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Report 2023-072

Report Title: Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Shapiro Foundation, Settlement Services Initiative

Committee Name: Economic Development, Tourism and Planning

Committee Meeting Date: June 7, 2023

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Council Meeting Date: June 7, 2023

Strategic Plan Priorities: Economic Prosperity and Innovation
 Sustainable Growth
 Thriving and Inclusive Communities
 Leadership in Change

Information Report

That the Economic Development, Tourism, and Land Use Planning Committee receive Report 2023-072 'Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Shapiro Foundation, Settlement Services Initiative' for information; and

Further That the Committee recommend that County Council receive this report for information."

Purpose

To provide County Council with information regarding a pilot initiative designed to support talent attraction for Northumberland through a collaborative partnership.

Background

In order to overcome critical labour force shortages in health care, construction, and advanced manufacturing the Department has shaped the following initiative which benefits from current Federal legislative changes regarding immigration, compliments our workforce housing strategy and most importantly establishes a collaborative partnership with an international foundation dedicated to matching talent with employment opportunities in the country of origin.

As Council is aware, Settlement Services in Northumberland has been in existence for nearly a decade and during this period of time, it has benefited from a very positive working relationship with both federal and provincial partners. This Department is fully funded through long term contribution agreements and not levy dependent.

The Federal Government response to labour shortages is to significantly increase immigration quotas to overcome an aging workforce and declining birthrate.

In our discussions with Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) we were made aware of a pilot project out of Pictou County Nova Scotia. Much like Northumberland, Pictou County represents a jurisdiction that is a mix of small urban and rural and faces the same challenges regarding talent into this type of constituency. Their response has been to work in conjunction with IRCC and the Shapiro Foundation to overcome this talent deficit.

Shapiro Foundation

The Shapiro Foundation focuses on refugee resettlement based on a fundamental belief that for resettlement to be successful, it must have deep, community-based, bottom-up support. That has the important, additional win-win benefit of involving the community and creating an opportunity for local families to experience the benefits of *Welcoming the Stranger*.

History

The Shapiro family's personal experience with Community Sponsorship started in 2016 when they partnered with Jewish Family Service of Metrowest, HIAS and eight Boston area synagogues (including Temple Beth Elohim) in a pilot project to resettle eight Syrian families. Three years later, these families are happy, healthy, employed, attending school and integrated. They continue to receive informal support/friendship from members of the community sponsor groups (including our own). This experience was life-changing and is in large part the basis of our ongoing global efforts to support community sponsored refugee resettlement.

In early 2017, recognizing that the United States was not likely to be hospitable to expanded resettlement programs, we turned our attention internationally. We were introduced to a coalition called the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI), led by the Refugee Hub at University of Ottawa, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), UNHCR and the Government of Canada. GRSI's mission is to: "share Canada's experience and support the adoption of similar models in other countries. The ultimate goal is to increase refugee protection by mobilizing the compassion that exists in communities around the world." Programs are underway in: the UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Argentina, and New Zealand.

In 2018, we learned that approximately 1,000 Canadian spaces under one of the three resettlement programs (called BVOR, which matches UNHCR most vulnerable refugees with private sponsors) were not going to be filled and would expire at the end of the calendar year. Recognizing that these scarce Canadian resettlement spaces had become the most coveted lottery tickets in the eyes of refugees in every corner of the planet, we vowed to do whatever we could to preserve them.

Our thesis was that the financial burden on sponsor groups was severely limiting participation, and financial capacity should not be a barrier to sponsorship. Working closely with our partners at the Refugee Hub at UOttawa, the Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), UNHCR, the Giustra Foundation, and Jewish Family Service of Ottawa, we created and funded a program (BVOR Fund) which would provide qualified sponsors with the funding they needed to be matched with a refugee family for resettlement. The program was a tremendous success, and with several of our philanthropic partners joining us, the result was the resettlement of 668 refugees in 2018. After being renewed in 2019, another 517 were matched. We are currently working with IRCC and other partners to leverage our experience and implement another version of the program for 2020 (and beyond).

Currently we have an exciting pilot project in Pictou County, Nova Scotia to expand resettlement via a new federal program called EMPP—Economic Mobility Pathways Project. The goal is to utilize EMPP to match skilled refugees in Kenya and the Middle East with employers seeking to fill vacant jobs. Working with IRCC, three organizations in Pictou— the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN), Safe Harbor and Glen Haven Manor— along with international partners RefugePoint and Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), we are hoping to create a model which will result in dozens of incremental refugees being resettled, with jobs and the deep involvement of the community, in Pictou in 2020. Our plan is to identify other rural Canadian cities with similar employment needs which can be met through identification and matching with skilled refugees. This program is purely incremental, with refugee-sponsor matches being executed outside of the current Canadian resettlement programs.

Consultations

Our consultation process has been on-going (and continues to be so), with representative groups within the community – particularly in the areas of agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and healthcare which at this juncture are most in need of skilled talent. In fact, this becomes the natural extension of our recently approved Workforce Housing initiative.

Legislative Authority/Risk Considerations

N/A

Discussion/Options

Negotiations are currently underway with both Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as well as with the Canadian Director of the Shapiro Foundation, Sarah Wiseman to determine the next steps in the process for reaching an agreement to move forward.

Tentatively the plan going forward would be as follows:

1. Secure support for the initiative from IRCC and the Shapiro Foundation. IRCC support would be conditional on the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Shapiro Foundation.
2. Begin discussions in earnest with the groups requiring talent i.e., agriculture/manufacturing/construction/healthcare to determine demand and their commitment to employment.
3. Public awareness/education component to recognize the community and community agency investment in not only the individual being employed but all the considerations associated with their individual families.
4. Address the challenges of accommodation – transitional/temporary and permanent.

Financial Impact

To be determined based on the negotiations going forward – however, given our existing relationship with IRCC and their support to date funding opportunities that are specific to this initiative are of significant interest, especially as a pilot going forward.

Member Municipality Impacts

To be determined – however, given the workforce housing initiative and its implications for individual municipalities the opportunity for renewal is significant for each and every municipality

Conclusion

It is the Departments intention to establish the relationships required, meet the IRCC mandate and undertake an innovative rural solution to the challenges of workforce attraction, diversity in community and ultimately rural renewal in Northumberland through this process.

Meetings are currently underway that will take place prior to the June 7, 2023 Standing Committee and at that time further updates will be provided.

Attachments

N/A