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Item No. 3
Halifax Regional Council
March 1, 2022

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed by 

Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: February 14, 2022

SUBJECT: Municipal Immigration Strategy

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

As part of the regional business plan for the Office of Diversity & Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs, there is a commitment to produce a municipal immigration strategy. This new strategy will build on the first immigration strategy, Welcoming Immigrants Action Plan 2013-2017.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter*, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39, subsections 7A, 34(1) and 34(3) provide:

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to:

- (a) provide good government;
- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; and
- (c) develop and maintain safe and viable communities.

...

34 (1) The Chief Administrative Officer is the head of the administrative branch of the government of the Municipality and is responsible to the Council for the proper administration of the affairs of the Municipality in accordance with the by-laws of the Municipality and the policies adopted by the Council.

...

34 (3) The Council shall provide direction on the administration, plans, policies and programs of the Municipality to the Chief Administrative Officer.

BACKGROUND

Immigration plays a central role in the future of the municipality's economic growth, social prosperity, and workforce development largely depend on the municipality's capacity to leverage its strengths to retain immigrants and newcomers who choose to make the region their home. This is possible by embracing diversity and striving to make Halifax Regional Municipality a more inclusive and welcoming area. The municipality is home to almost 89% of the migrants and temporary residents living in Nova Scotia; the majority of which are international students and temporary foreign workers¹.

Since 2014, Nova Scotia has seen an unprecedented rise in immigration. Between 2018 and 2020, Nova Scotia welcomed approximately 17,000 immigrants in a number of different categories including economic, family, and refugee classes². These numbers align with the province's efforts to attract and retain more immigrants, as reflected in the number of immigration streams launched by Nova Scotia Immigration and Population Growth (NSIPG).

Through the Nova Scotia Provincial Nominee Program, the federal government has significantly increased the number of nominations allocated to the province to nominate potential permanent residents. In 2016, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) made permanent the allocation of 1,350 spots for provincial nominees. This number increased by nearly 60% through the introduction of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP), which, as of 2021, has also been made permanent by IRCC. Through this program, Nova Scotia created 2,310 additional spots for permanent residents in 2019-2020, making 2,700 spots available for permanent residents since its conception in 2017. Employers can fill these spots by recruiting and hiring immigrants and/or international graduates. Additionally, NSIPG opened two additional streams in 2016 to attract entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial international students. Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to launch such programs for international entrepreneurs to obtain their permanent residency.

The [Accountability Report 2020-2021](#), released by the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, indicated the number of immigrants to Nova Scotia continued to steadily rise. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, had an impact in a decline in the numbers of newcomers welcomed in 2020. While 7,580 newcomers were welcomed to the province in 2019, a record number, only 3,510 newcomers were welcomed to the province in 2020. The Halifax Partnership reports that immigration continues to be the main driver of population growth in Halifax. Two-thirds of the net new residents welcomed in 2019 came from outside of Canada (6,509 people), 16% from elsewhere in Canada, 9% from elsewhere in Nova Scotia, and 8% from net natural growth within Halifax (births minus deaths).

Immigrants often settle in cities and they depend on their local government and communities to make it their permanent home. Cities are where the bulk of settlement services are typically located, as well, existing cultural networks are more readily available in urban centres. There is also greater existing social infrastructure in larger cities than in rural areas. Social infrastructure is one of the greatest challenges that rural areas face when trying to attract and retain immigrants. Given that most services and programs offered to support immigrant integration are funded by government agencies, government plays a significant role in helping immigrants to successfully integrate in their host region. For these reasons, the municipality needs coordinated and integrated efforts to contribute to the successful integration of immigrants in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

However, the municipality still faces challenges in terms of immigrant retention. Interprovincial migration remains one of the main challenges faced by the municipality and the province at large. Larger community and cultural networks as well as professional development opportunities and stronger social infrastructures existing in larger cities are among the main drivers for immigrants to eventually move to larger cities. Between 2013 and 2015, Halifax saw considerable talent lost to other provinces; many of whom were in

¹ [Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census - Census metropolitan area of Halifax \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

² This information can be found in the Halifax Partnership's annual *Halifax Index*, [2018](#), [2019](#) and [2020](#). See also the Nova Scotia Accountability Report, [2018-2019](#); [2019-2020](#); [2020-2021](#)

their prime working age. Although Nova Scotia holds the highest retention numbers in Atlantic Canada at 72%, this number is still below the national average of 80%.

DISCUSSION

The municipality is committed to supporting immigrant integration and talent retention. For this reason, the municipality continues to develop and expand services specifically targeted to immigrants. The municipality has continued to build strategic partnerships across communities and sectors to better understand both immigrant needs and strengths.

In 2013, Halifax Regional Council approved hosting the Halifax Local Immigration Partnership (HLIP). The HLIP was a three-year project funded by Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada. In April 2017, the project was renewed for three additional years and, in 2020, the project was renewed for five more years with funding to 2025. The creation of the HLIP has helped to strengthen internal services for immigrants and to align and coordinate efforts within and between immigrant communities and immigrant-serving organizations. The HLIP strategically uses available resources to build capacity amongst settlement organizations and other service providers through an intentional approach to partnership development. Since its establishment, the HLIP has been providing opportunities to enhance the current settlement and integration services networks and to expand these strategic partnerships to better serve the interests of immigrants in the municipality. The HLIP has also worked on the promotion of internal services directed to immigrants, such as the Welcomed in Halifax program, which provides immigrants arriving under the humanitarian refugee program as well as asylum seekers municipal cards for free access to public transit and municipal recreational facilities during the first year after their arrival.

In 2013, the HLIP created the Welcoming Immigrants Action Plan 2013-2017. The action plan integrated services geared towards immigrants by various business units into one document. The plan encompassed 30 strategic actions to improve immigrants' access to municipal services. The implementation of this action plan is annually updated. The actions developed were based on the following five major outcomes:

- Develop municipal communication tools to serve and represent diverse groups
- Leverage programs and services meant to support a welcoming community
- Celebrate cultural diversity
- Maximize opportunities to retain immigrants in the region
- Train municipal staff to value diversity and better serve diverse clients

It is worth noting that there has been no other plan after 2017. The first draft of the immigration strategy was completed in 2018, with the intention of having it become the next phase for the 2013-2017 Action Plan. Due to the need to do further internal and external consultation, the plan was delayed. Updates to the strategy have been made over the years, along with updates to the Action Plan. This new immigration strategy is meant to fill the gap that has been left from 2018 to date.

Making Halifax Regional Municipality a truly welcoming community for immigrants must be a long-term and primary solution to increase immigrant retention. The strategy will be one of the ways to achieve the mission of the Diversity and Inclusion Framework: "to remove barriers and create opportunities for the full participation of all residents and municipal employees". In addition, the strategy will help to:

- Affirm Halifax Regional Municipality's commitment to valuing equity, diversity and inclusion
- Provide services that are accessible and meaningful to immigrants
- Help immigrants and newcomers with their settlement process and in building a sense of belonging in the municipality by strengthening immigrants' bonds with the community
- Diversify and enrich the region's social fabric and economic development

Work has begun on the development of a municipal immigration strategy. This plan will align with the municipality's Diversity and Inclusion Framework and will detail a number of actions that the municipality

can take to make the region a place in which immigrants, asylum seekers and migrants can build a sense of belonging. In 2020, just before the lock down of the municipality due to Covid-19 restrictions, community engagement had begun on the development of the new immigration strategy. In February 2020 three consultation sessions were held; two with immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers, and one session for community partners, mainly comprised of service providers offering programs or services to immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers. Lastly, in October 2021, an internal survey was sent to all business units about municipal services already offered to new immigrants, migrants, and asylum seekers. This survey also asked business units to identify challenges they felt this community faced in accessing municipal services. Based on the findings of these consultations, ongoing engagement with community and researching what is being done in other municipalities, staff will be finalizing a new immigration strategy for Regional Council's review and approval in the spring of 2022.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications to this report. Any future financial implications arising from the implementation of the immigration strategy will be addressed in staff reports and business unit budgets as required.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement will be conducted as part of the development of the strategy. Both internal and external engagement will inform the new immigration strategy.

ATTACHMENTS

No attachments.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at halifax.ca or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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