

MEETING OF THE RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE FOR 2012
CITY OF MARKHAM
Ontario Room, Markham Civic Centre
January 14, 2013, 7:00pm

MINUTES

<p>Attendance:</p> <p><u>Committee</u></p> <p>Darius Sookram, Chair Astra Josie Rose, Vice-Chair Ramon Solis Bobbie France Rina George-Alexander Liliana Soengas Carla Crooks Vilvan Gunasingham Saad Omar Khan Barbara Tate Samil Chagpar Councillor Alan Ho</p> <p><u>Staff</u></p> <p>Cheryl McConney-Wilson, Diversity Specialist Darshika Patel, Committee Clerk</p>	<p><u>Regrets</u></p> <p>Moises Calo Councillor Logan Kanapathi Regional Councillor Joe Li</p>
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1. CHAIR OPENING REMARKS

The Race Relations Committee convened at 7:07 PM with Mr. Darius Sookram presiding as Chair. The Chair welcomed the Committee back from the holidays and introduced the two items of focus at this meeting: Presentation on Markham's draft new official plan and a panel discussion on poverty in Markham.

2. PRESENTATION ON MARKHAM'S DRAFT NEW OFFICIAL PLAN

Marg Wouters, Senior Manager for Policy and Research for the City of Markham, presented the official plan on the development of the new city of Markham to the Race Relations Committee. This plan will provide a guide to the city in regards to land use and was created to meet its obligation with the provincial Greenbelt Plan and the Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan and the York Region plans. The official plan recognizes the importance of agriculture and protecting the natural environment. It also outlines a plan to create more growth in mid to high-rise buildings as a way of limiting the expansion of urban area to accommodate growth. Furthermore, the City is interested in creating a more pedestrian oriented community than a car oriented community. Accessibility is also a focus in this plan which coincides with the Diversity Action Plan as the City is trying to build a place where people can readily get around and use different means of transportation to get around.

3. PANEL DISCUSSION ON POVERTY

At the previous meeting, the Race Relations Committee discussed the issue of child poverty amongst racial minorities in York Region. A panel of experts were invited to help educate this committee on this issue. The panel included Milan Nadarajah, Camille Logan, Patti O'Sullivan, Yvonne Kelly and Linda Ailtoslte.

Milan Nadarajah from the Worker's Rights Organization spoke first. Mr. Natarajah helps workers resolve their employment problems and has seen firsthand the struggles some workers endure to make ends meet. Many of his clients are immigrants from the City of Markham. They find it difficult to find acceptable employment and end up working for minimum wage. For this reason, many of Mr. Natarajah clients alongside their spouses will hold multiple jobs at minimum wage to make ends meet. Mr. Natarajah points out that if one person works full time on minimum wage, they will be making less than the poverty line. His organization supports the campaign to increase minimum wage.

Camille Logan is from the York Region School Board (YRSB). The YRSB is committed to meeting the needs of their students. In terms of the school board, what happens in the classroom is highly related to what happens outside of the classroom. There is a common perspective that Markham is an affluent city, however, poverty exists in Markham schools and the type of poverty that is seen here is hidden poverty. The Board is committed to ensuring that schools have equitable practices and thus, the Board has programs in place at performance plus schools to ensure that every student has the opportunity to learn.

Patty O'Sullivan is also from the York Region School Board. Ms. O'Sullivan states that the Board has identified 20 performance plus schools in York Region and 8 of these schools are located in Markham. Performance Plus schools are elementary schools identified by the Board needing additional resources and leadership to enhance the learning in school in neighbourhoods affected by poverty. The 2 key criteria that are considered when determining a performance plus school are gross family income and the education level of parents. The performance plus schools in Markham typically have a higher number of newcomers. Currently, there are various programs in place at these schools. The Student Nutrition Program provides breakfast and snacks to students. The Summer Learning Program, which is mainly for families where English is a second language, students get to engage in educational activities during the summer and parents are connected to various community resources such as libraries. Also, there are students coming to school without winter hats and mitts and Board would like to provide a program where parents can come and pick up winter clothing articles for free of charge or at an affordable cost. The Board is also working with teachers to better help them learn and know about the lives of their students outside the classroom.

Yvonne Kelly is a part of the Social Planning Council and provided the York Region perspective. The Social Planning Council prior to the article on poverty being published on the local newspaper had created a poverty profile for each riding in this region. Markham has a higher concentration of racialized poverty. Making Ends Meet, a York Region initiative, confirmed this finding that was demonstrated in the profiles. In order to make an adequate living in Markham, it was noticed that the household salary should be in the three figure salary range.

Members of the Race Relations Committee expressed their gratitude to the panel and felt that this discussion was very informative. This committee will look into having speakers further discuss this topic. The committee and the panel discussed that although there are programs in place to assist students and parents, sometimes these initiatives are not embraced due to the fear of stigma. For example, some students will choose not to take a snack that is available to them. It was discussed that having snack programs for all students and not for those just afflicted with poverty can help overcome this issue. Child poverty amongst racial minorities is a systematic issue. The major issue at the moment is employment and many skilled immigrants cannot find employment in their field.

4. NEXT MEETING

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

5. ADJOURNMENT

It was

Moved by	Saad Omar Khan
Seconded by	Ramon Solis

That the Race Relations Committee meeting adjourn at 9:07 PM.

CARRIED