



STRATHCONA
COUNTY

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

**An important step in our journey
to becoming Canada's most livable community**

October 2019



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Strathcona County's vision: Becoming Canada's most livable community

Consistent with our vision, Council voted in 2017 to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities (CIM)¹. The coalition, launched by UNESCO, consists of cities interested in sharing their experiences to improve policies against racism, discrimination, exclusion and intolerance.

Diversity and inclusion are not new concepts in Strathcona County. Before joining the coalition, work to prioritize diversity and inclusion and incorporate them into our existing and upcoming programs, policies and processes had already started. For example, in 2011 Strathcona County Council approved a Social Inclusion Policy to address inclusion and exclusion in the community. In 2016, the County revisited its Social Sustainability Framework, which was originally adopted in 2007, to examine how best to create a caring and connected community within the County.



Below are some examples of diversity and inclusion that can be seen in our workplace and community today:

- inclusive public engagement
- financial subsidies
- Pride crosswalks
- Newcomer Connector
- universal change rooms
- accessible facilities and transit
- Treaty Six acknowledgement
- Social Framework: emphasis on connectedness and inclusion
- upcoming Social Summit "From Isolation to Connection"
- mental health first aid training for County employees
- employee prayer rooms
- parental leave
- Council advisory committees that develop and maintain a community dialogue about matters important to various groups:
 - [Community Living Advisory Committee](#) enhances community life
 - [Youth Advisory Committee](#) supports the well-being of youth
 - [Seniors Advisory Committee](#) improves outcomes for seniors
 - [Accessibility Advisory Committee](#) improves outcomes for people with accessibility considerations

¹ Previously the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD)

In April 2018 administration was directed to develop a policy on diversity and inclusion and an inclusive hiring policy for Strathcona County as an employer, ensuring the public and employees were engaged in the policy development process. This policy direction recognizes the importance and value diversity and inclusion bring to our community and workplace, and the importance of partnering with employees and residents to understand what diversity and inclusion means to them, and how to identify and reduce barriers.

What we know

Research tells us that people from different backgrounds and experience bring different skills and talents into a community or organization. This, in turn, fosters innovation, diverse ways of thinking and increases engagement and morale. While it is important to focus on diversity, inclusion is important to help people feel welcome and involved in the community. Additional research shows that when people feel included in a community, the willingness of neighbours to help each other increases and discrimination is reduced.

Since 2007, the population in Strathcona County has grown and changed. The County recognizes the need to adapt and change programs, policies, and processes to facilitate equitable access to resources and opportunities, and to enable people to feel safe, respected, and valued, for who they are and for their contributions.

The County values input from our employees and the public. This feedback is used to inform policies, programs and processes. We have heard through several recent engagement sessions that inclusion is an important theme for our community. Below is a summary of such engagements:

- Social Framework (2016)
 - 7,815 people shared their thoughts and opinions
 - Nearly 10% of eligible residents over the age of 11 provided input
 - Eight themes emerged including affordability, working together, safety, belonging and acceptance, accessibility, and connectedness
- People Plan (2018)
 - Employee engagement process where over 1,000 Strathcona County employees shared thoughts and opinions about what is important to them when it comes to workplace culture
 - Six areas of focus emerged including clear purpose, accountability, positivity, trust, leadership, and team
- Recreation and Culture Strategy (2019)
 - 4,696 people shared thoughts and opinions

- Inclusion and addressing barriers to participation are areas of focus identified
- Transit Master Plan (2019)
 - 7 open houses and multiple stakeholder meetings including residents, community groups, County departments, staff and council
 - The survey had over 250 responses
 - Focuses on accessibility to opportunities while considering affordability, equity and environmental sustainability

The feedback heard in these public engagement processes supplemented our own findings and will further inform and strengthen the policy development process.

The 2019 employee engagement survey included key questions to gauge employee perception about diversity and inclusion. Employees were asked about how important it is that the organization understands that diversity is critical to our future success, if they think we value people and their contributions, and if they feel included.

In addition to engagement, there are tools and resources that municipalities can access that informs our diversity and inclusion policy development process:

Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities (CIM) Toolkit	Welcoming & Inclusive Communities (WIC) Toolkit	International, and Nation-based Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Created to help municipalities work against racism and discrimination, the toolkit includes "Ten Common Commitments" and what to consider when creating and implementing an action plan <i>for example: forming a staff committee, involving stakeholders, training and education</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In partnership with the Government of Alberta, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) developed the WIC toolkit which shares a number of tools and resources to continue or advance social inclusion in communities <i>for example: measuring inclusion tools, guidebooks</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and provincial advocacy groups have created programs to aid municipalities with developing more welcoming communities •International groups such as the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) also focus on providing tools for inclusion, following similar CIM principles

The following best practices align with recommendations made from CIM and the WIC Toolkit, and align with feedback received during engagement sessions on actions we can take as a governing body and organization to create a diverse and inclusive community and workplace:

- **Seek commitment from leadership** - Municipalities create policies and frameworks that highlight and promote the organization and leadership's commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- **Incorporate diversity and inclusion into existing priorities and initiatives**
 - Diversity and inclusion does not exist independent of other priorities within organizations and should be aligned with cultural/people plans and business/strategic plans.
- **Host initiatives to address cultural diversity** - Many communities are embracing celebrations to show their acceptance of diverse groups. For example, many municipalities are reaching out to Indigenous peoples in the spirit of reconciliation.
- **Pay attention to hiring practices** - Mitigating unconscious biases and creating inclusive hiring policies are a key step towards realizing a diverse workforce.
- **Ensure appropriate resourcing, clarify roles, and increase education** - Dedicating resources, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and focusing on education, training and tools to help create understanding and implement policies and frameworks in a tangible and meaningful way, were all identified as important.
- **Engage with internal and external stakeholders** - Municipalities are relying on holistic public and employee engagement to develop diversity and inclusion policies and frameworks. Many also have advisory committees to clarify, explore, and address issues of diversity and inclusion in their community and workplace.

What we did

The following steps were taken to gather insight into diversity and inclusion within our community and workplace to inform our policy development process:

Direction to create D and I policies (April 10, 2018)

Strathcona County Council directed administration to create a diversity and inclusion policy and an inclusive hiring policy.



Environment scan (2018-2019)

Provides an overview of current research, policies, regulations, benefits and best practices related to diversity and inclusion across municipalities. Common themes from previous engagement sessions for various County strategies were also reviewed.



People Leader Discovery Sessions (November to December 2018)

A series of eight discovery sessions were held with a total of 110 people leaders participating. In small groups, attendees shared their experiences with diversity and inclusion, explored what it means to them, and discussed future actions.



Public Engagement Sessions (May 1 to June 30, 2019)

A series of five sessions were held as focus groups involving subject matter experts and representatives from organizations that serve the community. Three sessions were open to the public. In total there were 55 participants representing 23 organizations.



Internal Employee Discovery Sessions (July to August 2019)

A series of five discovery sessions were held with a total of 115 employees participating. In small groups, attendees shared their experiences with diversity and inclusion, explored what it means to them, and discussed future actions.



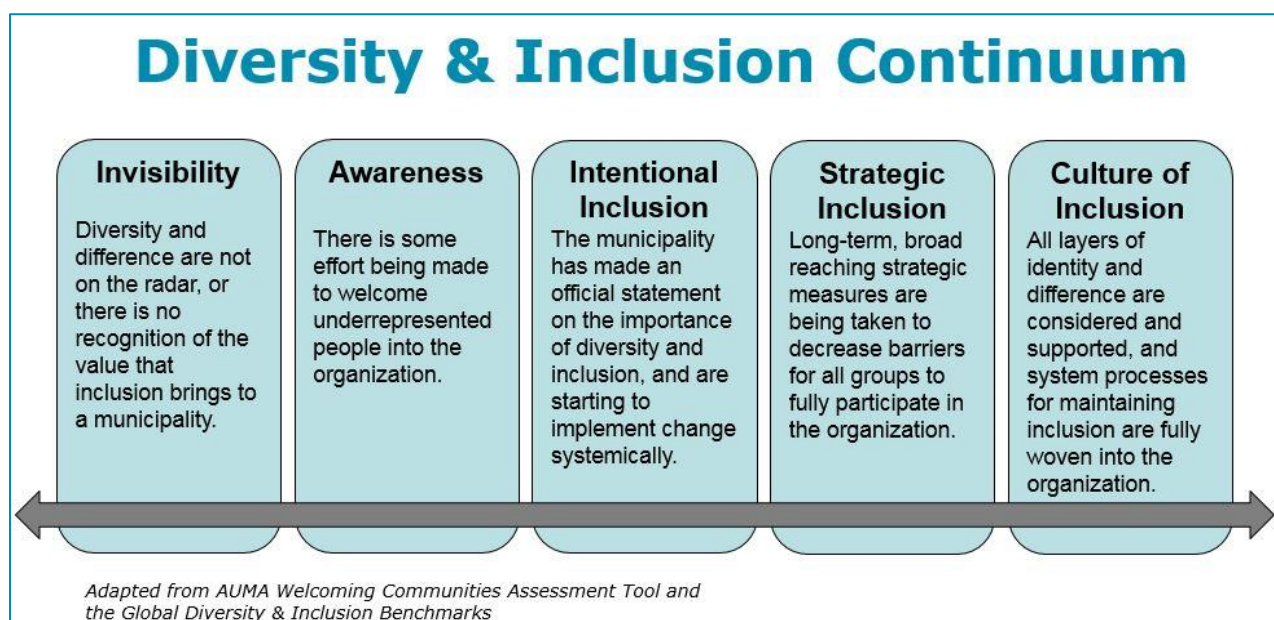
Public Survey (October 2019)

A public survey is underway to gauge public perception of diversity in the County. Completion and analysis of the survey is targeted for early November 2019.

What we heard

Throughout the public and employee engagement, we heard about the importance of respecting diversity and recognizing that it is not always visible, singular or independent of other diverse groupings. Participants emphasized that it is about being welcomed and accepted for who you are, contributing, having the ability- through access and inclusion- to participate, and having the County's diversity reflected by the people who work in local government and business.

Diversity and inclusion have evolved in Strathcona County and, based on an informal assessment and feedback from participants at our engagements, we are at the awareness stage on the "Diversity and Inclusion Continuum" as shown below. We anticipate that once we make an official statement and begin to implement long term strategic measures to decrease barriers for all groups to participate in the community and organization we will continue to progress along the continuum to a culture of inclusion where diversity and inclusion is our "way of being".



There was clear support for the development of a County diversity and inclusion policy and an inclusive hiring policy. Participants felt the policies will:

- help the County better reflect the demographic it serves,
- demonstrate the County is invested in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, and
- allow the County to be an example for other local organizations to prioritize diversity and inclusion.

In addition to developing diversity and inclusion policies, participants encouraged the County to continue collecting and reporting detailed demographic data to better understand the population it serves and to demonstrate the area's growing diversity.

Common Diversity and Inclusion Themes

The perspectives obtained from the engagement process reiterated dominant themes from previous County engagements, further validating their significance when we talk about diversity and inclusion in our workplace and community:



Communication

Participants consistently explored the impact of words on a culture's understanding and approach to inclusion. Participants identified two specific areas in which the County can enhance communication: using an inclusive lens when planning and executing communication and enhancing communication to the public about inclusion in relation to our programs and services. Creating and sharing information and materials that are written in plain language and better reflect diverse people will create safety and help residents feel included. Additionally, being inclusive with our communication channels and considering alternative methods of communication is important.



Partnering

Participants said the County should consider forming alliances with other municipalities and service providers to remove barriers and offer relevant programs and services locally.



Accessibility

The majority of participants said an individual's sense of inclusion and connection to County programs and services is dependent on their ability to access affordable and accessible transportation; buildings and facilities (for example, public transportation options for those with mobility issues or who live in remote areas and gender neutral bathrooms); and affordable and accessible housing and safe shelter (for example, low income senior housing and emergency shelters).



Inclusive Employment

Participants identified various barriers people may experience when searching for jobs and job advancement, which can lead to exclusion. Developing an inclusive hiring policy for the County must be followed by a thorough audit of County recruitment processes to identify and remove systemic barriers. The policy also needs regular, consistent review and measurement to ensure its intent is realized.



Integration

Participants expressed the importance of an integrated approach to programs and service delivery in the County. They expressed the need for a holistic approach to reducing barriers to inclusion. An integrated approach acknowledges that people often live multiple diversities at the same time creating additional challenges. Participants suggested that the County, service providers and both public sector and private agencies partner and take an integrated approach to client service.



Shifting Perceptions

Participants expect the County to play a greater role in challenging perceptions of the community as a homogenous culture and addressing stereotypes about diverse groups. They also recommended focusing on education, creating inclusive spaces, and creating opportunities and events that welcome and celebrate diversity.

Participants cautioned the County to ensure that we are not creating barriers that marginalize or exclude people by examining our biases, anticipating needs and applying a diversity and inclusion lens to our decisions and actions.