

Review of the Workers' Information and Action Centre of Toronto

(City Council on November 23, 24 and 25, 1999, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Policy and Finance Committee recommends:

- (1) the adoption of the report (October 21, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services subject to:**
 - (i) amending Recommendation No. (3) to read as follows:**

“(3) for the year 2000 Operating Budget, \$125,000.00 be transferred from the Community Services Department to the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department, to fund the former WIACT’s policy, research, community liaison and education functions; and that the Budget Advisory Committee be requested to identify the source of funding for the remaining amount of \$60,000.00 that is required”; and
 - (ii) amending Recommendation No. (5) to read as follows:**

“(5) this report be considered by the Budget Advisory Committee as per the regular budget process”; and
 - (iii) approval by the Budget Advisory Committee during the year 2000 budget cycle; and**
- (2) that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be requested to submit a report to the Policy and Finance Committee in one year on the effectiveness and progress of the transfer from Community Services Department to the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department.**

The Policy and Finance Committee submits the following report (October 21, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

As per City Council’s request, this report discusses the review of the Workers’ Information and Action Centre of Toronto (WIACT). The reasons for the review, its participants and the process are briefly described. Following a description of WIACT’s functions, the fit between WIACT’s activities and the City’s core responsibilities is examined. Agencies and organizations in the community that provide similar services or perform similar functions are identified and efforts to obtain alternate sources of funding for WIACT are reviewed. The report examines and responds to recommendations from the Advisory Committee established specifically for the review of

WIACT. Finally, the report recommends an approach to preserving WIACT functions compatible with the City's core functions.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

The impact of this report's recommendations regarding WIACT will be \$245,000.00 net on the tax base for the years 2000 to 2002, decreasing to \$185,000.00 thereafter. \$275,000.00 has been the annualized budget in previous years. This report has been discussed with the Finance Department and they concur with the financial implications.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) on the basis of the findings of the review of WIACT requested by City Council, the following changes be made to the Workers' Information and Action Centre of Toronto:
 - (i) the Centre's policy, research, community liaison and education capacity be located in the Economic Development Division of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism (EDCT), and funding be provided to support these functions in 2000 and future years to the amount of \$185,000.00 net per annum;
 - (ii) the Centre's information, referral and counselling functions be transferred to an appropriate outside agency with a guarantee of adequate funding from the City for three years, in the amount of up to \$60,000.00 net for up to three years;
 - (iii) the City assist the selected agency to secure alternate sources of funds during the period 2000 to 2002; and
 - (iv) the role of the WIACT Advisory Committee be reviewed with the Economic Development, Culture and Tourism Department in light of the changes recommended above;
- (2) staff from the Community and Neighbourhood Services and Economic Development, Tourism and Culture Departments work to expedite the transfer of functions and staff upon adoption of this report by City Council;
- (3) for the year 2000 budget, EDCT provide for an additional \$185,000.00 net in its budget submission to fund the former WIACT's policy, research, community liaison and education functions, to be reviewed as part of the year 2000 budget process;
- (4) for the year 2000 budget, the Community Services Grants program provide for an additional \$60,000.00 as the first of a three-year contribution to cover the transfer to an appropriate outside agency of the former WIACT's information and referral functions, to be reviewed as part of the year 2000 budget process;

- (5) this report be forwarded to the Policy and Finance Committee; and
- (6) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

The former City of Toronto approved the establishment of the Worker's Information and Action Centre of Toronto (WIACT) in 1990. The Centre offers information, counselling and referrals to individuals experiencing workplace problems and issues. In this regard, its primary target population consists of lower paid workers who are not members of unions, particularly women, visible minorities and recent newcomers. The Centre also performs public education, advocacy and community outreach and capacity building functions related to employment issues facing this target group, as well as undertaking research and policy work focusing on labour market adjustment issues. A more complete description of the Centre's functions is provided below. Until the restructuring of the former City of Toronto government in 1997, the Centre reported through its Advisory Committee to the City's Economic Development Committee.

An Advisory Committee, comprised of three Councillors and a number of community representatives, was struck by the former Toronto City Council in 1991. The Committee last met on a regular basis in 1997.

The amalgamation of local governments in Toronto announced in 1997 by the Province required that all existing functions be aligned within the new City government. Initial decisions about where specific functions should be located were made by the provincially appointed Transition Team. As part of this process, responsibility for WIACT was assigned to Toronto Social Services (TSS) for 1998. At that time, the decision was based on the belief that the Centre's community outreach activities were at least broadly consistent with TSS' role in delivering services in the community to unemployed people.

Subsequently, TSS' review of the Centre's functions in mid 1998 indicated substantial differences and potential inconsistencies between the Division's mandate under the new *Ontario Works Act* and WIACT's basic functions. For this reason, it was concluded that it would not be appropriate to retain the Centre within TSS for 1999.

WIACT's future role and its location within the new City were discussed as part of the 1999 budget process. Underpinned by an emphasis on maintaining core City functions in a fiscally constrained environment, the Chief Administrator's report to Budget Committee in February 1999 recommended that WIACT be discontinued.

Budget Committee subsequently recommended that the proposed cut to WIACT be deferred pending a more detailed examination of the Program's role in relation to the City. City Council (Strategic Planning and Priorities Committee, Report No. 8, Clause No. 18) then recommended that the City continue funding WIACT until September 1999. The Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services was directed to undertake a review of the Centre, and to consult with the WIACT Advisory Committee, including four Councillors selected to participate in the

process. The Commissioner was also directed to work with the Federation of Labour and WIACT to attempt to obtain Provincial/Federal funding for the Centre, as well as to identify an appropriate location for the Centre within the City's structure. The Commissioner was requested to report to City Council in September 1999.

The four City Councillors, selected to participate in the review as a result of their roles in the Community Services and Economic Development Committees, were Councillors Ashton, Brown, and Korwin-Kuczynski, and, for his interest in labour market issues, Councillor Miller.

A draft report was prepared by the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and presented to the WIACT Advisory Committee and the four Councillors in July 1999. The Advisory Committee and Councillors subsequently recommended to the Commissioner that a consultation be held with interested members of the public to obtain feedback regarding the draft report.

The Commissioner subsequently reported to the Policy and Finance Committee in September. In response to this report, the Policy and Finance Committee, at its September meeting, recommended that:

- (1) WIACT continue until December 31, 1999, with required funding from the approved budget of the Social Services Division of the Community and Neighbourhood Services Department; and
- (2) the Advisory Committee, including the designated Councillors, report to the Budget Advisory Committee in time for the 2000 Operating Budget.

In addition, the Policy and Finance Committee requested that the Commissioner take the necessary actions to ensure that WIACT "is no longer considered a City agency to enable the organization eligibility for Provincial/Federal funding".

Council approved the Policy and Finance Committee report at its September 28, 1999, meeting. The report back to the Community Services Committee was postponed to November 1999.
Review Process:

In response to Council's April 1999 direction to the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, the Department, with support from the Chief Administrator's Office, initiated a review of WIACT in May 1999. Consistent with Council's direction to examine the role and mandate of WIACT in relation to the City, and to investigate the appropriate location for the Centre within the City's structure, the review encompassed four distinct activities. First, based on an inventory of the Centre's specific functions and services, organizations and agencies providing similar services or performing similar functions were identified. Second, meetings were held with potential funders from senior levels of government to seek alternative funding sources. Wherever possible, WIACT Advisory Committee members and senior staff participated in the discussions. Thirdly, public consultations with interested parties were held in September and a report on the outcomes of that consultation process prepared in October. Following the consultations, the Advisory Committee, including the designated Councillors, made

recommendations to the Commissioners of Community and Neighbourhood Services and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism. Finally, discussions were held between the Commissioners of Community and Neighbourhood Services and Economic Development, Culture and Tourism regarding the location of certain key WIACT functions within the latter Department.

The report and recommendations from the Advisory Committee, as well as a supporting letter from Councillors Ashton, Brown, Korwin-Kuczynski, and Miller, are attached as Attachment No. 1. The report on the public consultations is available from City Clerks upon request.

Report Outline:

This report discusses the review's overall findings, and makes a number of key recommendations based on these findings. Following a description of WIACT's functions, the question of the fit between WIACT's activities and the City's core business responsibilities is addressed. Efforts to obtain alternate sources of funding for WIACT are then reviewed. Finally, the report responds to the recommendations from the Advisory Committee and recommends an approach for preserving WIACT functions compatible with the City's core functions.

Comments:

(I) WIACT Functions:

As approved by the former City of Toronto Council in 1990, WIACT was to undertake activities in three distinct program areas:

- (a) information and advice to non-unionized workers on workplace related employment rights, benefits and other employment-related issues, and referrals to appropriate agencies and institutions responsible for specific programs;
- (b) public education, community outreach and networking with the aim of informing the public, community agencies and organized groups about specific areas of concern affecting workers in the municipality and identifying gaps in service and implementing strategies to address those gaps; and
- (c) policy and research focusing on workforce issues of concern to the former City of Toronto Council, including labour market trends and the development of policy and program proposals which recognize specific workforce issues and concerns.

An inventory of the types of activities undertaken by the Centre is contained in Attachment No. 2.

These functions are performed by the Centre's five full-time staff, which includes a co-ordinator, three program staff and an administrative assistant. The 1998 budget was \$275,000.00. While there are fluctuations related to specific program priorities, overall,

WIACT's resources tend to be more or less evenly divided among the current functional areas (information and advice, public education, networking and community outreach, and policy and research).

Early in the review, there was a recognition among WIACT staff, the Advisory Committee and TSS, that the Centre's functions were not compatible with TSS' service delivery mandate, and that the Centre would be more appropriately positioned elsewhere in the City. To this end, the next section examines the Centre's functions in relation to the City's core business and service delivery functions.

(II) WIACT Program Activities as Core City Functions:

Amalgamation has required that the prior functions and roles of a substantial number of activities undertaken by the previous City governments be reviewed to assess the degree of fit with the new City's core businesses.

WIACT currently provides services for which there is no legislative or legal mandate within the City, nor is the City required to provide such services in relation to any existing Provincial requirement. On this basic level, the Centre's services are discretionary.

The key questions related to the City's role vis a vis discretionary services are whether the services demonstrably serve the public interest and whether the City is the most appropriate level of government to deliver the services. Based on the activities of the Centre, and given the strong support it receives from labour and community organizations, it is apparent that WIACT provides programs which meet the needs of vulnerable City residents, and which contribute to social development objectives.

Economic development activities are clearly within the mandate of the City, and also constitute a core responsibility. Effective economic development strategies are supported and facilitated by appropriate research and policy functions covering various areas, including employment and labour force trends and labour adjustment issues. The evidence gathered through the review process strongly suggests that the WIACT's research, policy, community liaison and education functions can contribute to the City's economic development goals, and that these functions can readily be adapted and strengthened to support the City's capacity to monitor, assess and analyze the impacts of ongoing changes in the labour force.

Currently, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), the Province and the City provide data and some analysis of broader labour market trends in Toronto. However, there are recognized gaps in the research conducted on changes in the City's employment environment, particularly related to the impacts of these changes on different labour market segments.

WIACT has historically focused its research efforts on identifying trends affecting key employment sectors (e.g., clerical workers, the fashion industry) which employ

substantial numbers of people in the City. One of the challenges facing the City is how to match and market the available labour pool to existing and potential employers, a task well suited to the Centre's capacities. Participants in the consultation sessions asserted that the City has a role in various labour adjustment issues: intervening where possible with employees to assist in job retention, liaising with higher levels of government to ensure that labour adjustment services are delivered on an equitable basis in the City, and monitoring job displacement.

It was strongly noted in the same sessions that a great deal of the value of WIACT's contribution to research and policy development derives from staff's direct contact with the sectors of the labour force which they serve through individual service, education and community liaison. Participants in the consultation meetings strongly recommended that this direct contact be continued to enable WIACT to be a window on emerging issues across these sectors and provide grounded information not available through statistical reports.

Consultation participants also argued that, as an economic development objective, the City should undertake activities that promote a high quality of work life and an adequate labour market income. WIACT's education activities are consistent with this objective, support the delivery of other employment-related services in outside organizations and facilitate liaison with community organizations.

It is less clear that other WIACT functions, such as information and referral services, should be provided by the City, or should be delivered in the current fashion. These services in their current form do not fit into the mandate of any existing City unit, are within the mandate of other agencies, or are delivered by other agencies or organizations. For example, basic information regarding employment standards and other employment issues is currently available from appropriate provincial government sources, notably the Ministry of Labour. Indeed, provision of this information is a provincial responsibility. Specific complaints can be made to the relevant government agency (e.g., the Human Rights Commission). Information, referrals and counselling services related to employment and human rights issues in the workplace are also provided by community legal clinics and community-based services. These services are generally restricted to certain geographic areas, income groups or ethno-racial groups or are limited in scope.

General referral services are provided by many of the same agencies, as well as by Community Information Toronto and local community information centres, which are funded by the City. Such services may also be provided by multi-services agencies, many of which also receive funds from the City, through the Community Services grant programs. Supported by HRDC, Employment Resource Centres have been established across the City. Including 14 Centres developed by TSS and situated in each local social services office, there are now a total of 50 sites. Information can be accessed through these centres by those who are able to use self-directed services through internet connections.

In summary, the Centre's information and referral functions are not seen to be core programs that should be delivered by the City. Research and policy functions, community liaison, education and capacity building, however, can support City economic and social development initiatives, and can increase the City's capacity to address emerging labour market issues.

(III) Alternate Funding Sources:

City Council specifically requested that alternate sources of funding for WIACT be sought, in conjunction with labour representatives and the Centre's staff. As part of this review, senior levels of government have been approached to fund the Centre, as has the Ontario Federation of Labour.

At a series of meetings, both federal and provincial officials indicated that they could not currently provide core funding to support WIACT and the services it currently provides. In a communication to Heather MacVicar, General Manager of Social Services, the Director of HRDC's Employment Service Portfolio noted that HRDC was unable to fund WIACT at this time (see Attachment No. 3), and that the services provided were already available in the community or fall under provincial jurisdiction. Similarly, a representative from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities indicated that the Ministry traditionally does not provide core funding to other government agencies (see Attachment No. 4). Timing is also working against any rapid decisions regarding new funding initiatives, given that the Ministry has just been restructured and a new Minister has taken on responsibility for the training portfolio.

Based on the evidence to date, it does not appear that core funding for WIACT can be obtained from senior levels of government in the near term. Neither the Provincial nor the Federal Government funding programs would support the major programs and services of WIACT. Both levels of government did indicate that there might be interest in funding specific projects which address needs clearly identified in the community and fall within their program frameworks. The Ontario Federation of Labour and the Labour Council of Toronto and York Region also indicated they do not have the resources to provide core funding to the Centre, although they continue to support WIACT's work.

In response to the direction provided to the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services at the Policy and Finance Committee's September 1999 meeting, appropriate provincial and federal government officials were approached to determine whether funding would be available to support WIACT if it were re-established as a non-government agency based in the community. Representatives from both levels of government confirmed that funding is currently not available to support WIACT.

(IV) Approach and Recommendations:

The following comments summarize the relevant findings from the review and are consistent with the recommendations received from the Advisory Committee:

- (a) there was general agreement from the Centre's staff, the Advisory Committee and TSS, that the Centre's functions did not fit in TSS and were not compatible with the Division's Ontario Works service delivery mandate;
- (b) the Centre's research and policy functions, as well as liaison and education with community organizations, can potentially support the City's economic development mandate and activities, and increase the City's capacity to address emerging labour force adjustment issues;
- (c) City staff agree that it would be appropriate for the Centre's research and policy capacity as well as community liaison and education functions to be located in the Economic Development Division, and for the City to continue to fund them on an ongoing basis;
- (d) WIACT's information, referral and counselling functions do not fit within the current mandate of any City division, however they are also not duplicated by existing services, and meet an important need in the community;
- (e) the information, referral and counselling functions should be transferred to an appropriate agency outside of the City with a guarantee of funding for an interim period and assistance in seeking funding from other sources; and
- (f) at this time, alternate sources of core funding for the Centre have not been identified and both the provincial and federal governments have indicated they will not provide funding for the Centre.

Therefore, based on the review's outcomes, it is proposed that the Centre's policy, research, community liaison and education functions be situated in the Economic Development Division of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism. It is further recommended that funding be provided to support these functions in the amount of \$185,000.00 net per annum. Funding at this level will support the equivalent of 3.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the Economic Development Division. The Commissioners of Community and Neighbourhood Services and Economic Development, Tourism and Culture support the location of key WIACT functions in Economic Development.

Given the vulnerable population served by WIACT, City staff and the Advisory Committee also recommend that the City provide interim financial support for up to three years to an appropriate community agency to offer the information, referral and counselling services on workplace issues now offered by the Centre. It is proposed that \$60,000.00 be transferred to this agency in 2000, and that the City assist in efforts to secure alternate sources of funding for these services to reduce the amount of City funding without destabilizing the service over the period 2000 to 2002. The selected agency should also be assisted in seeking additional or alternate sources of funding from

other levels of government and the United Way so that reliance on the City could be reduced over time.

Finally, the Advisory Committee is committed to continuing to assist the Economic Development Division in addressing labour market issues. In light of the changes to the Centre's functions, it is recommended that the mandate and composition of the Advisory Committee be reviewed.

Conclusions:

Drawing on the findings from the extensive review and consultation process conducted by staff of TSS and the Economic Development Division, in conjunction with the WIACT Advisory Committee and designated Councillors, it is recommended that the Centre's research, policy, and community liaison and education functions be housed in the Economic Development Division of Economic Development, Culture and Tourism. These functions will support the City's economic development mandate and activities and increase the City's capacity to address emerging labour force adjustment issues. Ongoing funding will be required to support these functions in the amount of \$185,000.00 per annum.

It is further recommended that the Centre's information, referral and advocacy functions be transferred to an appropriate outside agency with three years guaranteed funding in the amount of \$60,000.00 in the first year. In light of these recommendations, it will be necessary to review the mandate and composition of the Centre's advisory committee.

Contact:

Heather MacVicar, General Manager, Social Services Division, Tel: 392-8952/Fax: 392-8931;
Email: heather_macvicar@metrodesk.metrotor.on.ca

List of Attachments:

Attachment No. 1 – Advisory Committee Report on the Workers’ Information and Action Centre of Toronto, October 1999

Attachment No. 2 – An Overview of WIACT Program Functions

Attachment No. 3 – Correspondence from Human Resources Development Canada

Attachment No. 4 – Correspondence from Ministry of Training, College and Universities

The Policy and Finance Committee submits the following communication (November 4, 1999) from the City Clerk:

Recommendation:

The Community Services Committee on November 4, 1999, recommended to the Policy and Finance Committee the adoption of the report dated October 21, 1999, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services respecting the review of the Workers’ Information and Action Centre of Toronto.

Background:

The Community Services Committee had before it the following report and communication:

- (October 21, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services respecting the review of the Workers’ Information and Action Centre of Toronto; and
- (November 3, 1999) from Ms. Anne Dubas, President, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 79.

Mr. Tim Maguire, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 79, appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter.

The following Members of Council appeared before the Policy and Finance Committee in connection with the foregoing matter:

- Councillor Brian Ashton, Scarborough Bluffs; and
- Councillor David Miller, High Park.

(A copy of the communication dated November 3, 1999, addressed to the Community Services Committee from Ms. Anne Dubas, President, Local 79, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE); and each of the attachments referred to in the foregoing report (October 21, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, were forwarded to all Members of Council with the November 10, 1999, agenda of the Policy and Finance Committee and copies thereof are also on file in the office of the City Clerk.)