

NO: R200

COUNCIL DATE: **October 17, 2011**

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## REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **October 11, 2011**

FROM: **General Manager, Parks, Recreation and Culture** FILE: **0115-01**  
**General Manager, Planning and Development**

SUBJECT: **Canadians for Compassion - "Compassionate City" Initiative**

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## RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation and Culture Department and the Planning and Development Department recommend that Council receive this report as information.

## BACKGROUND

Canadians for Compassion was founded by Jannet Ann Nordemann in 2010 with one wish – to unite Canadians in affirming the Charter for Compassion ("The Charter"), a copy of which is attached as Appendix "A", and for Parliament to recognize Canada as a compassionate nation. The goal of Canadians for Compassion is to ignite the spirit of compassion in communities in each of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories with the creation of Compassionate City Campaigns.

Canadians for Compassion is part of an International Compassionate Action Network (CAN). The International Campaign for Compassionate Cities is a CAN initiative. The Campaign's goal is to support the development of compassion-based programs within institutions and political entities. The Charter for Compassion provides the International Campaign and local campaigns with essential guiding principles.

Based on writer Karen Armstrong's book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, the Charter calls on individuals and communities to refrain from inflicting pain and hatred, to refrain from denying basic human rights, and to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion. The Charter has been embraced by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Queen Noor of Jordan. The Charter for Compassion is available in 30 languages, as well as a children's version. It affirms that at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, compassion impels us to work to alleviate the suffering of our fellow citizens and to honour each individual with justice, equity and respect.

Seattle Washington was the first city in the world to affirm the Charter of Compassion in April 2010, when its Mayor and Council proclaimed Seattle to be a Compassionate City. London,

Ontario declared itself a Compassionate City in May 2011, becoming the first Canadian city and the second city in the world to do so.

Jannett Nordemann approached the City of Surrey when she undertook a tour of Western Canada in the spring of 2011 in an effort to raise awareness in Western communities of the potential to be a Compassionate City. There has been some community and council interest in relation to the Compassionate City designation in Winnipeg, Kelowna, Victoria and Brantford.

## DISCUSSION

The City of Surrey has adopted values, policies and plans that represent a commitment to building a compassionate city. These include:

- **City of Surrey Values:** The City's Value Statement includes a "community" value that states "we care about and contribute to the broader well-being of the community."
- **Corporate Policies:** The City's corporate policies include a "Respectful Workplace Policy" and a "Human Rights Policy".
- **Sustainability Charter:** The City's Sustainability Charter includes three pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic and socio-cultural. The overarching socio-cultural goal is "to promote a safe, caring, engaged and liveable community, with a sense of place, that is inclusive of all aspects of diversity and provides a range of educational, recreational, cultural and employment opportunities, affordable and appropriate housing, transportation options and personal, health and social services that are accessible to all."
- **Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents:** The Social Plan focuses on five priority social issues – children and youth, community development and inclusion, homelessness and housing, substance abuse and addictions and crime and public safety. It includes 65 recommendations that relate to strengthening the community and supporting the City's most vulnerable residents.
- **Learning for Life Strategy:** The Learning for Life Strategy focuses on literacy across the life cycle of Surrey citizens. Its recommendations include actions for improving literacy among populations that face challenges in achieving their potential.
- **Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy:** The Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy identifies a vision, goal and recommendations in three areas – child and youth engagement, the physical environment, and civic services. The Strategy is intended to create a city in which all children and youth thrive.

The City of Surrey continues to be proactive in implementing the recommendations of these plans and strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Staff will monitor the progress of the Canadians for Compassion initiative and will continue exploring the opportunities for the City of Surrey in relation to the Canadians for Compassion initiatives.

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Parks, Recreation and Culture

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Attachment: Appendix A: "Charter for Compassion"

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## CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

**The principle of compassion** lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

**It is also necessary** in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

**We therefore call upon all men and women** ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

**We urgently need** to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.