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**Subject:** Niagara Prosperity Initiative 2020 Update

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, June 16, 2020

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## Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## Key Facts

- Since 2008 (COM 53-2008) Regional Council has authorized staff to invest \$1.5 million annually towards Niagara Prosperity Initiatives (NPI).
- NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.
- This report provides information on NPI projects approved in 2020.
- Twenty projects within the three priority areas of need; housing, health and employment, were approved for funding.
- Service impacts and outcomes anticipated include:
  - 6,215 people served
  - 201 jobs created and filled by people who live in poverty
  - \$47,997 in revenue generated from social enterprise projects.

## Financial Considerations

Between 2008 and 2019, Niagara Region has provided \$1.5 million in annual funding to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative. Of this amount, \$150,000 is allocated each year to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. For 2020, responding to a number of critical budget pressures, Council approved a one-year \$250,000 reduction of the funding for NPI, with \$1.25 million allocated for 2020 NPI projects. Additionally, United Way Niagara reported \$104,130 in unspent funding (including interest) from 2019 projects, resulting in a total project allocation of \$1,204,130 in 2020.

## Analysis

NPI focuses on neighbourhood based interventions and development to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. The goals of NPI are as follows:

- To guide and direct investments on identified initiatives to alleviate poverty in neighborhoods across Niagara;
- To advocate for change that will reduce and prevent poverty in the community;
- To develop and enhance collaborative relationships between stakeholders; and
- To engage people living in poverty in meaningful ways to ensure that investments reflect need.

Three priority areas of need were used for the 2020 RFP process:

1. **Housing** (outreach, homelessness prevention, enhancing accessibility and improved stability);
2. **Health** (mental health, addictions, emotional health and wellbeing for children, dental needs for adults and sustainable access to healthy food);
3. **Employment** (social enterprises and working with Niagara's businesses to create secure jobs that pay a living wage).

The 2020 RFP was issued February 3<sup>rd</sup> and closed February 28, 2020. Forty-four applications, with a total funding request of \$5,028,686 were received. Of the 35 agencies that requested funding, twelve had never received NPI funding in the past.

Niagara Region approves funding applications based on the recommendations of an independent Review Committee. Review committee members for 2020 included two Regional Councillors (B. Greenwood, L. Villella); one employee from Niagara's non-profit sector; two Niagara Region employees (Children's Services and Public Health); one Brock University employee; and four members of the public.

The criteria for assessment matched the proposal criteria and scoring, as well as a list of review considerations, which were used to assist in deciding if the proposal was recommended or not recommended.

Assessors reviewed each of their assigned proposals independently, and then the group discussed funding recommendations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions took place electronically over two half-day meetings in April 2020.

Consideration of the current urgent needs of Niagara residents living in poverty, as a result of COVID-19, was incorporated into the final approval process.

United Way Niagara finalized contracts based on these recommendations and a list of the approved projects by neighbourhood is attached as Appendix 1.

Twenty projects were approved totaling \$1,204,130 in funding. Below is a distribution summary of investments within the three priority areas. Ten projects are under Housing, seven projects are under Health and three projects are under Employment.

| <b>Types of Projects</b>          | <b>\$</b>          | <b>%</b> | <b># of Projects</b> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------------------|
| Housing – Outreach                | \$184,647          | 15%      | 2                    |
| Housing – Improved Stability      | \$186,149          | 15%      | 5                    |
| Housing – Homelessness Prevention | \$175,974          | 15%      | 3                    |
| Health – Mental Health Outreach   | \$278,211          | 23%      | 3                    |
| Health – Healthy Food             | \$81,732           | 7%       | 3                    |
| Health – Dental Needs for Adults  | \$139,586          | 12%      | 1                    |
| Employment – Social Enterprises   | \$157,831          | 13%      | 3                    |
|                                   | <b>\$1,204,130</b> |          | <b>20</b>            |

NPI projects can be funded for one or two years. In 2020, all 20 projects will be funded for one year with contracts ending May 31, 2021.

In addition to the existing contract requirements, agencies have been advised that in the event they are unable to execute a project in full or in part, Niagara Region will recover unspent funds as soon as possible to ensure dollars can be redirected to other urgent areas of need as result of COVID-19.

## **Research Study**

In 2018, Niagara Region's Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities division received funding of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three-year research project.

Brock University has been working on updating a report outlining the state of poverty in Niagara along with recommendations for NPI design and delivery. One of the recommendations being implemented for the 2020 funded projects is the implementation of a modified project evaluation practice, informed by the latest research, on measuring poverty and poverty reduction. The changes are expected to make reporting less cumbersome for service providers and less intrusive for service users while increasing the value, validity and reliability of the project outcome data that is collected.

In response to COVID-19, community consultations planned for the summer and fall may need to be completed in a different setting or modality. There has also been a temporary closure of the Statistics Canada Research Data Centre at McMaster University, which has delayed access to datasets. Brock is committed to adjusting the work plan as required and expects to complete the full report on schedule in early 2021.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Healthy and Vibrant Community. Foster a high quality of life through safe, inclusive neighbourhoods and delivery of quality, affordable and accessible human services.

## **Other Pertinent Reports**

COM 04-2008 A Legacy of Poverty Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on Child Health in Niagara Region

COM 44-2011 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update (*Building a New Legacy: Building Prosperity by Improving the Quality of Neighbourhood Life*)

COM 04-2019 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update and Request for Review Committee Members

COM 2-2020 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1            List of approved 2020 NPI projects and agencies