



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	April 25, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers (CES16023) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	John Ariyo 905-546-2424 ext. 1564 James O'Brien 905-546-2424 ext. 2065
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Council Direction:

On March 9, 2016, City Council endorsed a motion directing staff to:

- a) Work with community partners to develop the Terms of Reference for the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Newcomer Resettlement; and
- b) Report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee in April 2016.

Information:

Background

Over 4.3 million Syrians have fled the country since civil war began in 2011. Canada is one of the countries supporting Syrian refugee resettlement. The Government of Canada has resettled 26,202 Syrian refugees in different provinces and territories as at March 1, 2016. The figure is comprised of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) and BVORs (Blended Visa Office Referrals).

Hamilton is one of the designated urban cities for refugee resettlement in Ontario. As at March 1, 2016, there are 10,505 Syrian refugees in Ontario, out of which 1,055 have settled in Hamilton (964 GARs, 75 PSRs and 16 BVORs).

In Hamilton, there is no single agency responsible for the resettlement of GARs, PSRs and BVORs. While Wesley Urban Ministries is the federal government designated agency for GARs, various settlement agencies, religious organizations, community groups and private citizens all engage in PSR and BVOR sponsorships.

The short-term and long-term needs of Syrian newcomers are multi-faceted. They include health, housing, school, language, training, employment, community orientation, community support, access to useful information and civic engagement. How well these needs are met goes a long way to ensuring the physical, mental, emotional, financial, familial, material and social wellbeing of the newcomers. In essence, it takes the entire community to ensure Syrian newcomers are successful in Hamilton, both for those already in the city and others still on the way.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers

On March 9, 2016, City Council endorsed a motion directing staff to work with key community stakeholders and create a Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers. The Membership and Terms of Reference for this advisory committee is attached as Appendix A to Report CES16023. The Advisory committee is comprised of community partners who have key roles to play to successfully integrate Syrian newcomers. Members come from relevant sectors and diverse backgrounds, such as settlement agencies, religious organizations, community supports and education.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee's mandate is to advise the Mayor on how to build community support and increase public participation in creating a welcoming environment for Syrian newcomers. The committee will act as a think tank, share information and good news stories, problem solve, address concerns, discuss opportunities and foster collaborative community building.

The committee will be supported by five proposed Working Groups as noted in Appendix B to Report CES16023. The chair of each Working Group will sit on the Mayor's Advisory Committee and bring forward topical and sector-specific issues requiring high-level discussion. The proposed Working Groups are:

- Housing Working Group
- Health Working Group
- Education Working Group
- Employment, Language and Training Working Group
- Community Support/Networks Working Group

Consultation

Staff consulted broadly with internal and external stakeholders to develop the Terms of Reference for the Mayor's Advisory Committee. The feedback from the consultation process also assisted in determining the five Working Groups that are needed to support the Mayor's Advisory Committee.

Some of the internal and external stakeholders consulted are as follows:

Internal Stakeholders:

- Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton
- Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives Division
- Housing Services Division
- Public Health Services
- Children & Home Management Division
- Communications & Intergovernmental Affairs Division
- Employment & Income Support Division
- Recreation Division
- Other divisions

External Stakeholders:

Since November 2015, staff have engaged with a wide range of community stakeholders, partners, organizations and individuals. On December 17, 2015, key community organizations and agencies immediately supporting Syrian newcomers were engaged through a key strategic meeting. Recently, on March 9, 2016, a multi-stakeholder focus group meeting was held involving refugee agreement holders, settlement organizations, groups and private residents who had sponsored or currently have active sponsorship campaigns for Syrian newcomers. Some of the external stakeholders engaged to date include:

- Wesley Urban Ministries
- Immigrant Working Centre
- The Anglican Diocese
- TruCity
- Hamilton Family Health Team
- Arab Culture and Heritage Centre of Hamilton
- The Islamic Association of Hamilton
- Hamilton boards of education (public and catholic)
- YMCA
- Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council
- Refugee Advisory Committee of Council
- Various housing, education, health and settlement partners

Conclusion

The collective mandate of the Mayor's Advisory Committee and the Working Groups is important and necessary to successfully resettle Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. The committees underscore the importance of strategic collaboration, community mobilization, information sharing and shared outcomes. They will also allow key issues, challenges and opportunities to be jointly discussed and addressed, without any community partner feeling disconnected, isolated or ignored.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES16023: Terms of Reference: Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers

Appendix B to Report CES16023: Working Groups Structure & Mandate