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Town of Aurora

## General Committee Report

No. CS20-020

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**Subject:** Workplace Diversity and Inclusion

**Prepared by:** Demetre Rigakos, Manager, Human Resources

**Department:** Corporate Services

**Date:** November 3, 2020

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### Recommendation

1. That Report No. CS20-020 be received;

### Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to respond to Council's direction which requested that staff provide research information on workplace diversity and inclusion strategies from public, private and non-for-profit organizations, as well as any initiatives currently under way and recommendations on how to enhance diversity and inclusion at the Town.

- Staff have completed a jurisdictional scan of private, public and non-for-profit organizations in the areas of diversity and inclusion with a focus on Canada's Best Diversity Employers as recognized annually.
- Building a diverse and inclusive workforce is aligned with The Corporation of the Town of Aurora Council's approved 2011-2031 Town of Aurora Strategic Plan.
- The Town is committed to a diverse and inclusive workplace and there are several initiatives underway that will identify opportunities and add value to an enhanced environment
- Staff are recommending retaining a consultant to assist in the delivery of a Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

## Background

Council, at its meeting on January 28, 2020, (attachment #1) passed the following motion;

1. That staff investigate municipal workplace diversity and inclusion strategies and work plans as well as other similar strategies across Ontario (public, private and non-for-profit organizations) and report to Council on the state of diversity and inclusion in the Town of Aurora and any current initiatives underway; and
2. Be It Further Resolved That staff in its report provide recommendations on how to enhance the Town's current workplace diversity and inclusion strategy; and
3. Be It Further Resolved That this motion be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario and all York Region municipalities for their consideration.

## Analysis

**Staff have completed a jurisdictional scan of private, public and non-for-profit organizations in the areas of diversity and inclusion with a focus on Canada's Best Diversity Employers as recognized annually.**

Canada's Best Diversity Employers is an annual event that recognizes employers across Canada that have exceptional workplace diversity and inclusiveness programs. This competition, now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, recognizes successful diversity initiatives in a variety of areas, including programs for employees from five groups:

- a) women;
- b) members of visible minorities;
- c) persons with disabilities;
- d) Indigenous peoples; and
- e) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual, questioning plus other (LGBTQ+) peoples.

The 2020 top employers were announced earlier this year and they include a number of private, public and municipal employers including our very own Regional Municipality of York. These Diversity Champions, as referred to in the attached report, have taken proactive steps to create both a more diverse workforce and an inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong.

Some of the various programs/activities that these top employers were recognized for include:

- A law firm in Vancouver has committed to improving the diversity of its senior leadership team and board of directors, with 45 per cent of its Canadian board identifying as female.
- A law firm has created a diverse talent pipeline by requiring diverse representation on shortlists when hiring lawyers as well as providing unconscious bias training for lawyers that are involved in the selection process for law student interviews.
- A Canadian airline held listening groups with its female employees who work in male dominated environments. The feedback received was used to make progressive changes in the workplace such as updating the washroom facilities and partnering with local women's organizations to promote women's participation in trades and technology.
- A large hardware retailer launched a mental health strategy under the pillars of awareness, care and access, and workplace support.
- A large Canadian public sector employer launched a Safe Spaces initiative to create awareness of LGBT issues in the workplace.
- A large Canadian bank has committed to hiring 500 people with disabilities annually.

Please visit [Canada's Best Diversity Employers 2020 webpage](#) to get a complete list of winners. The publication includes highlights of the various programs and initiatives these employers have developed and implemented to achieve their diversity and inclusion goals.

**Building a diverse and inclusive workforce is aligned with The Corporation of the Town of Aurora Council's approved 2011-2031 Town of Aurora Strategic Plan.**

The Strategic Plan outlines the Town's Vision 2021 as follows:

***"Our Vision for Aurora 2031 is:  
An innovative and sustainable community where  
neighbours care and businesses thrive"***

The importance of diversity and inclusiveness is also embedded in the guiding principles of the strategic plan:

- Principle #3 - Broad community outreach and engagement with partners, businesses, newcomers and community groups to ensure inclusiveness.
- Principle #6 - Respect and integrity
- Principle #7 - Progressive corporate excellence, innovation and continuous improvement

Achieving Council's Vision 2031 requires a diverse and inclusive workplace that mirrors the community it serves. The benefits of a diverse and inclusive workplace are numerous including:

- Improved understanding of the needs of the public we serve
- Enhanced innovation and creativity which leads to a more productive and efficient workforce
- Supporting a more resilient workforce that can adapt to a changing environment
- Ensures that all communities have equitable access to participate in the Town's decision making.

**The Town is committed to a diverse and inclusive workplace and there are several initiatives underway that will identify opportunities and add value to an enhanced environment.**

The Town continues to engage in activities that will support and enhance diversity and inclusion. Below is an outline of initiatives underway and a roadmap that will support diversity and inclusion in our workplace and community as a whole.

#### The Inclusion Charter for York Region

In October of 2018 the Town of Aurora signed The Inclusion Charter for York Region. The Charter is a community initiative that brings together businesses, community organizations, municipalities, police services, hospitals school boards, conservation authorities and agencies with a common commitment to create an inclusive environment with equality for all who work, live and play in York Region. Each representative who participates on the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group adopted a broad statement but also adopted their own Charter Commitment statement specific to their vision.

#### The Town of Aurora (Charter Commitment) – (Attachment #2)

"Together with other participating organizations, The Town of Aurora is committed to taking action to achieve the Charter's vision in our organization and community we serve. The Charter supports The Town of Aurora's vision

to promote diverse neighborhoods to create a vibrant community. The Town celebrates its growing and diverse population as a source of strength, vitality and economic opportunity and is committed to creating an inclusive organization that attracts and retains passionate employees, promotes innovation and provides an excellent customer experience”.

An assessment of the Town’s current workplace demographics is currently underway through the employee engagement survey

Gathering employee demographic data is widely considered a basic practice and a first step for organizations dedicated to diversity and inclusion.

Understanding the demographics in our organization is instrumental in identifying gaps in representation, and determining inclusion issues and barriers to advancement, so that we can set goals, establish appropriate programs and initiatives, and measure results.

Some municipalities have done this effectively and have seen great results from such an endeavor. They have an ability to compare their workforce to the Canada census data to determine if certain constituency groups are missing from the municipal staff.

They can track representation, hiring, promotion, and turnover rates to determine if certain groups are experiencing fewer promotions or greater turnover. And they can cut employee survey results by group affiliation to determine if different constituencies are experiencing the workplace differently. Some examples of basic metrics of diversity and inclusion are:

- Representation of diverse/under-represented groups by job level
- Recruitment, promotion, and turnover statistics by demographic group
- Employee engagement scores by demographic group
- Diversity-related or inclusiveness questions on employee surveys
- Human rights, harassment, or discrimination complaints
- Participation in training on diversity, inclusiveness, equity and/or human rights
- Participation in employee resource/networking groups

The Town of Aurora collects basic demographic data from its employees during the hiring process, such as age, gender (limited to male or female), but we do not have comprehensive data related to diversity, as this type of data is not legally required during the hiring process. However, staff efforts are well under way to deploy an employee engagement survey that will include self-identification, race/ethnic identity, place of origin, disability, religious or spiritual affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity and interest in

joining an employee resource group. We need to keep in mind that this is the first time ever that the Town has requested of staff to disclose this information on a voluntary basis, so the success of collection of the data depends on the employee's comfort level in disclosing this information through the confidential employee engagement survey process.

This initial step will help us create a baseline to understand our current workforce makeup from a diversity and inclusion perspective. The data will be analyzed to help us understand the current workforce makeup and how that compares to our Town, Regional, Provincial and Canadian demographics. With the results of the analysis we will develop diversity and inclusion goals and objectives and corresponding plans to achieve those.

The Town began its Excellence Canada journey in 2010 and is well on its way to achieving Gold certification by the end of 2022 which has a strong focus on demonstrating diversity and inclusion are embraced in the organizational culture

Utilizing the Excellence Canada<sup>1</sup> roadmap for continuous organizational improvement, the Town of Aurora continues its progress towards Gold certification<sup>2</sup> across five nationally recognized organizational drivers: Leadership, Planning, Customers, Processes and People. To accomplish Gold certification, The Town of Aurora must demonstrate evidence to Excellence Canada<sup>3</sup> that diversity and inclusion are embraced in the organizational culture (Attachment #3-Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Canada Standards). Evidence must include:

- The prioritization of demographic representation of employees that reflect the client and community base
- That people from diverse ethnic cultures and with differing beliefs and values are comfortable working for the organization, feel valued and are encouraged to participate in development opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1992 by Industry Canada as the National Quality Institute (NQI), then rebranded as Excellence Canada in 2011, is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that is dedicated to advancing organizational performance across Canada. It is a Canadian 'service driven' organization. Based on the Principles and Drivers of Excellence, the Excellence, Innovation and Wellness® Standard, is a holistic strategic framework, which helps organizations reduce redundancies, waste and costs while improving productivity and competitiveness. There are four levels of certification in this framework. Starting with the foundational level (Bronze), advancement level (Silver), role model level (Gold) and finally, sustained world class performance level (Platinum).

<sup>2</sup> The Town of Aurora accomplished Bronze certification in 2014, Silver in 2019 and is expected to apply for Gold certification in late 2022

<sup>3</sup> The verification process includes a comprehensive written submission substantiated through evidence and focus group interviews with all levels of the organization to ensure the standard is embedded and practiced in the organizational culture

- The organization demonstrates respect for diversity by accommodating employees accordingly (e.g. personal time provided for religious holidays) and through such things as cultural history months, multicultural food buffets, stories on the intranet, celebrations recruiting from sources that advocate for diverse individuals (i.e. new Canadians, people with disabilities, Aboriginals, etc.). Space is allocated and time is allowed for personal contemplation and relaxation (e.g., quiet rooms, prayer rooms, etc.).
- Employees are asked about their cultural preferences and preferences are respected.
- Employees feel valued and essential to the success of the organization.
- There are programs in place, e.g., cultural celebrations, quiet rooms, prayer rooms, where employees feel a need for them.
- The organization develops and offers diversity and freedom from discrimination and harassment training to all employees, management, and non-management. This may be in the form of modules or integrated into current training and orientation programs. The training should reference the applicable federal or provincial human rights acts and align to the core values of the organization.
- The organization monitors employee perceptions of the degree to which personal beliefs and choices are respected within the organization. Monitoring may be through surveys or focus groups.

To further support Gold certification, a comprehensive Human Resource Plan that is aligned with the Town's Strategic Plan must be developed and include as focus areas:

- Diversity and inclusion
- Strategies for recruitment, retention, succession planning,
- Capacity building,
- Organizational development and training,
- Compensation and benefits,
- Union relations and;
- Rewards and recognition.

A comprehensive assessment of the Town's diversity and inclusion efforts against the Excellence Canada Gold standard will help identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. The first step in assessing the Town's Diversity and Inclusion efforts includes the recommendation to invest in a comprehensive assessment of how we measure up against this standard and what the gaps are. While the Employee Engagement Survey deployed in October 2020 will assist in this assessment, it will only

provide diversity baseline information to be used as part of an overall assessment of our diversity and inclusion practices against the above noted standard. Once we understand the gaps staff will develop multi-year plans to ensure we meet and exceed the standard with a view towards Gold certification under the Excellence Canada initiative. Our work will not end there as we will continue to strive for excellence towards sustainable world class performance and Platinum certification under the Excellence Canada initiative.

**Staff are recommending retaining a consultant to assist in the delivery of a Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.**

The following next steps provide a high-level plan towards achieving Council's vision, improve organizational performance and enhance diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Staff will continue their implementation efforts and specifically:

1. Staff to continue with the assessment of the Town's policies and programs as it relates to the Gold standard, specifically for diversity and inclusion with an expected completion by Q2 of 2021. The sourcing of the consultant as mentioned in the Financial section of this report relates to this step. The consultant will support staff in assessing the organizations performance as it relates to the diversity and inclusion standards (Gold) in Excellence Canada, documenting the gaps, and prioritizing a multi-year plan with a view to meet and exceed the Gold standard in the area of diversity and inclusion by the end of 2022. The consultant will also support the development and implementation of unconscious bias training and establishment of employee resource groups. Staff will share with Council the multi-year workplace diversity and inclusion plan.
2. Gaps and opportunities identified through the engagement of a specialized consultant will lead to a list of action items that will be developed, prioritized and incorporated in the multi-year Human Resources Plan to be submitted to the leadership team for approval by end of Q2, 2021.
3. Concurrently with the above recommendations staff will be developing and implementing an inclusive hiring framework across the Human Resources division. The framework will provide tools and resources to support the Human Resources Consultants as well our all staff involved in recruitment efforts in sourcing and growing a diverse talent pipeline and developing practices and processes to attract and retain top talent from underrepresented groups.



4. Staff will continue with the implementation of a new Human Resources Information System, already under way, which will assist staff in implementing various modules including an Applicant Tracking System. This technology will help us assess talent from a diversity and inclusion lens and further enhance our recruitment efforts to attract and retain diverse talent.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

None.

## **Legal Considerations**

A workplace diversity and inclusion strategy is designed to promote fundamental human rights as set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It also reflects the principles identified in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, 2005 and the York Region Inclusion Charter. By adopting a workplace strategy or work plan, Council would be promoting the integration of equity, diversity and inclusion throughout the corporation.

## **Financial Implications**

A capital project to engage a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Consultant to assist the Town in its development of a workplace diversity and inclusion strategy at a total estimated cost of \$30,000 has been included in the Town's 2021 capital budget for Council's consideration and approval.

## **Communications Considerations**

None.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

The link to the Strategic Plan has been identified in the analysis section of this report.

**Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

None.

**Conclusions**

The Town recognizes that building a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the population it serves at all levels within the organization will promote public confidence and ensure that its decision-making processes include diverse perspectives. While much progress has been made by the Town in terms of improving its organizational performance and achieving Silver certification under the Excellence Canada initiative, there is work ahead of us to be completed such as assessing our current practices, identifying gaps and preparing a multi-year plan that will support the achievement of Gold standard under the Excellence Canada initiative in the next two years. The result will be a more inclusive and diverse workforce that is innovative and high performing and reflects the citizens the Town serves.

**Attachments**

Attachment #1 – Motion (a) Kim-Workplace Diversity-Inclusion-Strategy

Attachment #2 – Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Charter Aurora

Attachment #3 – Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Canada Standards

**Previous Reports**

Not applicable.

**Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on October 22, 2020

**Approvals**

**Approved by Techa Van Leeuwen, Director, Corporate Services**

**Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer**