



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Development of an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for Toronto

<b>Date:</b>	May 11, 2009
<b>To:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>From:</b>	Joseph P. Pennachetti
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

#### **SUMMARY**

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This report advises Council of the timeframe and process being used to develop an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for the City of Toronto.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

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The City Manager recommends that this report be forwarded to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee for information.

#### **Financial Impact**

There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

#### **Equity Statement**

The development of an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for the City of Toronto in consultation with the Aboriginal Affairs Committee and Toronto's Aboriginal community affirms Council's commitment to the principle of Aboriginal self determination and to establish mechanisms for full civic participation by all residents of the City.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its December 2008 meeting, City Council adopted the Auditor General's report on the City's Performance in Achieving Access Equity and Human Rights goals. The audit report included a recommendation requesting the City Manager to report by June 2009 on the development of a Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

The 2006 Census indicates that the Aboriginal population of Toronto is approximately 12,000. However, many researchers and service providers within the Aboriginal community claim that the federal Census figures undercount the Aboriginal population in urban areas.

In 1999, information gathered by the City's Task Force on Community Access and Equity estimated that Toronto's Aboriginal community numbered between 65,000 and 100,000. The Task Force Report noted that although members of this community live throughout the City, the majority are concentrated in the downtown core.

In addition, the Task Force observed that while some members of the Aboriginal community are permanent Toronto residents and are second and third generation residents, many also move back and forth between Toronto, their home reserves and communities and/or other cities across Canada. Unfortunately, demographic and historic research on Canada's urban Aboriginal communities is limited. In 1999, as part of the Task Force process, Council approved a commitment to the principle of Aboriginal self-determination.

The City has undertaken initiatives to respond to the Aboriginal community such as the commitment made to provide housing services through the Homelessness Partnership Initiatives, the recognition of the City's Aboriginal history at the proposed waterfront park, and the establishment of a protocol for consultation with the Aboriginal community for environmental assessments. Council has also established an Aboriginal Affairs Committee which has provided advice to Divisions on various programs and issues including housing, services to the homeless, public health, and emergency medical services. The Aboriginal Affairs Committee has also advised on the development of guidelines for Aboriginal policing in Toronto which have now been approved by the Toronto Police Services Board.

While the City has been actively addressing specific services aimed at the Toronto's Aboriginal community, there is a need to develop a comprehensive strategy. The purpose of developing an Urban Aboriginal Strategy for the City of Toronto is to outline an action plan to formally recognise the status of the indigenous people of Toronto and to support their aspiration to participate in all aspects of civic life.

## COMMENTS

About half of Canada's Aboriginal community live in urban areas, about half of whom are under the age of 25. A 2007 study prepared by Ryan Walker for the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) noted that Aboriginal people have shorter life expectancies, lower educational attainment, lower incomes and higher housing hardship than non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Walker study noted that the social exclusion of Aboriginal peoples in urban areas is a significant issue for municipalities to consider and that municipalities need to understand the context of Aboriginal aspirations and needs as this understanding has implications for future urban development, in physical, social, economic and cultural sectors.

Actions have been initiated by the Federal and Provincial orders of government as well as by civic society to address Urban Aboriginal issues. In 1997, the Government of Canada developed an Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) which included projects in 13 Canadian cities to address "the influx of Aboriginal people living in Canada's urban centres and to address the socio-economic needs of the Urban Aboriginal community." Under this program, funding was provided to community based projects. The Government of Canada is seeking opportunities to improve horizontal linkages and policy integration within the federal government as well as for partnerships.

The Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, is a partner with the Federal UAS and in February 2009 co-sponsored a conference with Aboriginal communities in Toronto, Thunder Bay and Ottawa. The priorities for Ontario include creating stronger relationships with the community, improving social conditions, creating sustainable economic livelihoods and addressing land claim settlements.

At the community level, two research projects are underway. The Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Association has initiated a Toronto Aboriginal Research Project (TARP) which is examining service provision within the Aboriginal community and will identify what services are being provided and what gaps exist with respect to housing, health, social justice, policing, child and family. The research study is targeted for completion in August 2009.

A second research study, The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, is being conducted in 10 Canadian cities by Environics Institute. The study will cover issues relating to aspirations, experiences, media portrayal and generational change within the Aboriginal community. It will also include a parallel cohort of non-Aboriginals and provide a mechanism for engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal study participants.

Toronto City Council's Aboriginal Affairs Committee has established a sub-committee to work with City staff on the development of a framework for Toronto's strategy. Development of the strategy will include: consultation with the Aboriginal Affairs Committee regarding the scope of the strategy; a review of findings from the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project and participation in the Toronto component of the Urban

Aboriginal Peoples Study; discussions with federal and provincial officials and consultation with agencies serving Toronto's Aboriginal community.

The results of two research studies noted above and consultations will be used to propose a strategy which will consider the following: the development of civic participation processes that are meaningful to members of Toronto's Aboriginal community; ensuring that there is access to municipal programs and services; utilizing the capacity of the community in economic development and tourism; developing agreements and protocols with the federal and provincial governments on areas of mutual concern; creating civic understanding of Aboriginal culture and history as central to the City's sense of place and identity.

It is anticipated that a draft Toronto Urban Aboriginal Strategy will be ready for broad consultation with the Aboriginal community early in 2010 with a final report submitted to Council in June 2010.

## **CONTACTS**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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