

## **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE - JUNE 19, 2006**

### **MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON WOMEN'S SHELTER NEEDS**

#### **Recommendation**

Mayor Michael Di Biase recommends:

The appointment of a task force to be known as the *Mayor's Task Force on Women's Shelter Needs* to investigate whether the need for shelter on the part of the women of Vaughan is currently being met, and if not, to outline a strategy for developing such a facility, either independently or in conjunction with current shelter providers in York Region, such strategy to include but not be limited to issues such as capital and operational costs, sources of funding, size, location, related resources, etc.

*The Mayor's Task Force on Women's Shelter Needs* will be composed of the following individuals, all residents of Vaughan:

Raj Bharwah, Member, South Asian Seniors' Club  
Janet Cesena, Public Health Nurse, Regional Municipality of York  
Nicole Damiano, Member, Vaughan Youth Cabinet  
Arlene Margolese, Manager of Volunteers, Reena  
Shernett Martin, President, Vaughan African Canadian Association

*The Mayor's Task Force on Women's Shelter Needs* will convene no later than September 30, 2006, and report to Council no later than January 31, 2007 (with the option of requesting an additional ninety days to complete any outstanding work).

*The Mayor's Task Force on Women's Shelter Needs* will be supported by staff of the Clerks Department.

#### **Economic Impact**

The task force itself will have minimal economic impact, requiring only some staff support from the Clerks Department.

#### **Purpose**

To determine if there is a need for a women's shelter in the City of Vaughan, and if there is, to outline a strategy for developing such a shelter---said strategy to address basic questions relating to costs---both capital and operational, funding options, size, location, etc.

#### **Background - Analysis and Options**

Women's shelters are a regrettable, but all too necessary service in modern-day society. The fact is that some women do suffer mental, emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse in their families of origin, at the hands of their spouses, or from acquaintances--"boy friends", class mates, etc. Such abuse has in turn been known to lead to life-long patterns of at-risk behaviours, including alcohol and drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, etc. The type of counselling that is typically provided by such shelters assists victims to understand and deal with their situations.

Currently, there is only one shelter located in the City of Vaughan---that operated by The Vitanova Foundation, an addiction day-treatment centre whose premises include a domiciliary unit for homeless males whose condition is related to alcohol or drug addiction (i.e., addiction has lead to homelessness, or homelessness has lead to addiction). While Vitanova is considering expanding its shelter to serve females as well as males, the Foundation acknowledges that its

mandate to treat and shelter substance users does not extend to those women without substance use issues.

*On Track*, the York/South Simcoe Youth Directory, funded by Human Resources and Skills Developments Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, the Canadian Red Cross/Region of York Branch, the Regional Municipality of York, and the York South Simcoe Training and Adjustment Board, lists two shelters in York Region which serve women: Sandgate Women's Shelter of Georgina/Jackson's Point, and Yellow Brick House, in Aurora.

Given the continuing growth in the population of York Region in general, and the City of Vaughan in particular, it is appropriate to determine if those female residents of Vaughan in need of shelter are adequately served by present resources, and if not, how any current inadequacy can best be addressed. The most appropriate way to do so is by the appointment of a task force charged with examining the issue of women's shelter services, and making all appropriate recommendations in respect of a strategy the City of Vaughan may adopt to address any identified inadequacy.

The **terms of reference** of the Mayor's Task Force are as follows:

1. *To determine from providers of women's shelter services:*

- (1) the current demand for such services from residents of the City of Vaughan;*
- (2) historic demand patterns and future demand projections; and*
- (3) present and planned capacity of current providers.*

2. *To determine, in consultation with all agencies that deal, inter alia, with abused women (e.g., York Region Police, York Region Abuse Program, local children's aid societies, The Vitanova Foundation, etc.), their assessment of the extent and nature of the phenomenon, and the degree of effectiveness with which it is currently being addressed.*

3. *To confirm any projected increase in the need for shelter services by women residents of Vaughan.*

4. *To determine whether any need for increased service would best be met by way of an independent, Vaughan-based initiative; or, in the alternative, by an initiative fostered by the City of Vaughan in support of current service providers which would result in enhanced service to women residents in the City of Vaughan.*

5. *In either event, and subject to confirmation of the need to enhance women's shelter capacity, to make recommendations for the enhancement of such capacity, to better serve the women of Vaughan.*

6. *And further, to outline a strategy for developing such a shelter---said strategy to address basic questions relating to costs---both capital and operational, funding options, size, location, etc.*

### **Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007**

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

**Conclusion**

It is appropriate that efforts be taken to determine if there is a need for a women's shelter in the City of Vaughan, and if there is, to outline a strategy for developing such a shelter---said strategy to address basic questions relating to costs---both capital and operational, funding options, size, location, etc.

**Attachments**

None

**Report prepared by:**

His Worship Mayor Michael Di Biase

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Di Biase  
Mayor