

September 1, 2006

To: Policy and Finance Committee

From: Councillor Joe Mihevc, Chair, Roundtable on Access, Equity and Human Rights

Subject: Chair's Progress Report – Roundtable on Access, Equity and Human Rights

Recommendation:

That this progress report from the Chair of the Roundtable on Access Equity and Human Rights be accepted by the Policy and Finance Committee and forwarded to City Council.

Comments:

(a) Establishment of the Roundtable

Toronto City Council established a Roundtable on Access, Equity and Human Rights in December 2004 and approved a one year term for members ending on January 1, 2006. This term was extended to the end of the current Council term by way of my status report to Council which was approved at its January/February 2006 meeting.

(b) Membership

The membership of the Roundtable was determined in consultation with the Mayor's Office and included individuals who were deemed to be knowledgeable about issues that were of significance to Toronto's diverse communities and representatives of organizations who worked in various sectors.

(c) Workplan

The report establishing the Roundtable outlined the work program of the Roundtable. The work program included the following:

- the development of an equity lens;
- the implementation of the profession to profession mentoring program;
- the provision of multilingual services,
- the representation of diverse communities among appointments made to agencies, boards, commissions and corporations;
- issues raised by the Ornstein study;

- access by designated group owned businesses to City contracts;
- the status of employment equity initiatives;
- accessibility to civic participation;
- gender equity analyses; and
- the status of implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Community Access and Equity as well as the City's Plan of Action for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination.

(d) Implementation of the Roundtable work program

The Roundtable has made progress on several fronts and worked directly with staff on the implementation of the assigned workplan. Where projects were already underway within the Toronto Public Service, the role of the Roundtable focused upon reviewing presentations by City staff and the provision of advice regarding improvements to service delivery.

It is fair to say that the Roundtable was extremely pleased with the progress that has been made on the following:

- the implementation and expansion of the profession to profession mentoring program;
- the provision of multilingual services, including 311; and
- the progress of implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on Community Access and Equity as well as the City's Plan of Action for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination.

The Roundtable was pleased to review the results of the outreach efforts made to improve the representation of diverse communities among appointments made to agencies, boards, commissions and corporations as well as the proposed multilingual outreach for the upcoming municipal elections.

The Roundtable is of the view that the issues raised by the Ornstein study regarding the status of racial minorities, especially with respect to people of African origins, must continue to be a prime focus of targeted programs across the Toronto Public Service. In addition, work must continue with respect to access to City contracts by designated group owned businesses.

The Roundtable was disappointed that employment equity implementation has not proceeded at the same rate as progress in other areas.

One of the most significant projects undertaken by the Roundtable was the development of an "equity lens". This tool was developed under the guidance of a working group established by the Roundtable. We commend the work that was undertaken by staff and the members of the City's Interdivisional Staff Team on Access Equity and Human Rights, particularly those divisions who were involved with field-testing the lens. The proposal to utilize an "equity lens" was reported to the June meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee, and is the subject of a further report from the City Manager of how implementation will proceed within the Toronto Public Service.

(e) Proposals regarding the Ontario Human Rights Commission

The matter of the proposed reforms to the Ontario Human Rights Commission was not on the original workplan of the Roundtable. The Roundtable viewed this issue to be of paramount importance to the achievement of equity and human rights for residents and workers in the City. In April 2006, I wrote to the Attorney General of Ontario on behalf of the Roundtable to urge him to conduct comprehensive consultation, combined with a research and policy review

process. We noted that while the best of intentions are behind the proposals presented to date, experience in other jurisdictions as well as that of the experiences of people who have no access to legal representation in the courts, have shown that the models for change under consideration could have the opposite effect.

Subsequent to this, the Roundtable invited representatives from the Attorney General's office to make a presentation. The Roundtable also heard from representatives from the community regarding their concerns about the proposed reforms. The Roundtable members have requested an opportunity to make a submission to the Provincial Committee and have identified the following as a summary of our comments on the proposed amendments:

- the necessity to engage with stakeholders who have expertise in human rights jurisprudence, particularly from the point of view of equality-seeking complainants with a view to putting into place appropriate support mechanisms
- the necessity for the Commission to have the powers needed to fully execute its mandate to effectively and pro-actively reduce and eliminate systemic discrimination in Ontario;
- the importance of legislating the provision of legal services for human rights claimants;
- the provision of adequate resources for Commission, the Tribunal and the human rights legal support centre;
- clarification of the roles and authority of the proposed Anti-Racism and Disability Rights Secretariats and consideration of adding an employment equity secretariat within the Commission.

(f) Community engagement

The City must continue to engage with the community and to maintain mechanisms for direct involvement with the policy development process and for reviewing services to the City's diverse communities.

The existing format and frequency of its meeting schedule did not permit the Roundtable to engage in on-going dialogue with Toronto's diverse communities. At present, there are several working groups and projects across the municipal structure which address equity and diversity issues. We support the continuation of committees to advise on disability access and on Aboriginal issues.

With respect to the focus for addressing equity and human rights issues within the city's governance structure, the importance of these issues to the well-being of Toronto's diverse communities requires that these issues fall under the ambit of the new Executive Committee. In addition, the proposed community dialogues requested by City Council must include these issues and solicit input on the future structures for community engagement.

It is further recommended that the primary focus for the upcoming term of Council must be the implementation of employment equity within the Toronto Public Service and on specific initiatives for youth employment, with a focus on African Canadian youth.

We further recommend that at the end of the first year of the next term of Council, that the Executive Committee request a report from the City Manager on the status of employment equity implementation, and that this be the subject of a specific meeting of the Committee, along with the results of the pilot project on implementing the “equity lens”.

We also recommend that the City Manager and staff convene a multi-sectoral congress on “best practices” on access, equity and human rights early in 2008, from which community advice can be further sought on the City’s progress.

Submitted by

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Roundtable on Access, Equity and Human Rights