

May 15, 2001

To: Community Services Committee

From: Councillor Irene Jones, Chair, Social Development Strategy Steering Committee

Subject: Draft Social Development Strategy Consultation and Release of “Preserving Our Civic Legacy”

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to inform Council on the findings of the first phase of the community consultation on the Social Development Strategy and to seek approval for the second phase of consultation.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

Funding for the concluding stage of the Social Development Strategy (SDS) consultation process is available in the approved 2001 Community and Neighbourhood Services Departmental Budget.

Following the completion of the final version of the SDS, City Council will have the opportunity to consider a set of strategic directions to be implemented within the context of the City’s multi-year fiscal framework and the annual budgeting process.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services present to Community Services Committee a revised draft of the Social Development Strategy incorporating the findings of “Preserving Our Civic Legacy”;
- (2) Council approve Phase II of the public consultation on the draft Social Development Strategy which would include public forums in each Community Council area as well as presentations to appropriate Council task forces and advisory committees; and
- (3) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its March 4, 1998 meeting, City Council approved a report which outlined the purpose and key components of a Social Development Strategy for the City. The report identified that the strategy's ultimate purpose should be to support the maintenance of a strong social infrastructure that meets the diverse needs of communities and residents. The Social Development Strategy is intended to provide the necessary framework for co-ordinating and integrating the responsibilities for human services in the City of Toronto. It is the social well-being component of the Strategic Plan.

At its October 28, 1998 meeting, City Council approved a report which outlined the elements, timelines, processes and preliminary budget for the Social Development Strategy and explained more fully its relationship to the City's Strategic Plan.

City Council directed that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services develop a draft vision and principles document which would be the subject of consultation with the community and stakeholders.

At its meeting of August 1, 2 and 3, 2000, City Council adopted the overview of the draft Social Development Strategy containing goals, principles and proposed strategic directions. Council also approved contracting with the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC-T) to assist in the strategy, design, co-ordination and support for the first phase of a community consultation process on the draft SDS. A steering committee composed of City Councillors and community representatives was established to guide the consultation process.

Comments:

The CSPC-T organized a total of 21 focus groups held throughout the city between November 2000 and January 2001 to discuss the proposed strategic directions. These included 13 local-area sessions involving community leaders and service providers and nine sectoral groups involving representatives of city-wide organizations. More than 265 community stakeholders participated in the sessions. The local focus groups were hosted by community agencies and neighbourhood centres. The sectoral sessions were hosted by city-wide organizations such as the Toronto Board of Trade, the United Way, Native Child and Family Services, and the Integrated Planning Group. All sessions were co-ordinated and facilitated by staff from the CSPC-T with the assistance of City staff.

Discussion at the focus groups revealed substantial public support for the main themes identified in the draft strategic directions: strengthening communities, investing in a comprehensive social infrastructure, and planning for the future. The findings of the sessions are outlined in "Preserving Our Civic Legacy," a report prepared by the CSPC-T and presented to the SDS Steering Committee on May 10, 2001. The report and executive summary have also been distributed to all Council members. The report outlines the findings and recommendations arising from the consultation sessions.

Report Findings:

Among the report's findings:

- (1) a growing polarization and inequality has become evident in Toronto during the past five years, and the city and the community have a diminishing capacity to address social conditions;
- (2) families, newcomers, and youth were cited most frequently as vulnerable populations in communities across Toronto. Also frequently cited as very vulnerable populations were frail and isolated seniors, marginalized adults and people with disabilities;
- (3) major social vulnerabilities are not concentrated in pockets of the city but spread to communities in all parts of Toronto; and
- (4) growing deficiencies in social support, a serious decline in basic living standards, and limited access to education and training were identified as major sources of vulnerability within communities.

Report Recommendations:

Participants agreed almost unanimously that, of the three levels of government, the city best understands and is most effective in dealing with social needs. However, there was also agreement that the city must:

- (1) provide more stable funding support for community-based agencies;
- (2) form alliances with neighbouring municipalities to deal with common problems; and
- (3) play an ongoing advocacy role with other levels of government to ensure adequate funding for services.

Focus group participants felt other levels of government must do more to ensure ongoing social development in Toronto. Specifically:

- (1) the provincial government must re-commit to funding support for the city in social housing and social assistance; and
- (2) the federal government should re-assert itself into a national leadership role in many important areas of social responsibility.

Next Steps:

At its meeting on May 10, 2001, the SDS Steering Committee received the report from the CSPC-T and approved a proposed timeline for the completion of the final version of the Social Development Strategy. A new draft of the SDS, incorporating the findings of "Preserving Our

Civic Legacy” and including more specific strategic directions, will be prepared and forwarded to the July meeting of Community Services Committee. If approved, this draft will form the basis for Phase II of the SDS public consultation which will take place in the early fall. It is recommended that public forums be held in each Community Council area. It is also recommended that consultations be conducted with the appropriate City advisory committees and task forces including the Children and Youth Action Committee, the Seniors’ Assembly, the Community Safety Task Force, and the Advisory Committees on Access and Equity.

Following the completion of Phase II of the public consultation, a final version of the Social Development Strategy would be presented to City Council before the end of 2001.

Conclusions:

“Preserving Our Civic Legacy” is the product of a consultation with key stakeholders. The report provides a useful sounding of public opinion and experience from which to elaborate and expand the draft strategic directions approved by Council in August 2001. The preparation of another version of the draft SDS and a final round of public consultations will culminate in a strategy which can guide the City’s approach to social development in the coming years.

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List of Attachments:

“Preserving Our Civic Legacy, Summary Report”