

Establishment of a “211” Community Information Telephone Service

(City Council on June 7, 8 and 9, 2000, amended this Clause by adding thereto the following:

“It is further recommended that, as recommended by the Telecommunications Steering Committee in the communication dated June 2, 2000, from the City Clerk, the report dated May 24, 2000, from the City Solicitor, embodying the following recommendations, be adopted:

‘It is recommended that:

- (1) the City Solicitor, in consultation with the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and other City staff as appropriate, be authorized to register the City of Toronto as an interested party in any Public Notice proceeding initiated by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (“CRTC”) as a result of the application by Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada (the “Applicants”) to the CRTC for the designation of 2-1-1 as a community information service, and participate in the proceeding, as needed, to assist and support the Applicants;*
- (2) the City Clerk be requested to immediately provide a letter of endorsement as requested by the Applicants so that it may be included in the Application; and*
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give affect thereto.’ ”)*

The Community Services Committee recommends the adoption of the report dated May 3, 2000, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services.

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having referred the report from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to the Telecommunications Steering Committee for comment thereon directly to Council for its meeting on June 7, 2000.

The Community Services Committee submits the following report (May 3, 2000) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

To inform Council of the proposed “211” Community Information Telephone Service for the City of Toronto and request Council endorsement of an application to the Canadian Radio-

television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for the designation of “211” nationally for this purpose.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement :

Community Information Toronto receives financial support from the City of Toronto through the Community Services and Homeless Initiatives grants programs. There are no anticipated financial impacts on the City as a result of the development of the proposed “211” Community Information Telephone Service. Community Information Toronto received an annual allocation from the City of Toronto (\$496,565.00 in 1999) to support the database, information and referral and Street Helpline programs. The agency also receives core support from the United Way of Greater Toronto.

Recommendations :

It is recommended that:

- (1) Council endorse the application by Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada, to the CRTC for the designation of “211” as a Community Information Service;
- (2) the City of Toronto register in the public process identified by the CRTC;
- (3) this report be referred to the Telecommunications Steering Committee for their concurrence; and
- (4) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background :

The development of a Community Information Service, similar to 411 or 911, was initiated at an international conference for information and referral services in 1998. The service was already under development in two American jurisdictions, the City of Atlanta and the State of Connecticut. Community Information Toronto then raised the possibility of developing a “211” service in Toronto with the United Way of Greater Toronto. The two organizations hired a project manager to lead the proposal development process required to make formal application to the CRTC for the designation of “211” as a Community Information Service.

Comments:

“211” is intended to be a simple, highly visible, easy to recall number to enable people across Canada to efficiently and effectively access information and referrals on community, social, health and government services.

Information and Referral:

Community information and referral services provide central access points to community information through which everyone can access the full range of community services and receive efficient and appropriate referrals to them. A trained information and referral specialist answers the call, assesses the caller's needs, often assists the caller to prioritize who to call and provides the numbers, locations and other relevant information. Community information and referral services in Toronto are delivered by community organizations, including Community Information Toronto and are financially supported by the United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto.

"211" Service:

A "211" number is a simple, easy to recall, highly visible number which is especially important for populations who face barriers accessing information. This includes people such as older adults, children and youth, people who are homeless, persons with disabilities, people who speak neither official language, illiterate individuals and people incapacitated by crisis such as domestic violence. Unnecessary delay and inappropriate referrals will be decreased with access to a single number through which callers will be referred to the organization that can best meet their needs.

As a member of the North American Numbering Plan, Canada maintains broad consistency with the United States, where "211" services already exist in Atlanta and Connecticut. An application for the assignment of "211" nationally in the U.S. is before the Federal Communications Commission.

CRTC Application:

The four co-applicants to the CRTC are Community Information Toronto, United Way of Greater Toronto, InformCanada (a national organization of information and referral service providers) and United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada. Given the interest in implementing the "211" service across Canada, the CRTC application is seeking to reserve "211" nationally. "211" services will be implemented locally and rolled out across Canada based on community readiness.

The applicants have undertaken extensive consultations with telecommunications carriers, information and referral agencies, United Way/Centraide, and legal and technical experts in order to prepare the CRTC application. In addition, Ambulance Services staff have endorsed the "211" proposal. Staff at the Toronto Police 911 service are very supportive of the "211" proposal and a request for endorsement by the Toronto Police Services Board is in process.

Community Information Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto are planning to submit the CRTC application in June 2000. Once the application has been submitted the CRTC will complete an initial assessment to determine the public review process required. The applicants anticipate that the CRTC will inform them of the review process by August 2000, and that the

process may take a minimum of a year. The earliest implementation in Toronto would be the spring of 2001.

Conclusions:

The City of Toronto has provided core support to Community Information Toronto for the provision of information and referral services for over 25 years in recognition of the importance of an accessible, City-wide information service. The proposed “211” service will significantly enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of this critical service.

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List of Attachments:

Overview of 211 (April 2000)

Overview of “211”
April 2000

“211” Project Goal:

A simple, highly visible, easy to recall number to enable people across Canada to efficiently and effectively access information and referrals on community, social, health and government services.

What is Information and Referral?

- Community information and referral services provide central access points to community information through which everyone can access the full range of community services and receive efficient and appropriate referrals to them.
- A trained information and referral specialist answers the call, assesses the caller’s needs, often assists the caller to prioritize who to call and provides the numbers, locations and other relevant information. Calls are confidential.
- Community information and referral services are available in communities across Canada. They are responsive to local need because they design their service to address local conditions. Services are multilingual and culturally sensitive.

- Community information and referral services are delivered by community organizations, which, in many communities, are financially supported by United Ways and municipal and provincial government.
- Organized data collection on calls and referrals provides the basis for community service planning and public policy formulation.
- Each call translates into an individual or family being referred to the appropriate organization, either for themselves, or on behalf of a family member, friend or client. This enhances people being able to help themselves.
- Examples of typical calls received by community information and referral organizations are attached in the appendix.

Why an “211” number?

- An “211” number is a simple, easy to recall, highly visible number which is especially important for populations who face barriers accessing information. This includes people such as older adults, children and youth, people who are homeless, persons with disabilities, people who speak neither official language, illiterate individuals and people incapacitated by crisis such as domestic violence.
- Public frustration, unnecessary delay and inappropriate referrals will be decreased with access to a single number through which callers will be referred to the organizations that can best meet their needs.
- “211” numbers are a scarce resource. This proposed use of “211” for the public good, is the best possible use of an “211” number.

Why “211”?

- As a member of the North American Numbering Plan, Canada maintains broad consistency with the United States, where “211” services already exist in Atlanta and Connecticut. Both United Way “211” in Atlanta and Infoline in Connecticut are delivered by United Ways. The implementation of “211” is progressing in other states as well. Currently the approval of the use of “211” has been provided by state Public Utility Commissions. An application for the assignment of “211” nationally in the U.S. is before the Federal Communications Commission.

Applying for the Assignment of “211”:

- The four applicants to the CRTC are Community Information Toronto, United Way of Greater Toronto, InformCanada and United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada.

- The CRTC application is seeking to reserve “211” nationally. There is interest in implementing the “211” service across Canada. “211” services will be implemented locally and rolled out across Canada based on community readiness.
- Essential to the success of the assignment of “211” will be public, voluntary and business sector support.
- Service delivery standards using existing North American standards for Information and Referral developed by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, will be in place. (See: www.airs.org)

Background on Process to Date

- Community Information Toronto, in partnership with United Way of Greater Toronto, has been developing the “211” initiative for the past two years. A project manager has been retained to support the CRTC application and implementation of the “211” service in Toronto.
- Extensive consultations with telecommunications carriers, information and referral agencies, United Ways/Centraides and legal and technical experts have been carried out to enable an application to the CRTC to be prepared.
- Significant effort has been put into building national awareness and support for the “211” proposal. At this time, 60 organizations consisting of United Ways and information and referral organizations across Canada are collaborating on “211”.

Launching “211”:

There are seven components, all of which need to be in place to develop and sustain “211”:
Endorsement and Support:

- Support for and endorsement of the project by Municipal and Provincial governments as well as the voluntary and business sectors, is essential to the success of the CRTC application.

Sustainable Funding:

- The cost of sustaining a “211” service in a community is driven by (a) call volume, (b) hours of service, (c) technology, and (d) infrastructure. Examples of anticipated sources of funding include United Way allocations and major gifts, foundations, business and municipal, regional, and provincial government.

Call Centre Technology:

- Call centres require technology to receive, queue, route and create reports on calls.

Telecommunications Involvement:

- If the CRTC application is successful, telecommunications carriers will be required to re-program switches to route calls to “211” in communities where the service is provided.

Current Database:

- The accuracy and appropriateness of the referral depends on the development and maintenance of a comprehensive and current database of community services, e.g., Community Information Toronto currently has more than 3,500 services on its database.
- Concurrent with the “211” project is an initiative known as Human Services Information System (HSIS) to enhance the database so that it will become web-based. The two projects are complementary. Within a couple of years, the web-based version of the data base will be available to members of the public who have access to computers and the Internet, as well as agencies and organizations.
- Trained Information and Referral Specialists:

Staffing is provided by trained information and referral specialists who answer calls and assess caller needs. In addition, there are people who support the service through community outreach, training and administration.
- Marketing and Public Awareness:

An extensive campaign to inform the public about the availability of “211” will be necessary. This will be made possible in Toronto, for example, through the expertise and broad community reach of the United Way of Greater Toronto and Community Information Toronto.

Projected Schedule:

- The application will be filed with the CRTC in May.
- July 2000 - process expected to be identified by CRTC. It is anticipated that the process with the CRTC may take a minimum of a year.

Appendix: Examples of Typical Calls and Referrals

Caller's Question and Need	Information and Referral
A woman who recently came to Canada from Sri Lanka called to find English as a Second Language (ESL) courses in Scarborough. She said she would feel most comfortable with a service geared to the South Asian community.	Over the course of the five minute call, the woman was provided with five options, including three Tamil community organizations and two ESL services.
A distraught mother of three telephoned to ask about financial assistance.	She was greatly relieved to be able to speak with an information and referral specialist in Urdu, her own language. It became evident that the caller needed some legal advice and counselling as well as financial assistance. The caller was referred to three family service organizations and community legal services.
A social worker with Community and Social Services called CIT desperately seeking an Urdu speaking counsellor. The social worker had secured a shelter space for a refugee family of five. She had limited time to communicate this important information to the family before the spot was offered to others.	The Urdu speaking information and referral specialist called the family immediately and conveyed all the information, plus emotional support. He then called the Social Worker back to confirm that the family understood the instructions.
Person wanting to sponsor a family from overseas.	The information and referral specialist provided the number to call to Immigration Canada.
A frustrated woman wanted help finding telephone numbers for the Wal-Mart and Loblaws closest to her. She had arrived in Canada two years previously and did not know how to use the various telephone books.	The information and referral specialist provided the telephone numbers. Next he explained how the telephone books are organized and the various indexes, and they went through a few examples together. Within about 20 minutes, the caller had mastered the books and developed the skills for future use.

Caller's Question and Need	Information and Referral
An elderly man suffering from Parkinson's disease called for help in obtaining a subsidized wheelchair. He told the information and referral specialist he had received some information from his doctor, but was having difficulty pursuing further action.	With the caller's permission, the information and referral specialist advocated on the caller's behalf and established a three-way conference call to the Ministry of Health - Assistive Devices Program (ADP). Through this method, the caller's initial application was completed. He was also given referrals to three ADP-registered physiotherapists with whom he could arrange for an in-home assessment. The information and referral specialist then spoke with the caller's son to provide telephone numbers and other information for follow-up.
The caller wanted to know how to set up a non-profit organization.	The information specialist referred the caller to the appropriate section of the Blue Pages, and the number to call to receive an information package on registering a non-profit organization. The caller was further directed to the appropriate department to contact for making an application for charitable status.
The caller asked where she can get visual aids to assist her mother who is gradually losing her sight.	The caller was directed to two suppliers in the area in which she lived and provided with their phone numbers and hours of operation.
The caller asked for support groups for male sexual abuse survivors. He had already secured individual therapy but wanted to be connected with other men who had experienced childhood sexual abuse.	The information and referral specialist provided two referrals to survivor support groups for men and recommended a book containing further information and referrals.
A person called requesting home support for their elderly parents.	The information and referral specialist directed them to their local Community Care Access Centre and provided the number to call and the hours of operation.

Community Information Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto, April 18, 2000

(City Council on June 7, 8 and 9, 2000, had before it, during consideration of the foregoing Clause, the following communication (June 2, 2000) from the City Clerk:

Recommendations:

The Telecommunications Steering Committee on June 1, 2000:

- (1) recommended to Council:*
 - (i) the endorsement in principle of the Recommendation of the Community Services Committee embodied in the communication (May 18, 2000) from the City Clerk; and*
 - (ii) the adoption of the report (May 24, 2000) from the City Solicitor; and*
- (2) as requested by the Community Services Committee, submits the aforementioned recommendations directly to Council for consideration with Clause No. 12 of Report No. 5 of The Community Services Committee, entitled “Establishment of a ‘2-1-1’ Community Information Telephone Service”; and*
- (3) received, for information, the 211 project overview from the United Way of Greater Toronto.*

Background:

The Telecommunications Steering Committee on June 1, 2000, had before it the following communications and report:

- (i) (May 18, 2000) from the City Clerk, advising that the Community Services Committee on May 18, 2000:*
 - (1) recommended to Council the adoption of the attached report (May 3, 2000) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services respecting the establishment of a “211” Community Information Telephone Service; and*
 - (2) referred such report to the Telecommunications Steering Committee for comment thereon directly to Council for its meeting on June 7, 2000;*
- (ii) (May 24, 2000) from the City Solicitor, providing comments to the Telecommunications Steering Committee on the proposed participation of the City of Toronto in the public notice process requested by the Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada (the “Applicants”) in their Application to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (“CRTC”), for a proposed 2-1-1 community information telephone service; and recommending that in the event that City Council chooses to endorse the Application, it is recommended that:*

- (1) *the City Solicitor, in consultation with the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and other City staff as appropriate, be authorized to register the City of Toronto as an interested party in any Public Notice proceeding initiated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission ("CRTC") as a result of the application by Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada (the "Applicants") to the CRTC for the designation of 2-1-1 as a community information service, and participate in the proceeding as needed to assist and support the Applicants;*
 - (2) *the City Clerk be requested to immediately provide a letter of endorsement as requested by the Applicants so that it may be included in the Application; and*
 - (3) *the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give affect thereto; and*
- (iii) *(June 1, 2000) from the Community Information Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto, submitting an overview of the 211 Project for the information of the Telecommunications Steering Committee.*

Ms. Jonquil Eyre, United Way 2-1-1 Project Manager, made a presentation to the Telecommunications Steering Committee in connection with the foregoing matter and provided an overview in regard thereto.

*(Report dated May 24, 2000, addressed to the
Telecommunications Steering Committee from the City Solicitor)*

Purpose:

To provide comments to the Telecommunications Steering Committee on the proposed participation of the City of Toronto in the public notice process requested by the Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada (the "Applicants") in their Application to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission ("CRTC"), for a proposed 2-1-1 community information telephone service.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

As set out in the report (May 3, 2000) of the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services concerning this matter, one of the applicants, Community Information Toronto, currently receives funding, in the form of grant support, from the City of Toronto.

Recommendations

In the event that City Council chooses to endorse the Application, it is recommended that:

- (1) the City Solicitor, in consultation with the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services and other City staff as appropriate, be authorized to register the City of Toronto as an interested party in any Public Notice proceeding initiated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission ("CRTC") as a result of the application by Community Information Toronto, the United Way of Greater Toronto, Inform Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada (the "Applicants") to the CRTC for the designation of 2-1-1 as a community information service, and participate in the proceeding as needed to assist and support the Applicants;*
- (2) the City Clerk be requested to immediately provide a letter of endorsement as requested by the Applicants so that it may be included in the Application; and*
- (3) the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give affect thereto.*

Background:

At its meeting of May 18, 2000, the Community Services Committee recommended adoption of the report (May 3, 2000) of the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services respecting the establishment of a proposed "2-1-1" community information telephone service for the City of Toronto and nation-wide. The Commissioner's report recommends that Council endorse the application to the CRTC by the applicants for the designation of 211 as a community information service and that the City of Toronto register in any public notice process initiated by CRTC at the request of the applicants. The Committee has referred this report to the Telecommunications Steering Committee for its concurrence and the Chair of the Telecommunications Steering Committee has asked for my comments with respect to the City of Toronto's participation.

Comments:

The proposed 211 service applied for would be assigned for non-commercial use across Canada to provide a one number access for callers to information and referrals on community, social, health and government services. Community Information Toronto, one of the four applicants making this application, has in the past received financial support from the City of Toronto through the community services and homeless initiatives grant programs. The Applicants have retained the law firm of Gowling, Strathy & Henderson to represent them at the CRTC and provide legal advice concerning the Application.

The Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services has indicated that in her opinion the proposal would result in benefits to the residents of the City of Toronto. It would also appear that the assignment of a 2-1-1 number would complement and benefit the City's 9-1-1 services by

attempting to reduce the percentage of “non-critical” calls currently made to 9-1-1 operators. It is my understanding that the Applicants have met with Councillor Norm Gardner and 9-1-1 staff and shall be seeking the endorsement of the Toronto Police Services Board at its meeting of June 1, 2000.

The Applicants have advised that preparation of the Application has included consultation with various telecommunications carriers and the invitation to them to comment on the Application before it is filed.

If there is little opposition to the Application, this would obviously reduce the need for the City to become actively involved in the proceeding. However, registration as an interested party would permit the City, after consultation with the Applicants, the option to participate to the extent required, even if only to confirm to the CRTC the City’s support for an accessible and effective City-wide information service and the benefits which would flow to its inhabitants as a result.

Assuming that the application is filed with the CRTC in mid-June, 2000, it is estimated that it may take up to a year for the CRTC to issue a decision.

Conclusions:

In the event that City Council endorses the Application, I am recommending that the City of Toronto register as an “interested party” in any public notice proceeding initiated by the CRTC and that participation in such proceeding be on an “as needed” basis to support the Applicants as required.

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