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May 24, 2021

Attn: Economic and Community Development Committee

EC22.1 Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026

The Neighbourhood Group (TNG) is an amalgamation of three long standing community organizations: Neighbourhood Link, St. Stephen's Community House, and Central Neighbourhood House. All three organizations have extensive experience working with refugees and other newcomers to Toronto. TNG is the lead agency for the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership (TSLIP), formed in 2012 through the merging of 5 prior neighbourhood LIPs. Our Partnership Council, committees, and working groups include membership from over 60 local organizations and institutions.

In recent years, our LIP has focused on strengthening regional and national collaboration through our strategic engagement with the other Toronto LIPs (including the Toronto Newcomer Office) and with the National LIP Secretariat which we co-lead with Jasper LIP. As a participant at the City of Toronto's Newcomer Leadership Table we have been involved in the development and implementation of the original Toronto Newcomer Strategy as well as the new revision now under consideration.

I am writing this letter to both voice my support for the new Toronto Newcomer Strategy under consideration by this committee and to register my belief that to be effective, the strategy must be accompanied by significant investment from the City of Toronto.

It is now evident that the "Covid hotspots" in Toronto overlap to a significant extent with areas inhabited by high concentrations of newcomers. While this was clear to community agencies from early in the pandemic, it took the City of Toronto many months to begin consistently applying a newcomer lens to the crisis, which contributed to the low initial testing and vaccination rates in newcomer neighbourhoods. This reflects a gap within the City's understanding of and commitment to newcomer needs that will not be solved or overcome without significant resources. Such understanding and investment are crucial to ensuring that newcomers can participate equally in post Covid recovery.



Both the Newcomer Strategy consultations and the continuing Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted ways in which progressive City policies are undermined by lack of resources. For example, implementation of the Access TO policy has been found to suffer from *“a lack of training, capacity and resources (...) Access T.O. is viewed as an excellent policy that has not been given the resources and attention it needs for full implementation to enable undocumented residents to access City services without fear.”* (Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 Report for Action, May 14, 2021)

The new Toronto Newcomer Strategy places the Toronto Newcomer Office (TNO) squarely at the centre of City efforts to ensure newcomer voices and interests are adequately represented: *“As an internal centre of expertise on newcomer issues, the Toronto Newcomer Office will continue to carry primary responsibility for coordinating the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, and other directly related policies and strategic documents (Access TO Policy, Refugee Resettlement Program, Refugee Capacity Plan and Integrating Cities Charter). The Office will have a leading role in employee training related to the Strategy, implementation of Access TO, advising on the City's position related to immigration issues, providing guidance and support on the development and implementation of newcomer access plans, and reporting to City Council and the public on progress.”* (Toronto Newcomer Strategy 2022-2026 Report for Action, May 14, 2021) In order to carry out this function the Toronto Newcomer Office must also be adequately resourced and have sufficient internal leverage to ensure a newcomer lens is consistently applied to all City initiatives.

Having worked closely with TNO staff over many years and having observed their efforts on behalf of marginalized newcomers during the pandemic, I have had ample opportunities to observe their competence, professionalism, and dedication, but also to note that they are a small team stretched very thin across a large city seem pulled in many directions at once. Given that over half the residents of Toronto were not born in Canada, I believe a robust, well resourced, and centrally positioned Newcomer Office is essential to Toronto's success and standing as a world class multicultural centre.

Such an office would be supported by a budget in line with that of Newcomer Offices in other major Canadian cities (e.g., Montreal), would regularly report to Council on the progress of the Toronto Newcomer Strategy, and would enjoy the standing of other offices designed to redress existing inequities (e.g., The Indigenous Affairs Office.)

In short, I wholeheartedly support the goals of the new Toronto Newcomer Strategy while simultaneously requesting that the Committee consider the resources that may be necessary for its realistic implementation.

Please feel free to contact me directly at ceo@tngcs.org with any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Sinclair", with a stylized, cursive script.

Bill Sinclair

President and CEO