
For Information

REPORT TITLE: Continued Investment in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

FROM: Davinder Valeri, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services

OBJECTIVE

To provide Regional Council with an update on how Peel Region will continue to invest in the principled area of “Diversity and Inclusion community initiatives,” as identified in the report of the Chief Administrative Officer to Regional Council on June 8, 2023 titled, “Bill 112 – Managing Through the Transition” (Resolution 2023-455).

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Peel region is one of the most diverse communities, with 69 per cent of people identifying as part of a racialized group and 18 per cent of Ontario’s immigrant population.
 - On June 8, 2023, Regional Council endorsed the principles identified in the report “Bill 112 – Managing through the Transition” (Resolution 2023-455), which includes “Diversity and inclusion community initiatives.”
 - Regardless of future governance structures, the diversity in Peel’s community will remain. It is imperative to deliver equitable and inclusive programs and services to the community to meet diverse and unique needs that will enable everyone to thrive.
 - A shared commitment and investment from all levels are needed to sustain partnerships and continue to build trusting relationships with community organizations to minimize reputational risk and enable critical supports and programs to Peel’s diverse community, including those who are racialized, marginalized and most vulnerable.
 - Organizational culture and psychological safety must be prioritized and maintained during the transition process to mitigate any negative impacts to program and service delivery for the community in Peel.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Peel Region serves one of the most diverse communities in Canada. According to 2021 Stats Canada, 69 per cent of people in Peel identify as part of a racialized group and 18 per cent of Ontario’s immigrant population reside in Peel.

Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a priority for Peel and current efforts are focused on two pillars – workforce and community. Several activities to advance DEI have already been successfully implemented over the past few years. Some are currently in progress, and/or are actively in development, particularly regarding the delivery of inclusive

Continued Investment in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

and accessible programs and services that meet the unique needs of Peel residents which will contribute to creating a community where everyone feels they belong.

On June 8, 2023, Regional Council endorsed the principles identified in the report titled, “Bill 112 – Managing Through the Transition” (Resolution 2023-455). Included in these principles was the continued investment in “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.” To advance this principle, two focus areas have been identified as follows:

- Equitable and inclusive programs and services
- Equitable and inclusive treatment of staff

2. Equitable and Inclusive Programs and Services

Peel Region delivers many essential services to some of Peel’s most vulnerable community members, including housing and homelessness, income subsidies, community funding and services that reach the entire Peel community, including waste and wastewater, public health and paramedic services.

Peel recently engaged with the community in the development of its DEI Strategy. The community expressed the following strengths and opportunities:

Strengths:

- Peel residents want to live in a community where everyone feels respected, safe, and welcomed
- Past and current engagement with several community partners and leaders has helped build trust and rapport

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Deliver programs and services in an inclusive manner
- Build awareness and accountability in the public eye by transparently sharing DEI objectives, commitments and progress
- Reach broader audiences with inclusive communications mechanisms
- Strengthen relationships with community members and organizations

Regardless of future governance structures, the diversity in Peel’s community will remain and is anticipated to continue to grow. It is imperative that equity and inclusion becomes foundational to the delivery of programs and services for to the community in response to the diverse and unique needs that will enable everyone to thrive.

Although Peel is in the early stages of its community-facing DEI work, there are program areas that have made significant strides that have positively impacted the diverse communities in Peel, which has helped to establish trusted relationships within several Peel community organizations and groups.

a) Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives (PAMA)

PAMA exists to share the stories of Peel by providing diverse opportunities for creative exploration and discussion to help build cohesive communities. ‘Nothing About Us, Without Us’, PAMA’s guiding principle ensures direct participation of communities represented in exhibitions and programming.

Continued Investment in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As the “Cultural Hub” for the Region of Peel, PAMA has demonstrated leadership in community engagement through partnering to deliver local, national, and international content and experiences that resonate with residents. It is a place where diverse communities have opportunities to exchange stories, celebrate arts and heritage and engage in enriching learning experiences.

In 2022, PAMA partnered with over 50 local community groups and agencies to deliver engaging exhibitions and programs. Over 900 students from Peel schools participated in curriculum-based programming and over 54 Creative Expressions programs were delivered to youth and adults impacted by brain injury. The team also engaged with over 170 seniors at Peel long term care centres and offered 65 public programs to the community.

In 2023 PAMA established an Indigenous Sharing Circle (ISC) to develop consistent relationships with Indigenous people, organizations, and communities. The ISC has committed to redeveloping core Indigenous exhibitions and guiding ongoing content to ensure Indigenous voices, histories, and experiences are represented and accessible. The ISC actively contributes to the development of exhibits and programming that work to promote cultural awareness, while increasing intercultural understanding of Indigenous histories and contemporary experiences, artistic expression, and cultural practices. The ISC also supports the creation of associated educational materials and programs to support local school boards.

By embracing reconciliation as a core value, PAMA has bridged gaps, empowered meaningful conversations, and worked to foster an environment that nurtures and celebrates reconciliation.

b) Community Investment Program (CIP)

The Peel community relies on the non-profit sector to provide several essential programs, including those focused on mental health supports, food insecurity, intimate partner violence, newcomers/settlement, services for individuals with disabilities, family services, housing, access to community, skills training, care for seniors, youth programming and the advancement of equity and systemic discrimination.

The CIP enables Peel and community organizations to provide equitable solutions to support Peel’s vulnerable communities, filling historical gaps often created from shifts in leadership impacting non profit organizations that support diverse and marginalized communities. In 2022, Peel provided \$7.9M in base funding to support over 100 unique agencies to deliver programs and services to marginalized and equity-deserving populations in Peel.

Sustainable funding is critical to supporting the non-profit sector, to strengthen financial investment and build capacity, particularly with organizations that provide food access, and holistic wellness supports to Black, Indigenous and racialized-focused not-for-profits.

Advancing DEI work encompasses outreach, collaboration and partnership with the community. Peel has recently hired its first Indigenous Engagement Advisor to lead the work of building relationships with Indigenous people, families, organizations and communities and to advance Truth and Reconciliation. Although this work will evolve over time, it is imperative that ongoing challenges, such as gaps in internal knowledge and training on Indigenous histories, contemporary experiences and engagement protocols, ineffective and inconsistent engagement histories, and instability due to

Continued Investment in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

changes in leadership are addressed and resolved during this critical shift in governance.

To demonstrate continued commitment to creating a community that respects and embraces diversity, a united effort is needed between Peel Region and local municipalities to ensure a smooth transition occurs. Community partners, Indigenous residents and leaders have expressed concern that established and trusted relationships will end, and they will need to start from scratch with Local municipalities. Working together to sustain these partnerships will increase trust and confidence and will bring credibility to the shared approach needed to attain common goals. Partnership between both levels of government will ensure progress towards the long-term outcomes of delivering equitable and inclusive programs and services is possible.

3. Inclusive and Equitable Treatment of Staff

The announcement from the Provincial government introducing *Bill 112, The Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023*, has impacted employees of Peel Region as they question what this legislation may mean for them. This has brought on a high level of anxiety and stress for many employees, particularly as Peel is still working through its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Province works to define the steps towards the dissolution of Peel and the future of program and service delivery, Peel Region must prioritize the psychological safety and well-being of employees. A trauma-informed, holistic approach that includes a focus on physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being must be used to maintain a healthy organizational culture and inclusive work environment. In doing so, Peel will work towards retaining talent and mitigating negative impacts to service delivery.

Peel has identified the following areas that can enable this approach. They include, but are not limited to:

- Frequent and transparent communication and sharing of information
- Enhanced benefits that support physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being, including access to Indigenous cultural supports and healing practices
- Continued learning and development opportunities that increase awareness and knowledge about DEI to enable inclusive service delivery and promote and support inclusion competencies

BILL 112 RISKS AND IMPLICATIONS

Peel has built long-standing and trusted relationships within the community. Engagement and partnership have continued to be a priority, however news of the dissolution of Peel Region has led to concerns about unintentional setbacks negatively impacting working relationships, information sharing and future collaborations. Specifically, fears have been expressed regarding the possibility of leadership transitions resulting in further budget constraints and an abrupt end to work in progress. These concerns reflect a deep investment and commitment to the collaborative efforts that have been established and highlight the need for a trauma-informed lens during this time of transition. To mitigate potential reputational risk, working in partnership with local municipalities to identify strategies that will maintain stability and sustainability of existing partnerships and initiatives will be important.

The provincial, local and regional governments have committed to no disruptions to service and program delivery. *Bill 122, the Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023*, may impact Peel

Continued Investment in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Region's ability to retain its employees, as many may choose to seek employment elsewhere. Maintaining a healthy organizational culture and psychological safety and well-being will also be integral to Peel and its employees. A holistic, trauma-informed approach focusing on physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual perspective must be applied during this period of transition to mitigate negative impacts to employees, which in turn can impact delivery of programs and services to the community.

Advancing DEI in a meaningful way is complex and multifaceted. During this time of transition, a modified and simplified process will be utilized to ensure that changes needed to embed equity and inclusion within service and delivery models occurs. Training, tools and resources will be developed and deployed to support achieving true and lasting systems change. Continued investment and a unified commitment are required from all levels to ensure a systematic approach that will benefit all members of the Peel's community.

CONCLUSION

The demographic make up of Peel makes it one of the most diverse communities in Canada and it is imperative that accessible and inclusive programs and services are prioritized. *Bill 112, The Hazel McCallion Act (Peel Dissolution), 2023*, has been passed in support of the dissolution of the Region of Peel; however, regardless of the future governance structure, DEI efforts must continue to affect change in a meaningful and sustainable way for the diverse communities in Peel to create a community for life where everyone can thrive and feel a sense of belonging.



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