



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Partnership with Toronto Foundation to Support Syrian Refugee Resettlement

<b>Date:</b>	February 16, 2016
<b>To:</b>	City Council
<b>From:</b>	Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Reference Number:</b>	

#### SUMMARY

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The most immediate challenge to the successful resettlement of Syrian Refugees is housing affordability. The City of Toronto has funded WoodGreen Community Services and COSTI Immigrant Services to provide housing assistance to Syrian refugees including the development of a housing registry.

The Toronto Foundation has approached the City of Toronto to determine the feasibility of creating a rent supplement program targeted to Government Assisted Refugees destined for Toronto. Based on initial discussions with Toronto Foundation and COSTI (the federally contracted Resettlement Assistance Program for the Toronto area), staff are recommending that the City proceed with negotiations and, upon successful completion of those negotiations, enter into an agreement and deliver the program.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

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The General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration recommend that:

1. City Council authorize the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration and the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration jointly to execute an agreement with the Toronto Foundation to administer and deliver a rent supplement program to assist government assisted

- Syrian refugees at net zero cost to the City, on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager and Executive Director and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.
2. City Council direct that the 2016 Operating Budget include \$750,000.00 gross, zero net, in the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration budget for the Syrian Refugee rent supplement program.
  3. City Council direct the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration to implement a Syrian Refugee rent supplement program with expenditures up to \$750,000.00 and for that purpose authorize the General Manager to enter into agreements with landlords, program applicants and other agencies on terms and conditions satisfactory to the General Manager and in a form satisfactory to the City Solicitor.

### **Financial Impact**

The Syrian Refugee rent supplement program will be fully funded by the Toronto Foundation. Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will administer the program within existing resources, no additional resources are required for this program.

The Shelter, Support and Housing Administration 2016 operating budget now before Council will be adjusted by \$750,000.00 gross, zero net.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

### **DECISION HISTORY**

Council directed staff to initiate the City of Toronto Resettlement Program in response to the anticipated influx of Syrian refugees at its September 2015 meeting. The Resettlement Program is designed to assist both refugees and Torontonians in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis by successfully resettling thousands of refugees to Toronto.  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX8.39>

Council further delegated authority to the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration to allocate and enter into agreements with community based partners and City divisions to implement the City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program at its December, 2015 meeting.  
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD8.9>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

As of February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1,595 government assisted refugees have arrived to Toronto, with an additional 700 expected to arrive before the end of the month. Arrivals are expected to continue throughout the year, but at a lower level.

Implementation of the Refugee Resettlement Program is well underway with community based partners and City Divisions providing a range of services and supports including a housing registry and housing workers, child care and recreation services, dental and other public health services, supports for private sponsors and a public awareness campaign to be launched in March.

While the overall resettlement work is going well, access to longer term housing for government assisted refugees has been an issue. Availability of appropriate units is a challenge, however, affordability has been identified as the immediate obstacle to moving government assisted refugees out of hotels and into more permanent housing. Due to existing demands for rent geared to income housing and other housing assistance, there is no capacity within existing systems to provide additional supports.

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) in partnership with Manulife and CN have created the Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees to assist Syrian government assisted refugees to secure housing across the country. Working through the Toronto Foundation, CFC have initiated a discussion with City staff on the possibility of a City of Toronto Syrian refugee rent supplement program for government assisted refugees.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Program Design**

The Canadian Foundations of Canada has suggested that up to \$750,000.00 may be available to assist Syrian government assisted refugees destined for the Toronto area to secure longer term housing. In discussion with the Toronto Foundation and COSTI, staff have determined that a rent supplement program provides the greatest opportunity to support the largest number of Syrian refugees in the shortest period of time.

The proposed program will be designed to match landlord contributions in the form of rent reductions over a 12 to 24 month period. Because the rent supplement program architecture is well established it is relatively simple to create a specific rent supplement stream for Syrian government assisted refugees. It will also allow the City to take advantage of existing rent supplement agreements with established landlords to source additional units for Syrian government assisted refugees.

Staff continue to work with Toronto Foundation and COSTI to finalize the program design. There is a trade-off to be made between designing a program that provides a deeper subsidy for a shorter period of time (i.e. up to \$400 per month for up to 12

months) or a shallow subsidy for a longer period of time (i.e. up to \$200 for up to 24 months). Based on the experience of COSTI to date and concerns regarding what will happen after 12 months, a longer, shallower subsidy is being considered.

The issue of a possible claw back on a rent supplement has been raised with federal officials and City staff will continue to work with federal staff to ensure that any such support will not be clawed back.

All parties involved are working to set the final program design as quickly as possible in order to begin program implementation for April 1, 2016 lease agreements. This critical support is needed immediately in order to increase the flow of government assisted Syrian refugees out of hotels and into longer term housing.

The proposed approach has been reviewed at a high level with both federal and provincial officials. While there are procedural issues to be resolved, there is agreement that this program will be a critical support to addressing the housing issue.

## **Next Steps**

Approval to proceed will be required from the Community Foundations of Canada and Toronto City Council. Staff will continue to finalize the program design and required legal agreements. Should Council adopt the recommendations in this report, City staff will have the authority to enter into the required agreements to implement the program.

The Toronto Foundation has created a unique and highly creative opportunity to address the housing affordability challenge for Syrian government assisted refugees. The Foundation has highlighted the issue of housing affordability for all Torontonians and articulated a desire to see this initiative as a step in raising awareness to the broader issue of housing affordability.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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