
Subject: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Report to: Regional Council

Report date: Thursday, December 17, 2020

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **ENDORSE** the establishment of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Committee to:
 - 1.1 Provide direction, support and advice on the creation and maintenance of an inclusive and barrier-free workplace, including matters such as training, hiring and promotion, policy review, and improving access to Regional services; and
 - 1.2 Serve as a steering committee for external community engagement in order to identify the community priorities and action plan.
2. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to prepare a report respecting a draft Terms of Reference, including membership requirements for a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Advisory Committee for consideration at the Corporate Services Committee being held on January 13, 2021

Key Facts

- Regional Council passed a motion to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities (CIM) on September 19, 2019, and signed a joint declaration to join the Coalition along with the 12 Local Area Municipalities on September 18, 2020.
- At the Corporate Services Committee meeting held on October 14, 2020, staff were requested to provide a report respecting the creation of a structure of working groups and/or advisory committees to ensure that the communities in Niagara have a part in directing the work related to addressing issues faced by equity-seeking groups.
- There are 82 municipalities across Canada that have joined the CIM including Niagara. Other municipalities surveyed have at least one advisory committee related to diversity, equity and inclusion, or are in the process of establishing one.

Financial Considerations

Costs associated with the creation and maintenance of the Committee include administrative resources and staff time. A draft Terms of Reference will propose options to provide honorariums and cover other costs for committee members, such as child or

other respite care, in order to remove any barriers to participation. All of these potential costs have been contemplated and can be accommodated within the Council approved budget for the work associated with joining the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities.

Analysis

Background

On September 19, 2019, Niagara Regional Council joined the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities and in doing so, must work actively towards the 10 common commitments to build respectful, inclusive and diverse societies (see Appendix 1). A major part of honouring these commitments is creating a structure to support DEI work specifically by connecting community members to Council through the creation of an advisory committee.

This is especially important as diversity in Niagara continues to increase – particularly regarding Indigenous communities, visible minorities, linguistic diversity, and individuals with disabilities. Despite an increase in diversity in Niagara, it has not always translated to an increase in inclusivity. Discrimination and barriers related to entry, access, and appropriate support remain for a variety of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ communities. The Region has a central role to play in working towards building diverse, equitable and inclusive communities by holding itself and all its citizens, organizations and businesses accountable to champion diversity, equity and inclusion (see Appendix 2 for more details on diversity in Niagara). In order for advisory committees to be successful, it is important that diverse and marginalized groups with lived experience are represented.

Research on DEI committees and resources across municipalities similar to Niagara, such as Waterloo, Hamilton, and London, revealed that all six surveyed had at least one Committee relating to Diversity and Inclusion (see Appendix 3 Table 1). Membership composition within these advisory committees ranges from 7-15 members. The majority of these committees report to Council through a Standing Committee. In all these municipalities, there is at least 1 staff resource that supports the work of committees relating to diversity, equity and inclusion.

In addition to these municipalities, existing advisory committee structures, activities and resources of municipalities and townships within Niagara were considered. Member composition within Niagara advisory committees related to diversity, equity and inclusion ranges from 8-20 members. Other than St. Catharines, which reports to

Council through the Social Sustainability Committee, Niagara advisory committees all report directly to Council (see Appendix 3 Table 2).

Within Niagara Region, multiple committees within specific Departments support focused mandates. These include the Niagara Regional Housing Tenant Advisory Committee, the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Lived Experience Advisory Committee, the Public Health Lived Experience Advisory Network and Youth Advisory Committee, and the Mental Health Client Advisory Committee.

Recommended Advisory Committee Structure

Staff are recommending that the proposed DEI Advisory Committee report to the Corporate Services Standing Committee, and be composed of at least 15 members including Regional Councillors, community members, staff, and at least one member each from the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the Women's Advisory Committee. An intersectional approach¹ should be taken in order to ensure representation by community members with lived experience, or service in agencies related to one or more of the following areas:

- Ethnocultural and linguistic diversity
- New immigrants
- Indigenous communities
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- Individuals with disabilities
- Seniors/older adults
- Individuals living with low income/homeless
- Post-secondary students/youth
- Faith-based diversity
- People with mental health disabilities

The DEI Advisory Committee will focus on internal and external issues. Internal issues to the Region include ensuring an inclusive and barrier-free workplace, including areas such as training, hiring and promotion, policy review, physical spaces, and improving access to Regional services for the community. The Committee would provide direction, support, or advice on this internal work, which would be implemented through specific

¹ Cresnshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241

internal departments and the newly formed Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group, composed of 15 staff members from across the Region.

The DEI Advisory Committee would also serve as the initial Steering Committee for external community engagement in order to identify the community priorities and develop an Action Plan. This could involve providing direction or recommendations for skilled facilitators to engage with a wide variety of community organizations and members, and provide recommendations on how to engage with community members through creative means and technology.

As the development of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan continues, Council should remain open to creating more committees in the future where appropriate.

Alternatives Reviewed

Appendix 3 includes an analysis of similar committees created within Niagara's local area municipalities, as well as in other similar Ontario municipalities. Staff considered multiple options, including the implementation of multiple committees, and the simultaneous creation of a single diversity, equity and inclusion committee with a variety of sub committees or working groups focused on particular populations. The proposed option provides the greatest flexibility and potential while remaining manageable and realistic for Niagara's current situation.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The creation of the DEI Advisory Committee supports Regional Council's Strategic Priorities by **Supporting Business and Economic Growth**, as research indicates that culturally diverse regions are more innovative and economically prosperous, and by promoting a **Healthy and Vibrant Community** by ensuring that actions taken in and through the Region are relevant and appropriate for the increasingly diverse populations in Niagara. The DEI Advisory Committee will also help foster a more **Sustainable and Engaging Government** by enhancing Council's ability to provide innovative, and inclusive customer focused services through reaching and maximizing the assets of Niagara's diverse community members.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [CAO 14-2019](#) - Actions & Resources to Join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities
- [COM 14-2019](#) - Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD)
- [CAO 08-2019](#) - Community Safety and Well-Being Plan
- [CWCD 70-2017](#) - Global Attractiveness Committee Report

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities 10 Common Commitments

Appendix 2: Diversity in Niagara

Appendix 3: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committees in other Municipalities