - c) Request the Honourable Mary McNeil, BC Minister of Citizens' Services, Multiculturalism and the Public Affairs Bureau and other relevant provincial Ministers write to Minister Clement and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada urging them to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.
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1. PURPOSE

To inform the Housing Committee of the implications of the change from the mandatory long form to a voluntary National Household Survey to collect data for the 2011 Census and make recommendations for action.

2. CONTEXT

It was announced on June 26, 2010 that Statistics Canada will replace the mandatory long form questionnaire filed by 20% of Canadian households with a new voluntary National Household Survey. The Census long form questionnaire is a unique tool that provides decision-makers with a rich set of facts about Canadians at the census tract, neighbourhood, municipal, regional, provincial and national level. Its richness stems from the huge sample size and the fact that response is mandatory. The long form provides all of the socio-economic and demographic data for the population, and is the source of data on core housing need, poverty, household income, household type, and a whole range of information that the Metro Vancouver uses to assess labour markets, travel patterns, and the needs and well-being of the region's population. This information is not only invaluable for the region, but also for every decision-maker at every level of governance.

Information historically provided by the long form is established in municipal and regional plans and is crucial to plan implementation and performance monitoring. For example, the Regional Growth Strategy, Regional Affordable Housing Strategy and the greenhouse gas targets mandated by the province rely on housing and income data, place of work, place of residence, and transportation mode and distance data collected in the long form.

Another concern for municipalities is with respect to transfer payments. In some cases monies are awarded based, for example, on immigration data characteristics, and the change in survey methodology could have financial implications for cities.

Minister Tony Clement has explained that the move to a voluntary survey was prompted by public concerns that the long form questions amounted to an invasion of privacy. Changing to a voluntary survey is likely to skew the number and demographic of respondents significantly. It is expected that lower income households and vulnerable populations will be less well represented in the data. This means that there will be a lack of continuity and comparability between data collected in previous Census and the one planned for 2011 making it difficult to assess socio-economic trends in the region and in Canada. A spokesperson at Statistics Canada acknowledged that they may not get the same level of detail as in the Census, and that the move could have a negative impact on provincial governments, community groups and other organizations that rely on the data for policy development.

The Toronto Star, Globe & Mail, Montreal Gazette and Victoria Times-Colonist have published articles on this issue and the Centre for Policy Alternatives, Canadian Institute of Planners and Canadian Association of University Teachers have publicly expressed their opposition to the change in the Census. There is also an on-line petition and Facebook page that have been started. The Centre for Policy Alternatives published an open letter to the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada and the Chief Statistician asking for the long form to be reinstated (Information item 6.1).

A report on this issue went to Toronto City Council on July 6, 2010 urging the federal government to immediately reverse its decision. Many municipal staff around the region have called Metro staff asking for the Board to take action. City of Vancouver staff is preparing a report on the issue. Metro Vancouver staff has also contacted provincial BC Stats and they are working with their Minister to convey concerns to the federal government. The Ontario Government has also expressed concern and will likely make a statement on the issue.

3. ALTERNATIVES

- 1) That the Board:
 - a) Request the Honourable Tony Clement, Ministry of Industry and Minister Responsible for Statistics Canada and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.
 - b) Request UBCM and FCM to write to Minister Clement and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada urging them to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.

- c) Request the Honourable Mary McNeil, BC Minister of Citizens' Services, Multiculturalism and the Public Affairs Bureau and other relevant provincial Ministers write to Minister Clement and Munir Sheikh, Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada urging them to reverse the decision to eliminate the mandatory Census long form.

This is the recommended option.

- 2) That the Housing Committee propose an alternative response.

4. CONCLUSION

The change announced by Statistics Canada has profound implications for member municipalities and the region as well as decision-makers throughout the country. The data generated through the Census long form is established in regional and municipal plan policies and used for vital analysis of the demographic, socio-economic trends and travel patterns in every municipality in the region, province and country. Changing to a voluntary survey will change the quality and nature of the data collected and comparability of the data to previous Census years. In particular, vulnerable populations will likely be less well represented. The loss of the essential data provided by the mandatory long form presents a significant challenge for decision-makers and policy-makers.

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