



City of Surrey

Social Planning Advisory Committee

Minutes

Executive Boardroom
City Hall
14245 - 56 Avenue
Surrey, B.C.
THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2009
Time: 7:02 pm
File: 0540-20

Present:

Chairperson – J. Villeneuve
K. Ardawa
S. Dooley
D. Chattha
M. Chatwin
L. Coyle
G. Gill
K. Kreis
Dr. Z. Malik
R. Mehta (alternate)

Absent:

Councillor Rasode
L. Alexander

Staff Present:

A. Murphy, Senior Social Planner
L. White, Manager, Park, Recreation & Culture
N. Dyrbye, Legislative Services

A. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

It was

Moved by Dr. Z. Malik
Seconded by G. Gill

That Social Planning Committee Minutes of

March 26, 2009 be adopted.

Carried

B. DELEGATIONS

1. Kathy Sherrell and Chris Friesen, Immigrant Services Society, provided a presentation on the “*At Home in Surrey? The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Surrey, BC*” report.

The following comments were provided:

- Chris Friesen thanked the City of Surrey for the opportunity to undertake this project. This project has helped the Immigrant Services Society to look at their work in a different way as a result of the outcomes of the research.
- Two key questions frame the study:
 - Current needs of refugees in Surrey?
 - How are they being supported?
- Immigrant Services of BC is contracted by the federal government to provide initial support to Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) during their first year in Canada. About 800 or 900 GARs arrive in BC on an annual basis.
- Surrey is and has been the prime destination for government assisted refugees for the past few years.
- Interviewed Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) from Sudan and the Karen people from Myanmar and to ascertain from them their experiences and document their housing needs and recommendations of what would assist them and help them in maintaining and enhancing their housing situations. 44 households participated in this study.

- Key issue was income security. The group interviewed were experiencing high unemployment and increasing layoffs. Of the individual respondents only 8 out of 24 were employed.
- Employment and social assistance were the two main sources of household income. Over half are dependent on government transfers.
- Over half reported difficulty in repaying government transportation loans. 36 service providers across Canada that work with government assisted refugees have written to the Ministry of Transportation to eliminate the transportation loan. Will forward copy letter to this committee.

Karen Kries arrived at 7:09 p.m.

- Majority of the Myanmar Karen population is concentrated within 2 complexes in Cedar Hills. The Sudanese live in Whalley and Guildford. Very low mobility. This is a bit of surprise as we often hear about refugees moving from place to place.
- Affordability a significant concern among respondents.
- Housing costs:
 - The study found that over two-thirds of households spend over half of their household income on housing, putting them at increased risk of absolute homelessness. Just under a third are spending $\frac{3}{4}$ of monthly income on housing.
 - Sofa surfing is on the rise. Not having a stable place to live, staying with friends and family included not only singles but also families.
 - Many people talked about being homeless for periods of time.
- Housing units:
 - Current housing conditions are better than expected but suffer mould, water ingress, infested with mice, cockroaches, bedbugs, require repairs, etc.
 - Challenges in having repairs completed without having someone accompanying who is English speaking.
 - Crowding is an issue for almost all households. One in three households have beds in the living and/or dining room.
- Ability to access settlement and housing services:
 - Majority have been able to access the system.
- Barriers to finding housing:
 - Low incomes and high rents
 - Size of household as many landlords are unwilling to rent small spaces to large families.
 - Lack of knowledge
- Settlement and housing services - Three key needs:
 - Increased access to English language and employment skills based training (pre- and post-arrival)
 - Surrey-based settlement counselors who can provide ongoing assistance
 - Arrange housing for GARs prior to their arrival
- Short term Recommendations - City of Surrey:
 - Increased education on refugee issues for municipally funded services
 - Encourage greater community understanding of refugee issues
 - Promote the Community Bridging/Host program

- Letter of welcome from the City to newcomers
- Post report on City of Surrey website and disseminate to key stakeholders
- Long term Recommendations - City of Surrey:
 - Publish a newcomers guide to Surrey
 - Create a multilingual “Welcome to Surrey” rotating sign on city’s website
 - Lobby the Government of Canada to eliminate the government transportation loans for refugees.

A one-page summary of the study results is being translated and will be distributed to study participants and settlement agencies.

Committee Comments:

- Recommendations are suitable and seem attainable.
- Small gestures are important. A letter from the City to newcomers in their language would represent a real sense of welcome.
- Recommend government funded housing specialists. Also look at the iHost Program and develop a discussion paper on the whole notion of having a housing component to the iHost program. Would long term Surrey residents be interested in having refugee families matched to live with them? This would disburse refugees throughout Surrey rather than into population pockets.
- Needs to be stronger and more integrated linkages with counselors available to provide assistance.
- Sudanese people have been in BC longer than the Karen people. At the time that the Sudanese arrived in Canada there were fewer services and supports available for GARs. It is important to provide more accessible services since cost, especially the cost of transportation, may preclude people from utilizing. Providing bus tickets will enable people to get to agencies where services are available.
- Committee member G. Gill thanked the delegation for their presentation. It was very informative and this will be key piece of information.
- Once this report goes through Council the Social Planning Advisory Committee can work on implementing some of the recommendations, especially the short term recommendations.
- It would be helpful if the delegation could provide any more information on the government transportation loans. It would be useful to know what the policy is in other countries for refugees paying back transportation costs.

Delegation departed at 7:55 p.m.

- Discussion ensued around the methodology in the research and it was felt that the study results should reflect all the details and provide information of people who did not want to participate in the study. Aileen Murphy advised that the research was done within the terms of the contract with the City – within the budget and timeline.
- Lisa White reported that the recommendations in this housing report are similar to some of the ideas/recommendations of the Multicultural Advisory Committee. It would be useful to share information between the Committees.

RECOMMENDATION:

It was

Moved by L. Coyle

Seconded by D. Chattha

That the Social Planning Advisory

Committee recommend that Council:

- (a) Receive the *"At Home in Surrey? The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Surrey, BC"* report as information;
- (b) Recommend to Council that Council receive a presentation on the report at a Council in Committee meeting;
- (c) Recommend to Council that Council forward a copy of the report to key stakeholders including other Metro Vancouver Mayors, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, Minister of Housing and Social Development, and BC Housing; and
- (d) Recommend that staff prepare a corporate report to Council responding to the recommendations provided within the *"At Home in Surrey? The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Surrey, BC"* report.

Carried**C. DELEGATION REQUEST****D. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES****E. NEW BUSINESS**

Discussion of the Social Planning Advisory Committee, including its role, meeting schedule and activities for the coming year.

The following comments were provided:

- The Social Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) has occasionally undertaken its own projects such as partnering with other groups to put on conferences or forums. Generally, the role of SPAC is to support work that the City is doing and to provide feedback.
- It was agreed that meetings should not be held if there is not a sufficient agenda and there are no pressing issues.
- Councillor Villeneuve encouraged members to bring ideas forward to put onto the agenda.

F. ITEMS REFERRED BY COUNCIL

G. UPDATES

1. Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces: Community Partnership Development – Stephen Dooley and Councillor Villeneuve

On March 24, 2009, under the leadership of the Surrey Foundation, in partnership with the City of Surrey, and funded by the Immigrant Integration Branch, 55 community leaders from Surrey Council, City staff, Surrey Public Library, School District #36, community agencies, post secondary institutions, health facilities, faith groups, the private sector, and community foundations participated in a Community Partnership Development Forum, where a vision was created, priority issues identified, and action plans formed for the purpose of developing the City of Surrey into an even more welcoming and inclusive community.

- Full report provided in package.
- This is step one of a process that we hope will continue. The Surrey Foundation is now seeing if all the various agencies that participated in the forum are prepared to sign on in-principal to this document. This report will go to the provincial government. A formal signing onto the document will be held.
- The Surrey Foundation plans to apply for subsequent phases of the Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces program funding. The second phase will have funding of approximately \$50,000.
- The province is saying that in the subsequent phases, applicants need to make certain that the community projects undertaken do not represent settlement services, as that is another stream of provincial funding. This program is for initiatives that will contribute to creating a welcoming and inclusive community.

RECOMMENDATION:

It was

Moved by S. Dooley

Seconded by G. Gill

That the Social Planning Advisory

Committee:

- (a) Support, in principle, the Vision, Priority Issues and Action Plans outlined in the *Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Community Partnership Development April 2009* document; and
- (b) Recommend that Council pass a resolution to support, in principle, the Vision, Priority Issues and Action Plans outlined in the *Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces Community Partnership Development April 2009* document.

Carried

2. Other Committee members' updates:

- (a) Karen Kreis - Surrey Association of Sustainable Communities - provided an update on "**Renewing Newton Neighbourhoods**"
 - Three neighbourhood forums have been held in Newton. Issues identified by forum participants include: crime; need to better link

- services; and the need to strengthen the social connections between South Asian and non-South Asian residents.
- Surrey has about 20 community associations but none located in the Newton area. It would be great to get at least one located in Newton.
- (b) Merlin Chatwin - **Food Action Coalition** - provided an update:
- Looking at ways that the school district can incorporate, increase healthy eating and decrease hunger.
 - Meeting this week to look at the possibility of the Food Action Coalition taking over the community garden at a secondary school.
 - Working on development framework linking knowledge of healthy and whole foods among seniors and bringing this into schools so they can educate the next generation on this.
 - Breakfast meeting at Elgin Hall – "*back yard solutions to food*".
- (c) Stephen Dooley - **Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) Grant** - is bringing together community partners to talk about how to proceed on the CURA-funded youth gang prevention research project. As well, his 4th year criminology class has been undertaking over the last semester, a process evaluation of the school district's First Step program on gangs.
- (d) Zambka Malik is working with the provincial election.
- (e) Gurtej Gill - **Measuring Up** - will provide an update at the next committee meeting.
- (f) Davinder Chattha - **Welcome Fair** - attended the Welcome Fair earlier today. It is being hosted by the Surrey Delta Intercultural Council, Surrey School District, and Surrey North Delta Settlement Consortium. The Fair is highlighting resources and services available in Surrey and Delta.
- (g) Linda Coyle - **Newcomers to Canada** - provided a copy of the Newcomers to Canada Day planner for everyone. This booklet contains good valuable information of benefit to all and is a good template for a newcomers guide to Surrey. She also provided Committee members with '*building futures planning guide*' – a booklet on planning for your child's education.
- (h) Raj Mehta - **Joint Family Court** - is working with the Joint Family Court on policing issues.
- (i) Kuldip Ardawa - **Newton Advocacy Group** - reported that the homeless Linkline will be up and running May 22, 2009. This is a new initiative: a *phone line for help*, whereby business can call homeless outreach workers and connect those in need to services.

H. CORRESPONDENCE

I. INFORMATION ITEMS

1. **Official Community Plan Review - Open Houses**

J. OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

K. NEXT MEETING

Next meeting of the Social Planning Advisory Committee is scheduled for Thursday, May 28, 2009.

L. ADJOURNMENT

It was

Moved by K. Ardawa
Seconded by Dr. Z. Malik
That the Social Planning Advisory

Committee meeting do now adjourn.

Carried

The Social Planning Advisory Committee adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Jane Sowik, City Clerk

Chairperson, Councillor J. Villeneuve
Social Planning Advisory Committee