PUTTING OUT THE WELCOME MAT IN STRATFORD, P.E.I.

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The Town of Stratford is a municipality located along the beautiful south shore of Queens County, Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.). Just minutes from Charlottetown, Stratford is a predominantly residential community with an emerging commercial core consisting of retail outlets, light manufacturing activities, and professional services. Stratford covers an area of 22 square km and boasts a unique mix of rural and urban settings.

As the fastest growing community on P.E.I., Stratford's population of almost 10,000 has recently seen an influx of newcomers arriving in Canada from many different parts of the world. Prior to 2008, no Diversity and Inclusion Plan was in effect, but the municipality began to realize the importance for a plan to ensure that Stratford was a welcoming community in which every person was respected and had the opportunity to reach their full potential. As we embarked on our sustainability journey, the municipality quickly recognized the need to simultaneously support culture and diversity in order to achieve our sustainability goals.

In 2008, a committee was formed with a mandate to develop a Diversity and Inclusion Plan for the Town of Stratford. The committee brought together a variety of residents of different nationalities—residents with health care backgrounds, members of the business community, and families with members with intellectual disabilities. Although diverse in structure, the committee had the singular goal to develop a Diversity and Inclusion Plan that would allow all who wished to reside in Stratford to do so within an inclusive community.

During the development of the Plan, the committee was educated on many aspects of diversity and inclusion, as well as the effects of racism. They reviewed plans from other communities, developed a "Definition of Terms," and created the first draft. Throughout this process the committee was guided by CCMARD's 10 commitments, looking to its focus areas to determine opportunities for action in Stratford. The work developing the guide was extremely important in giving us a complete and informed view of what diversity and inclusion means. It ensured we were all speaking the same language, put us in touch with community resources, and forged connections with like-minded groups in our area. It also became clear that several initiatives in the area of diversity and inclusion were already underway. The administration, utility, public works, recreation, and planning departments had integrated aspects of diversity and inclusion into their ongoing duties. Following a review of the initiatives, it was realized that a strong plan would help extend, implement, and substantiate this work.

As part of the Diversity and Inclusion Plan, a series of goals, objectives, processes, and as modes of action were developed. These formed the structure of a clearly defined action plan for Council and Town staff. Upon completion of the first draft, a focus group comprised of Stratford residents was held and suggestions were incorporated into the Plan. The focus group cautioned the committee about working alone and encouraged us to partner with other organizations to assist in

carrying out the Plan. It was also suggested that evaluations be carried out on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the plan whether changes are needed.

In June of 2009, the Diversity and Inclusion Plan was formally adopted. Putting this Plan in place for the Town of Stratford was an extremely important step in meeting our goals and reaffirmed our commitment to diversity and inclusion. All staff and Council have been versed on diversity and inclusion and continue to incorporate it into decision-making and ongoing programming. This capacity-building has allowed us to engage in dialogue with many residents within the community and continues to provide opportunities for us to connect with new residents. In addition, we have become familiar with available resources and often partner with other consentient groups in the area. As a result of our work in this area, we are viewed as a progressive community and have been recognized with awards by organizations such as the Newcomers Association of P.E.I. and the Chamber of Commerce. The recognition creates a sense of pride within the community, for Town Council, and among members of the staff.

Like many other towns and communities across the country, we are composed of a unique mix of cultures. With the support of CCMARD we continue to carry out the actions laid out in our Diversity and Inclusion Plan and our Town continues to grow and become an even more welcoming and inclusive community. We have always been proud to celebrate our diversity, but we now have a plan that ensures we are providing the services and support our residents need which is allowing us to build the best community possible. Working within the framework of CCMARD and its 10 Commitments provided us with the guidance needed along this journey and has allowed us to shape our own vision about what Stratford can be.