

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – NOVEMBER 5, 2001**

### **ITALIAN INTERPRETIVE CENTRE**

#### **Recommendation**

Councillor Ferri recommends that staff work with the A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee in the design phase of the Italian Interpretive Centre, and

That staff work with the A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee to address the remaining recommendations contained in their presentation paper to Committee of the Whole, and

That staff report back to a future Committee of the Whole with the progress made to date.

#### **Purpose**

To request staff to work with the A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee in the design and operation of the Italian Centre.

#### **Background – Analysis & Options**

Approximately two years ago the A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee was created for the purpose to establishing an Italian Interpretive Centre that would include among other things, the following components:

1. A data base that would provide information about immigrant families, their origins, ports of departure and landing, etc.
2. The collection and conservation of archival materials
3. The conservation of photographic and audiovisual documents
4. A library with publications, books, newspapers, etc.
5. A provision of computer connections with Pier 21 in Halifax, Ellis Island in N.Y. and ports of departure in Italy

A variety of different social clubs and organizations that serve the community have collected over 1,0000 signatures in support of this project.

#### **Conclusion**

Establishing a working relationship with staff and A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee will ensure a more effective and realistic interpretive centre for the benefit of Vaughan residents

#### **Attachments**

Deputation notes by A.M.I.C.I. Steering Committee

#### **Report Prepared by:**

Respectfully submitted

Councillor Mario Ferri, Ward 1



**A.M.I.C.I.**  
**(Association for the Memory of Italo-Canadian Immigrants)**  
**(Associazione per la Memoria degli Italo-Canadesi Immigranti)**

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**A Deputation to the City of Vaughan Committee of the Whole**

November 5, 2001

*Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, Ladies & Gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I have the distinguished pleasure and privilege of making this presentation on behalf of the A.M.I.C.I. Italian Interpretive Centre Committee. For your information, AMICI is an acronym that stands for Association for the Memory of Italo-Canadian Immigrants.*

*As we begin our journey into the new millennium, a universal review of our history and origins will help us understand the paths our global community will take. What better way could there be than to revisit the role and the contribution of those individuals who superseded us in North America.*

**What has been the impact of Immigration to the Canadian lifestyle?**

Canada has flourished in large part because its immigration policies have allowed this country to evolve and grow. The earliest of our immigrants worked very hard in the mining industry thus giving our country the tools with which to become one of the richest in the world. The second wave of immigrants also worked intensively and faced innumerable hardships to build roads and railways that linked the country from coast to coast. More of our immigrants have relentlessly worked in construction to move and shelter the population our great nation.

Abandoning the futile political mindset of cultural assimilation, Canada invented and actualized the politics of multiculturalism for the first time in world history. This empowered its immigrant population to integrate themselves into the connective and productive fabric of the country via its own cultural heritage. Our many various ethnic groups were therefore able to expand their consciousness and cultural growth.

Italians have lived the immigration experience in all its phases and have contributed notably to the economic, social and cultural growth of this great country. Their contribution helped Canada become what it is today – among the world's most industrialized nations. Not by chance, the United Nations has ranked our country as #1 in quality of life for the last 10 years.

### **Why do we need the AMICI Italian Interpretive Centre?**

Circumstances have endowed Vaughan with a high percentage of Canadian residents who are of Italian origin. These residents strongly support the design, construction and operation of a museum or “Italian Interpretive Centre” in their own city dedicated to the history of Italian immigration. This project would be the first of its kind in the world. There are immigration museums throughout the world wherever there are large immigrant populations, but nowhere has an Italian Interpretive Centre been constructed in a partnership such as we propose.

This initiative is very thought provoking if one takes into consideration that approximately 2 million residents in Canada are of Italian origin and that over 60 million people outside of Italy are scattered throughout the world.

The realization of the AMICI Italian Interpretive Centre would facilitate economic and tourist development for the City of Vaughan.

AMICI (the Association for the Memory of Italo-Canadian Immigrants) was formed 2 years ago in order to realize the dream of an Italian Interpretive Centre. The association gave itself some very ambitious objectives that can be realized over time with a focused commitment of energy and of financial resources.

The City of Vaughan has taken the first step towards the realization of this ambitious project by approving the inclusion of the Italian Interpretive Centre with the Vellore Community Centre project in Block 39. We understand that this initiative must develop at various levels, all of which must proceed contemporaneously and all of which may develop further with the passage of time within the realm of the initial objectives.

### **What is our vision of the Centre?**

The AMICI Italian Interpretive Centre would provide for a section dedicated to the collection and conservation of archives that could originate from our Italo-Canadian community. There is an enormous potential to supply all the practical materials required for a physical and visual inheritance of their life experiences.

A second section would be dedicated to receive and conserve photographic and audiovisual documents. It would be equipped with a media room for viewing films and slideshows as well as audio booths for music and audio tapes/CDs.

With the help of computers, a third section would create a database of all single persons and family units who left Italy since the beginning of the immigration experience. This data would be categorized by families, cities of origin and final destinations. The use of computers would be expanded to include the ability for researching archives from Pier 21 in Halifax and Ellis Island in the USA via the internet. Family genealogies would also be traced with the use of this vehicle.

A fourth section would be dedicated to individuals who, in the respective cities where they settled, climbed to various social levels and made notable achievements in their chosen fields. This section would also house an archive of personal stories/accounts from individuals and families inclusive of archives from their native cities to be used as an inheritance for future generations.

Such an Italian Interpretive Centre would not exist without a library that collects various publications such as books, newspapers and photographic collections that would be realized over time. These would be grouped and sorted into a form of illustrated “immigration guide-book” accessible worldwide via the internet.

Services such as interpreters and research consultants could also be provided. The Italian Interpretive Centre would inherently be a logical backdrop or stage for various events, launches, etc. at a cost to the group(s) who use it.

The entire project would be adapted over time to include other sections by the unification of contributions made by AMICI, City of Vaughan Mayor, Members of Council and Staff. We would like to begin by creating an initial nucleus that would grow and evolve over time through the intervention of new infusions of ideas, hands-on assistance, and financial contributions.

In the initial phase, AMICI proposes to involve the Italo-Canadian community as well as other communities throughout the world who are of Italian origin. We would use various levels of Canadian and Italian government to secure the necessary funding as well as to find historical and archival materials that will benefit the public.

We appreciate Council’s decision to include an Italian Interpretive Centre in the Vellore Community Centre scheduled to open in the future. We also want to declare an absolute interest in wanting to support and be involved in the evolution of this project.

### **What is AMICI's Contribution?**

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee, AMICI is prepared to provide direct support in the following ways:

1. To provide expert advice on the design and content of the AMICI Interpretive Centre.
2. To secure capital funding from foundations including Trillium, the Italian government and the community.
3. To work with staff to support an effective and efficient operation of the AMICI Interpretive Centre.
4. To act as a liaison between the Italian community and the City of Vaughan.
5. To promote the use of the AMICI Interpretive Centre.
6. To act as an advisory board for the Centre's development, operation and evolution.
7. To secure and store historical and archival materials at the Centre.

Before closing, I would like to thank all members of the City of Vaughan Council and Staff for their attention to this request and also to those who already have signed the petition included in this presentation. The petition has been signed by over 1,000 people and will continue to circulate to obtain more signatures of support and I would like to encourage all the Councillors to sign also.

Antonio Porretta