

Report to Community and Protective Services Committee

To: Chair and Members
Community and Protective Services Committee
From: Sandra Datars Bere, City Manager
Subject: London's Designation as a Welcoming Francophone Community
Date: April 7, 2025

Recommendation

That, on the recommendation of the City Manager, the following report regarding London's Designation as a Welcoming Francophone Community **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Executive Summary

Following a briefing note to Council in August 2024 this report provides an overview of London's designation as a Welcoming Francophone Community and its implications.

London was designated as a Welcoming Francophone Community in August 2024. The newly formed Consultative Community Committee will drive the three-year project, with administrative support from the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario (Network for Francophone immigration for South Central West Ontario or RIFSCO) and funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Linkage to the Corporate Strategic Plan

The Welcoming Francophone Community designation is closely aligned with two priorities of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan:

a) Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

Expected outcome: Equity-denied groups come to London and choose to stay in the community.

Strategy: Support the community in attracting, integrating and retaining new Londoners through education, celebration, employment and other actions

b) Economic Growth, Culture and Prosperity

Expected outcome: London is a regional centre that proactively attract and retains talent, business and investment

Strategy: Attract and retain a skilled workforce by marketing London as a destination for new investments, education and talent

1. Analysis

1.0 Background Information

1.1 Context

London has a Francophone population of 1.5 percent (7,975 residents in 2021). Of the immigrant population of 115,600 residents, 2.2 percent are Francophone, and 445 are recent immigrants having arrived between 2016 and 2021. Francophone residents are supported through French language settlement agencies, school boards, post-secondary education, daycare, health and cultural organizations.

In August 2024 the Francophone community in London applied for and received the designation for London as a Welcoming Francophone Community from the Réseau en immigration francophone de Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario (Network for Francophone immigration for South Central West Ontario or RIFSCO). A letter of support from Civic Administration was provided to support the designation.

Attracting and integrating Francophone immigrants is a priority of the London Newcomer Strategy and the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership. This work also aligns with the forthcoming London Economic Development Strategy.

While immigration levels have decreased overall, they have increased for Francophone economic immigrants in minority communities outside of Quebec, representing an opportunity for London. In January-February 2025 there were 1,181 unique bilingual job postings and 283 employers were competing for bilingual talent, representing 4.2% of all employers who posted during this period (source: London Economic Development Corporation). Bilingual roles are concentrated in stable fields such as healthcare, education, public administration and insurance.

2.0 Discussion and Considerations

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this information report is to inform Council of London's designation as a Welcoming Francophone Community.

2.2 Background

The Welcoming Francophone Community initiative began in 2018 with the designation of 14 communities across the country, with the objective of supporting the reception and settlement of French-speaking newcomers into these communities. The Welcoming Francophone Communities have been selected based on their potential to welcome and successfully integrate French-speaking newcomers. Through the Welcoming Francophone Communities Initiative, each community will receive annual funding for proposed activities to support the initiative.

The Francophone Local Immigration Committee, of which the City was a member, led the submission of the application for a Welcoming Francophone Community (WFC) designation. The City provided a letter of support to the application. (The FLIC has since dissolved and has been replaced by a Consultative Community Committee created to implement the initiative). In August 2024, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced ten additional communities were selected, among them three in Ontario, including Cornwall, Cochrane District and London for a four fiscal year period. 31, 2028.

2.3 Overview of the Project

Since the announcement, several activities have occurred including:

- Formation and development of terms of reference of a Consultative Community Committee with 7 members (from social, educational and economic sectors, City of London and one newcomer) to guide the project over the next four years
- An environmental scan of the local French immigrant community and its needs
- Determination of priorities for London
- The creation and submission of community plan of activities with budget, accepted by IRCC in February 2025.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will provide \$1.2 million over four fiscal years from January 2025 to March 2028. RIFSCO will act as administrator of the funds.

The community plan, attached as “Appendix“ has designated three key priorities: 1) Economic Development, Entrepreneurship and Employment; 2) Civic Engagement and Participation; and 3) Equitable Access to Reception and Settlement Services. Among the planned activities are English language training around the workplan, mentorship programs, networking and for entrepreneurs, visits to political institutions including City Hall; a community fair for French ethnocultural organizations; promoting an awareness campaign around the initiative and enhancing the availability and information of settlement services offered in French.

The City of London has membership on the Consultative Community Committee by staff that has knowledge of immigration and who can participate in meetings in French staff. The WFC designation aligns London Newcomer Strategy to attract and retain Francophones and with the plans of the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership to integrate newcomers and the French community is well integrated into these plans. The Newcomer Strategy’s Google Ads campaign to secondary immigrants in competitor Ontario cities (Hamilton, Mississauga, Sudbury, Toronto, Waterloo and Windsor) will include ads in French. Both plans can assist in promoting the initiative, identify partners for the launching of activities, and supporting visits to City Hall. Civic Administration will liaise closely with the Director of Strategy, Innovation and Economic Development who is leading the creation of a new London Economic Development Strategy and the London Regional Employment Services which works with a French-speaking employment service provider.

2.4 Next Steps

RIFSCO has issued a funding call for small grants in the areas of conversation circles, mentorship and planning open house meetings to political institutions and other programs that will start in April 2025. The Welcoming Francophone Community will also develop a website and community-level logo.

3.0 Financial Impact/Considerations

3.1 Funding

The Welcoming Francophone Community initiative is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada through the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l’Ontario. There is no financial impact on the Corporation.

Conclusion

The designation of London as a Welcoming Francophone Community complements the work of various City strategies and plans and represents an opportunity to attract, integrate and support Francophone immigrants into our community.

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