

NO: **R017**

COUNCIL DATE: **January 28, 2013**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **January 28, 2013**

FROM: **General Manager, Planning and Development**

FILE: **5080-01**

SUBJECT: **Welcoming Communities Program in Surrey**

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Development Department recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the City of Surrey's role as the sponsoring organization for the Welcoming Communities Program ("WCP") in Surrey. The WCP is focused on ensuring that communities across BC are welcoming and inclusive for new immigrants and refugees.

The WCP is a program of Welcome BC – the Province's strategic framework for settlement services and welcoming communities' initiatives. Welcome BC has allocated \$667,000 for Surrey to establish a Community Partnership Committee and by means of the Committee to develop and implement a Welcoming Communities Action Plan. The City of Surrey is the sponsoring organization for the WCP in Surrey. The funding from the WCP is to be used between January 1, 2013 and March 31, 2014.

BACKGROUND

The Program goal of ensuring that Surrey is a welcoming and inclusive community for new immigrants and refugees is consistent with priorities and recommendations in the Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents under the goal of "community development and diversity". It will also contribute to the implementation of the Surrey Poverty Reduction Plan's recommendations related to "supporting the settlement of recent immigrants".

Successful immigrant integration is crucial to addressing labour market and demographic challenges that will become increasingly evident over the next decade as the baby boomers retire. The Province estimates that immigrants are needed to fill approximately one third of the 1.1 million anticipated job openings across BC between now and the end of the decade.

Basic settlement services alone are not sufficient in integrating and retaining new immigrants. A community's receptivity to new immigrants is a critical factor to successful integration. Recent research indicates that immigrants are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and a willingness to stay in a community when they feel welcome. New immigrants' perceptions of

welcoming communities are influenced by several factors, including access to the same public services as everyone else in the community, their success in forming intercultural relationships and their perceptions of discrimination and employment opportunities.

Under the Canada-British Columbia Immigration Agreement (the "Agreement"), until March 31, 2014, the Province of BC has responsibility for settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees. Led by the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, Welcome BC is the Province's strategic framework for these services, which includes both direct delivery of settlement and integration services for newcomers, as well as broader initiatives to support the integration of new immigrants within communities.

Welcome BC's initiatives are guided by the principle of two-way integration as captured in the following Program statement:

"Integration is a two-way process, which involves commitment on the part of Immigrants and Refugees to adapt to life in Canada and on the part of Canadians to welcome and adapt to new peoples and cultures".

In April 2014, responsibility for immigrant settlement and integration services will revert back to the Federal government.

Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program (2008-2012)

In 2008, the Province launched the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Program ("WICWP") as a pilot. The goal of WICWP was to develop partnerships across sectors that would develop resources, and plan and manage capacity building initiatives that would result in communities being more welcoming to newcomers. All WICWP projects were finished by August/September 2012.

In Surrey, the lead agencies for WICWP were the Surrey Foundation (for initiatives focused on the community) and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society (for initiatives focused on workplaces).

Welcoming Communities Program (2013-2014)

The new WCP was developed based on lessons learned from the WICWP pilot, as well as consultations with stakeholders across the Province during the spring of 2012. Fifty BC communities, including Surrey, have been identified as communities for implementation of the WCP.

In July 2012, the Province issued a Request for Expressions of Interest ("EOI") from parties in the 50 WCP communities who were interested in participating in a Community Partnership to develop and implement a Welcoming Communities Action Plan ("WCAP") in their community. This was followed in August 2012 by the Province issuing a Request for Proposals ("RFP") to select one qualified Proponent or Sponsoring Organization for the WCP in each of the WCP communities. The RFP stated that the Province may select up to two proponents in centres with high numbers of immigrants and a high overall population base. The RFP described the role of the Sponsoring Organization as follows:

"The Sponsoring Organization will be responsible for forming a Community Partnership within the identified Community... (and) will disseminate and manage the project funds on behalf of the Community Partnership".

DISCUSSION

The Welcome BC website highlights the importance of municipal leadership for creating a welcoming and inclusive community. It states that:

". . . local government involvement validates the issue in the eyes of the community. It has short and long-term effects on the capacity to mobilize resources, build support and confidence amongst those involved, lead public education and shape public opinion . . . Leadership at this level also demonstrates to members of minority communities that the entire community sees and understands their struggles and challenges, and is committed to actions that will build inclusion and equity".

City of Surrey as Sponsor Organization for the WCP

In July 2012, the City of Surrey responded to the WCP EOI by submitting a letter to the Province indicating an interest in participating in the WCP in Surrey.

Following the issuance of the WCP RFP in late August 2012, staff convened a meeting of the community agencies in Surrey that had responded to the Province's EOI expressing an interest in the WCP. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement by the group that one WCP community partnership in Surrey was preferable, rather than establishing two partnership tables and that the City of Surrey would assume the role of lead or Sponsoring Organization.

The rationale for the City serving as the lead agency for WCP is that the City is considered a neutral body with existing relationships across all of the organizations in the community that may have an interest in implementing specific activities that will be identified in Surrey's WCP Action Plan. In addition, the City has contacts with non-settlement-related community agencies and businesses/employers that would be beneficial to engage in the community's efforts to create a more welcoming community for newcomers.

Memorandum of Understanding with the Province of BC

The City of Surrey's application to be the Sponsoring Organization for the WCP was successful. In late December, the City of Surrey signed a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with the Province of BC, which has a term from January 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014. The total amount of funds available from the WCP for all deliverables outlined in the MOU is not to exceed \$667,000.

The terms of the MOU include that the City of Surrey will:

- submit a Welcoming Communities Action Plan (by February 15, 2013);
- be responsible for the establishment of Community Partnerships and strategies;
- be responsible for providing the Province with the required reports on the implementation of the Action Plan and the submission of invoices; and
- acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province in communications.

WCP Community Partnership

One of the key principles of the WCP is that direct involvement of multiple partners at the community level is critical to the creation of a welcoming environment for new immigrants. The WCP requires that a diverse and cross-sector Community Partnership be formed in each WCP community. The Partnership is expected to be responsible for developing and implementing a Welcoming Communities Action Plan and the Sponsoring Organization is expected to disseminate and manage the WCP funds on behalf of the Community Partnership.

Surrey's Community Partnership Committee has been established and includes representatives from the following organizations:

- Alexander Neighbourhood House
- City of Surrey – Planning Department, Surrey Libraries, and Parks Recreation and Culture Department
- DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society
- Douglas College
- Fraser Health Authority
- Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre (to be confirmed)
- Immigrant Services Society of BC
- Kwantlen Polytechnic University
- Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub Society
- Options Community Services Society
- Pacific Community Resource Society
- Progressive Intercultural Community Services
- RCMP
- Semiahmoo House Society
- Simon Fraser University
- Sources
- S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
- Surrey Board of Trade
- Surrey Foundation
- Surrey School District
- Umoja
- YMCA

The Committee's draft Terms of Reference state that membership is:

- to be non-partisan;
- engage agency decision makers and limit involvement of "alternates"; and
- be limited to a single representative from each organization, with the exception of the City.

The City of Surrey's Senior Social Planner and the CEO of the Surrey Board of Trade are the Co-Chairs of the Community Partnership Committee.

Development of the Welcoming Communities Action Plan (WCAP)

The development of a WCAP is underway. According to the program guidelines, the WCAP must identify initiatives that increase the capacity of the community to support the integration of new immigrants (those in Canada for 10 years or less) by:

- improving access to community services;
- supporting the development of intercultural relationships;
- supporting welcoming and inclusive workplaces; and
- creating welcoming and inclusive spaces in the community.

The WCAP must be completed by February 15, 2013. It will include:

- a work plan;
- information on the role of community partners in implementing the work plan;
- an evaluation plan; and
- a budget.

Peers Employment & Education Resources Inc. has been contracted to assist in coordinating the development of Surrey's WCAP. Council will be provided with further reports as the project evolves.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The WCP will assist in achieving the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter; more particularly the following action items:

- SC5: Plan for the Social Well Being of Surrey Residents; and
- SC12: Adapting to Demographic Change.

CONCLUSION

The successful settlement and integration of new immigrants and refugees into the social and economic life of the City is of vital importance to the on-going health and vitality of Surrey. The WCP represents an important opportunity for the City of Surrey to support and participate in a collaborative Community Partnership that will develop and implement a coordinated and strategic plan for increasing Surrey's capacity to support and welcome newcomers.

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