



**MEETING OF THE RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE FOR THE
CITY OF MARKHAM**

**Ontario Room, Markham Civic Centre
October 7, 2013, 7:00pm**

MINUTES

Attendance: <u>Committee</u> Darius Sookram, Chair Moises Calo Rina George-Alexander Vilvan Gunasingham Saad Omar Khan Barbara Tate <u>Council</u> Regional Councillor Joe Li <u>Staff</u> Cheryl McConney-Wilson, Diversity Specialist Bev Shugg Barbeito, Committee Secretary	<u>Regrets</u> Astra Josie Rose, Vice Chair Carla Crooks Bobbie France Si Ming (Steven) Lu Ramon Solis Councillor Alan Ho Councillor Logan Kanapathi Sharon Laing, Director of Human Resources
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1. CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Race Relations Committee convened at 7:12 pm with Darius Sookram presiding as Chair.

2. CHANGES OR ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

The agenda was accepted with one addition:

- CMARD update

It was agreed to discuss this item as part of the Markham Human Resources Update unless there were specific CMARD initiatives to be discussed.

3. MINUTES OF THE MARKHAM RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE HELD ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2013.

It was

Moved by: Vilvan Gunasingham

Seconded by: Saad Omar Khan

That the minutes of the Markham Race Relations Committee Meeting held on September 16, 2013 be adopted as distributed.

Carried

4. HUMAN RIGHTS PRESENTATION

Dushahi Sribavan, a Tamil lawyer, presented information about the major human rights issues in the province of Ontario with statistical data specific to Markham/York region. Markham is the 16th largest diverse city in Canada, but perhaps the most diverse in terms of visible minorities. Ms Sribavan reminded Committee members that Markham is often thought of as a well-to-do community, yet there are many low income neighbourhoods. Markham has a slightly lower income level and a slightly higher level of unemployment than the corresponding median levels in Ontario. In fact, Markham/Unionville has 17.2% of its population living below the poverty line. Poverty leads to homelessness - approx. 22% spend more than half of their income on housing. Poverty also leads to poor health for adults as they work in "precarious" work - long hours in unsafe workplaces for low wages without pensions and with little job security. Those performing precarious work often have not had the benefit of higher education, they have not received adequate training for the work they do, and there may be language barriers hindering their understanding of safe work practices. Women often fill such positions because they require flexible hours in order to also carry out their domestic responsibilities.

It was agreed that it is not government's responsibility alone to combat poverty. Cheryl McConney-Wilson, Diversity Specialist, spoke about "Cities in Migration" and "The Colour of Poverty". Cities in Migration showcases good ideas in immigrant integration and promotes innovative practices that create inclusion and urban prosperity. Initiated by the Colour of Justice Network and funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Colour of Poverty Campaign was launched in September 2007 to help raise public awareness about the extent of poverty within the racialized communities of Ontario. Ms McConney-Wilson will forward information about these initiatives to Committee members.

Chair Darius Sookram thanked Dushahi Sribavan for her informative and thought provoking presentation.

5. RACE RELATIONS BUSINESS

A. MANY FACES OF MARKHAM

Chair Darius Sookram advised that he will send information about possible themes to Committee members. The Committee will continue discussion on the theme and planning the event at its October meeting.

Rina George-Alexander agreed to serve as Co-chair with Darius Sookram for the Many Faces of Markham sub-committee; other members will be added to the sub-committee in time.

B. Race Relations Committee Work Plan 2013

Chair Darius Sookram advised that the Race Relations Committee Work Plan 2013 had been distributed to Committee members. It will be updated to include initiatives such as CMARD.

C. Race Relations Committee Name Discussion

Vilvan Gunasingham distributed information from the City of Burnaby regarding the ten CMARD commitments and corresponding City initiatives. He noted that the words "racism" and "discrimination" appear in seven of the ten commitments. He suggested that deleting the word "race" from the Committee's name would detract from the role of the Committee. Vilvan also suggested that the Committee could adapt some of the

CMARD initiatives undertaken by the City of Burnaby. Chair Darius Sookram advised that the Committee could consider including such initiatives in the Committee Work Plan.

Vilvan Gunasingham advised Committee members that Thunder Bay had held a one-day CMARD conference; he will send the conference information to Darius Sookram before the next meeting. Chair Darius Sookram reminded Committee members that, if the Committee were to consider hosting a CMRD conference, it would have to review the scope and funding of such a project.

6. MARKHAM HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE

Ms. Cheryl McConney-Wilson, Diversity Specialist, reported that Markham staff continues to work on preparing a document summarizing statistics relating to the City's demographics; it will be sent to Committee members when it has been completed.

She reminded Committee members that she had distributed information about three opportunities to provide feedback about initiatives that will assist diverse communities and youth:

1. York Region Planning Board Youth Toolkit, "STRIVE"
York Region has created a tool with information intended to make youth in York and South Simcoe aware of services. Committee members were asked to review the document to see if there is anything missing, especially as it relates to Markham, and to provide feedback on this draft by October 11.
2. Ontario Human Rights Commission - The Ontario Human Rights Commission is updating its 1996 Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances. Committee members were asked to consider filling out their Human Rights and Creed Survey, and sharing it with their networks and peers.
3. The Youth Link Diversity Project (YLDP) - The Youth Link Diversity Project (YLDP) is designed to engage diverse youth (ages 14 to 18) from ethnically marginalized groups to become leaders and agents of change to effect multicultural unity within our community.

Ms McConney-Wilson reported that Markham is offering staff lunch 'n learn sessions about how different religions treat matters relating to death and dying. Other recent sessions offered insights into mental illness issues.

She reported that other initiatives include a joint venture by Markham Welcome Centres and the Varley Art Gallery for new immigrants. This initiative has two purposes: to introduce new immigrants to the Varley Art Gallery, and to learn how Markham appears to new immigrants.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Information Sharing

Vilvan Gunasingham shared information about the Fall Festival which took place at the Markham South Welcome Centre on September 28, 2013. He wondered why few residents of South Asian descent take advantage of the services available to them at this Welcome Centre. Cheryl McConney-Wilson will investigate the possibility of having Welcome Centre clients self-identify themselves.

8. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Race Relations Committee is scheduled for November 4, 2013 at 7:00 PM.

9. ADJOURNMENT

It was

Moved by	Moises Calo
Seconded by	Regional Councillor Joe Li

That the Race Relations Committee adjourn at 8:45 PM.

Carried