

# Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group Recommendations to Region Council

October 2022

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## Background

Following a series of Anti-Racism Town Halls hosted by the Region of Waterloo in the summer of 2020, Anti Racism Advisory Working Group was formed in order to propel action to address systemic racism and other forms of oppression.

In October of 2021, Regional Council unanimously accepted our first set of recommendations. The working group has seen in the past year that processes have started to take action on these recommendations, including hiring staff whose mandate is to bring equity to policy making and services.

The following recommendations, given at the end of its first term, reflect both what we have learned and what has been expressed by community residents. There is a moral imperative to move more urgently and responsively to the people who live in this community. They are being harmed. Current policy and actions are increasing demands on health systems-- in particular, mental health. These recommendations are given in the knowledge that this is difficult work which requires that every member of Council address historical wrongdoing.

Current membership of the group who co-present and endorse this report and it's recommendations are:

**Co-Convenors:** Donna Dubie and Maedith Radlein

**Current Members:** Tammy Webster, Ciann Wilson, Krishna Badrinarayan, Gebrehiwot Berihun, Amy Smoke, Fauzia Mazhar, Cheyanne Thorpe, Aalaa Rehman

**Members who Endorse Report:** Donna Dubie, Maedith Radlein, Ciann Wilson, Krishna Badrinarayan, Gebrehiwot Berihun, Amy Smoke, Fauzia Mazhar, Cheyanne Thorpe, Aalaa Rehman

**Members Abstaining:** Tammy Webster

## Recommendations

### A. Continuation of the Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group (ARAWG)

In its first term, the ARAWG has been able to help both the Region and the community to work together to affect positive change in the work of correcting systemic harms.

One of the most significant impacts of the ARAWG has been to serve as a conduit between community and the Region. While there is a formal Terms of Reference and a mandate, in practice after this first term, it is clear that the ARAWG has filled a necessary and important role for Council and the Region as a whole. The ARAWG has created a voice for those living in the region that must remain and grow.

It is important to note that many living in the Region of Waterloo do not see the ARAWG solely as advisors to Council as is dictated by its mandate. For instance, at the July 19, ARAWG Town Hall, there were repeated inquiries as to why the ARAWG was not responding to grassroots issues such as the encampment and the needs of neighbourhood/community associations.

It is therefore recommended that;

1. The ARAWG continue but with an expanded and evolved mandate
2. Resourcing from the Region of Waterloo be used to support operations of the ARAWG

**1. The ARAWG continue but with an expanded and evolved mandate**

**a. Continuation**

- i. The current ARAWG be allowed to continue and have a transitional time with incoming new members at the beginning of the new term
- ii. Current ARAWG members be invited to be part of the selection process for new members
- iii. The ARAWG formed by the new Council to be elected in October 2022 be given the opportunity to amend the current Terms of Reference
- iv. Selection process for new ARAWG should reflect the revised mandate of ARAWG

**b. Mandate**

- i. The mandate of the ARAWG be revised to actively engage and communicate with those living in the region from equity deserving groups

1. This accountability includes responding to the voices of community collectives/groups and their Calls to Action.
- ii. Include as part of the orientation of new Regional Councillors a conversation with the ARAWG which shares their commitment to Reconciliation, Equity , Diversity and Inclusion as well as to the work of the ARAWG

## **2. Resourcing from the Region of Waterloo to be used to support operations of ARAWG**

- I. Staff be provided to support the ARAWG in the use of the digital communication platforms used by the Region of Waterloo for communicating information to the larger population of Waterloo Region, e.g., through a website, emails
- II. The Region provide staff resources so that the ARAWG can create written and published communications with the larger community, e.g., Assisting in the creation and post of updates, sharing Reconciliation and EDI related information, through a website or other means deemed appropriate by the ARAWG
- III. Resources be provided for regular Town Halls which ensure that the community continuously feels involved in the work of the ARAWG.

## **B. Achieving a Municipality Steeped in Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Practice**

(i) The ARAWG recognizes that the governing structure which allocates different responsibilities to Cities, Regions and the Province makes change difficult. However, if the Region of Waterloo is committed to Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion it must abandon past practice and craft new ways to ensure it responds to diverse community needs. It must openly and clearly challenge and encourage its governing partners when human rights are being abused and outdated systems continue to oppress and rob its residents of their human dignity. A revised mandate would reflect the intersectionalities of equity deserving groups and enable the Region of Waterloo to move forward in all elements of Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

The Regional Municipality of Waterloo must;

- Openly support the renaming or new naming of landmarks, roads and other public entities to reflect a more inclusive and less colonized perspective, e.g., Victoria Park and Indian Road as well as the removal of the statue of Queen Victoria from the aforementioned park,
- Stop evicting people from encampments before allocating Regional land or permanent accommodation,
- Ensure that any response to encampment issues, including security be a civilian led response which includes trained mental health and addiction workers,
- Provide additional funding to grassroots organizations and outreach groups working with encampments to ensure basic human needs are met,
- Inform the new ARAWG of the work of the above mentioned civilian team as promised in a conversation with the current Chair and CAO,
- The Region MUST assign specific outcomes for both long and short term goals.

## **Summary**

The ending of this first term of ARAWG provides an opportunity for the Region to reaffirm its commitment to Reconciliation, anti-racism and other forms of anti-oppression. There has been a momentum built that, if continued, will build bridges between the community and council, and create a more equitable and inclusive community.

It is imperative that change happen, harm be minimized and ended, and that Council and the community work together. This is difficult but necessary work, and more time cannot lapse before actions are taken.