

MINUTES

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON

THURSDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2000

CHAMPLAIN ROOM

1:30 P.M.

PRESENT

Chair: A. Munter

Members: W. Byrne, L. Davis, C. Doucet, D. Holmes, H. Kreling, A. Loney, M. McGoldrick-Larsen

Regrets: D. Beamish

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

That the Community Services Committee confirm the Minutes of the meeting of 16 December 1999 and 20 January 2000.

CARRIED

INQUIRIES

THE OWL'S NEST (LINCOLN HEIGHTS SHOPPING CENTRE)

Councillor W. Byrne asked that the Health Department report back on whether funds are available to help The Owl's Nest seniors' program rent alternate accommodation. The Department should coordinate with the Finance Department to see whether the Owl's Nest is eligible for any kind of a tax break.

Notes: 1. Underlining indicates new or amended recommendations approved by Committee.

2. Items requiring Council approval will be presented on 23 February 2000 in Community Services Report No. 41.

REGULAR ITEMS

1. FINAL REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON POVERTY

- Social Services Commissioner's report and Executive Summary dated 18 Jan 00
- Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty issued separately

Mr. Cliff Gazee and Ms. Jocelyne St Jean, Co-Chairs, presented the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty, dated February 2000. Mr. Gazee and Ms. St Jean highlighted forty-six (46) recommendations and asked that regional staff be directed to undertake actions and incorporate these actions into appropriate work-plans in the areas of:

- ⇒ Housing
- ⇒ Utilities
- ⇒ Education
- ⇒ Recreation
- ⇒ Food Security
- ⇒ Child Care
- ⇒ Transportation

Mr. Gazee paid tribute to those who testified at the People's Hearings, generally considered to be the start of the Task Force on Poverty, and to others who participated in the work of the Task Force. He referred to Recommendation 46, which calls for the creation of an interim organizing committee to develop a Standing Advisory Committee for ongoing public participation by low-income people. Mr. Gazee pointed out that Task Force participants do not seek benefits for themselves, rather they want to help remove barriers so they can become equal contributing members of society. He indicated that a lot more work needs to be done and he asked for the Committee's support. Committee Chair A. Munter thanked the Co-Chairs for their leadership and he praised all those who were involved in the Task Force on Poverty. It provided a forum for the community and the Region's budget decisions reflect the excellent work done by that community.

Responding to questions from Councillor D. Holmes, Mr. Gazee said that approval is being sought for the recommendations tabled with the Committee and for a separate initiative from the Food Security Group referenced in Recommendation No. 18 of the Task Force on Poverty report.

Councillor A. Loney proposed that the Committee only receive the report at this time. He indicated that, whilst he had no problem with the general thrust of the document, he did not feel he could approve every individual recommendation without further information on its financial impact. The Councillor went on to say he was not seeking roadblocks to implementing the report, but in order to practically exercise the actions envisioned in it, there should be an analysis of their potential or likely costs and information about who is responsible to bear these costs.

Councillor M. McGoldrick-Larsen requested that local MPs and MPPs receive a copy of the report, with recommendations relating to their respective levels of government being highlighted, and that copies of this correspondence be circulated to Committee members.

That the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty, dated February 2000, be circulated to local MPs and MPPs for information.

CARRIED, as amended

Commenting on whether the report should be approved or received by the Committee, Councillor Holmes said she was not worried about spiraling costs. She proposed that the report be approved, that staff move on actions identified and that the different departments report back to their appropriate Committee should there be related costs.

The Committee's legal counsel, Ms. A. Taschereau-Moncion, responding to a question from Councillor Loney, indicated that approving the report at this time meant approving everything contained in the document. The Social Services Commissioner, D. Stewart, said it was staff's understanding that any proposed initiative which is not in the department's work-plan and not budgeted for would be assessed as to its cost and its course of action and the Committee would be provided with this information.

Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen asked whether staff could provide the dollar figure associated with the Millennium Learning Centres, and the possibility of partnerships with other funders. Commissioner Stewart indicated this is part of the Region's Partners for Jobs initiative, and active partners include the federal government and the network of Community Health and Resource Centres (CHRC). He added that the actual amount of financial support the Region will provide is under discussion. The Region has been asked to provide \$100,000 and these funds would come from the employment development and support components of the National Child Benefit Program. Responding to a further question from Councillor McGoldrick-Larsen, Commissioner Stewart said he was not fully cognizant of the CHRCs proposal to the Trillium Foundation.

Councillor C. Doucet put forward the view that receiving the report as opposed to approving it would represent an abrogation of Council's responsibility, since it funded the study and people have been hard at work for over a year. Councillor Doucet said the Committee's role is to advance social services in the Region, and simply receiving the report would to that process a disservice. He acknowledged there will be costs, and these can be debated or refined as they come forward, but this should not change the intent behind each of the Task Force's recommendation.

The Committee then considered the following Motions:

Moved by A. Loney

That the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty be received and approved in principle.

LOST

NAYS: L. Davis, C. Doucet, D. Holmes, A. Munter 4

YEAS: H. Kreling, A. Loney, M. McGoldrick-Larsen 3

Moved by D. Holmes

That the Community Services Committee recommend Council:

- a) **Approve the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty.**
- b) **Direct regional staff to undertake the action items identified in the report and incorporate these actions into appropriate operational plans. That the Region also act on the advocacy recommendations contained in the report.**
- c) **Approve the creation of a Standing Advisory Committee to monitor the implementation of the Task Force on Poverty recommendations (recommendation 46 to get the process started).**
- d) **Encourage the new City of Ottawa to adhere to the Task Force on Poverty recommendations that are designed to help reduce poverty and create greater inclusion for all residents.**

CARRIED, as amended

YEAS: L. Davis, C. Doucet, D. Holmes, A. Munter 4

NAYS: H. Kreling, A. Loney, M. McGoldrick-Larsen 3

2. **COMMUNITY GARDEN NETWORK- FOOD SECURITY GROUP**

Co-ordinator, Community Services Committee report dated 24 Jan 00

Ms. Brenda Inouye, Coordinator, Community Garden Network of Ottawa, addressed the Committee. She proposed the joint implementation of a food security policy between community members and regional Health, Environment and Transportation, Social Services and Planning and Development Approvals Departments, as per Recommendation 18 of the Final Report of the Task Force on Poverty. Ms. Inouye said food security is a critical and immediate need in Ottawa where approximately 30,000 per month use a food bank. In addition,

consumers are constantly faced with whether their foods are treated with pesticides or genetically-modified organisms.

As well, over 90% of the food comes from outside the Region: this causes poor air quality and increased carbon dioxide emissions due to transportation of food over long distances.

Ms. Inouye continued by saying that, although it is the jurisdictional responsibility of the federal and provincial governments to manage the Canadian food system, it is community members and local government which must deal with food-based problems, most intensively and effectively.

Some solutions include:

- community gardens;
- good food box programs;
- collective kitchens;
- community economic development projects through which people can grow the organic food of their choice;
- people working together to support the local food distribution system;
- people preparing nutritious meals together and learning how to produce and market products.

The speaker noted the group's vision expands beyond these measures to include community gardens, good food box programs and collective kitchens in every neighbourhood. Participants would increase their capacities through these initiatives, and increased employment would result through support of food-based community economic development projects and further support of the local food system. Ms. Inouye said an explicit food security policy would allow certain changes in present policies and by-laws that present barriers to the expansion of food security initiatives in the Region and would allocate appropriate resources for its implementation. She concluded her presentation by highlighting the need to work together and use resources as efficiently as possible. She pointed out that the Toronto Food Policy Council, under that city's Health Board, has facilitated the development and implementation of a food policy in collaboration with community members, non-profit groups, local farmers and industry representatives. As well, Vancouver, Kitchener-Waterloo and Victoria are presently taking similar steps.

Councillor L. Davis indicated she was prepared to put forward a Motion to provide \$20,000 from the recent sale of non-viable land in her ward to cover the various costs associated with bringing more community gardens into various areas. Ms. Inouye responded that one of the main costs relates to the salary of a Co-ordinator, and the proposed amount would cover that cost. Councillor W. Byrne, having assumed the Chair, clarified, in response to a query from Councillor Doucet, that Recommendation 18 of the Task Force on Poverty, which refers to the establishment of a regional food security policy, has been approved as part of the discussion on Item 1.

Terrie Meehan, a disabled mother of three children, two of whom are also disabled, said she has had to rely on food banks to meet her family's needs, because, based on current assistance rates, it is necessary to use any means to have anything close to a nutritious diet. Ms. Meehan said she preferred a "hand-up" to a "hand-out" and is excited to be part of the Food Security

Group. The Ottawa-Carleton Region needs to gather its resources to form an effective plan. She spoke about programs such as the Southeast Ottawa Good Food Box and the Quality Fresh Food Club that have made a difference in her community and in her family. She indicated that her community would like a community garden but there are barriers to this happening. Ms. Meehan pointed out that working families often do not have the knowledge and the resources to ensure they have adequate, nutritious diets. They need a food security plan to add strength to what currently exists. Collective kitchens, food bank clubs and other strategies mean people can feed themselves and their families with dignity, not through charity.

Elicia Wernikowski, a gardener at the Carlington community garden, indicated that 120 families were working a garden plot there and it is estimated that 700 people ate the garden's produce last season. Some of the benefits of garden plots include low cost, fresh organic food, physical exercise, fresh air and sunshine, and a sense of satisfaction and pride at being productive and involved in one's own and the community's well-being. Another benefit comes from working with people from many different cultures and backgrounds and as a result, seeing them as neighbours, not as strangers. Ms. Wernikowski said the Carlington community has responded in the following manner:

- tools were donated by individuals and businesses;
- knowledge and expertise on organic gardening was provided by local farmers and gardeners;
- labour and expertise was provided by a local plumber;
- compost was provided by the City of Ottawa and the Region.

The community also learned about nutrition and food preservation, and participated in pick-your-own trips to local farms for good, inexpensive produce. Gardeners volunteered their time, shared knowledge, provided labour to new or less able gardeners, and shared produce with those unable to garden at the time. Ms. Wernikowski said the benefits of community gardens go beyond the dollar value of the food itself and are difficult to quantify, especially in the short-term. They include improved social relations among diverse people and the feeling of being connected, of breaking social isolation, of belonging to and having a stake in one's community. She asked that the Region help in accessing suitable land and water sources, testing soils, and using its knowledge, expertise and connections to sustain and improve existing community gardens and develop new projects which can only enhance the community as a whole.

Frances Tanner, part time coordinator, Carlington Community Garden, began by thanking the Committee for approving Recommendation 18 of the Task Force on Poverty report. She spoke about the book "Real Food for a Change", which estimates that, if the population only ate as much local food in Ontario as it did in the 1970s, there would be 10,000 more jobs in Ontario today. Ms. Tanner pointed out that an estimate of the cost of produce from the Carlington garden represents approximately \$30,000; if the gardeners had to pay organic prices, the 120 families would have spent that much money over the season to buy food; if they estimated their time, the result would be different. She thanked regional staff from the Social Services and Environment and Transportation Departments for their support to-date, and the Task Force on Poverty for including the food security recommendation in its report.

At this point, the Committee Chair, A. Munter, read a number of Motions presented by Committee members. Speaking to her Motion to provide \$20,000, Councillor Davis said she saw this as an opportunity at community building, and something that should be a priority in high density areas. She posited that using the funds from the sale of non-viable land for this purpose is an appropriate use, since the profits from the sale are being returned to the community. She suggested it was incumbent on staff to report back on locations, to work with Councillors in this regard, to establish priorities and to report back to Committee at a later date.

Councillor D. Holmes said her Motion comes from the food security group and lists areas where there already are community gardens, however it does not preclude the fact there may be other lands the Region can provide for this purpose. The Councillor felt that finding a little more funding, as well as providing staff resources, would also be useful. She indicated that, in light of initiatives in other cities, the Region needs to get busy and activate its residents to find more gardens.

Councillor A. Loney said that coordinating the efforts of all departments in order to make things happen is the most important aspect of this initiative. If community gardens are planned at the start of new housing projects, such as the one in Nepean, it would be simpler and cheaper. Councillor Loney said he could support the proposal, and he stressed the importance of communicating this loudly throughout the Corporation to ensure things happen.

Councillor M. McGoldrick-Larsen expressed the belief this is an opportune time to meet some of the goals and objectives of sustainable communities. She indicated that the housing development referred to in her Motion has vacant land all around it and the City of Nepean owns the adjoining vacant lands: all this provides opportunities for partnerships from the conceptual stages.

Councillor W. Byrne requested that the food policy group contact Ottawa-Carleton Housing with a view to accessing its resources at a number of housing sites in her community or nearby. The Councillor said this is an initiative that would serve the residents of those communities well.

Moved by L. Davis

That \$20,000 be allocated to the Community Garden initiative to facilitate and offset the cost and development of community gardens within Ottawa-Carleton. Funds for this project are to be provided from the \$20,000 proceeds of sale of non-viable land declared surplus land at 214 Hinchey Street on 2 February 2000, subject to a comment from the Finance Department being received prior to Council consideration of this item.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by D. Holmes

That as many new community gardens as possible be established this Spring with the assistance of the Region (at the following locations):

- Laurier at Bronson (empty lot, north side)**
- Centretown near "Bugs"**
- Sandy Hill/Lowertown**
- Southeast Ottawa near Heatherington**
- Vanier**
- Heron Park Community North (east end of Apolydor recently designated as garden park area by the city).**

CARRIED, as amended

That the Region provide access to soil testing procedures. That use of region-owned roto-tilling equipment be approved to dig up new community gardens. That water access be found for each new community garden.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by M. McGoldrick-Larsen

That the Community Garden Network work with the Nepean Housing Corporation to develop a community garden in Longfields, Madden Court Housing Development as well as the new housing project of 72 units beside Madden Court.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by W. Byrne

That the Community Garden Network coordinate with Ottawa-Carleton Housing to establish community gardens on their sites, including buildings

CARRIED, as amended

3. **CHILD CARE SUBSIDY: POLICY CHANGES INTRODUCED BY THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Mr. Merv. Sabey, Director, Area Operations East, presented the report. He began by clarifying that the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) has not introduced new asset limits, rather Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) that were exempt are now considered to be liquid assets. Mr. Sabey indicated staff have identified 800 cases of clients with RRSPs, 255 of whom are in excess of the new limit. He cautioned that this was not a

precise assessment of the impact on a case by case basis as it will require significant efforts throughout February and March to determine the exact impact on eligibility.

M. Sabey said that the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) has written a formal letter to the Province, asking them to reconsider the policy change and the Province has responded that it intends to implement the changes. Departmental staff have tried to find a balance between the pressures to implement and the pressure to give clients and agencies time to adjust. Mr. Sabey expressed the belief staff have found a balance to implement the policy change in a way that is respectful of people who have been following the policy but now find themselves in a changed environment.

Councillor L. Davis asked whether child care workers who were given RRSPs in lieu of pensions would now have to divest themselves of their savings. M. Sabey said he could not answer the question at this time, but the indications are the Province intends to protect only mandatory, employer-sponsored pension plans. Staff will need to look carefully at individual circumstances and continue to interpret the directives to the benefit of its clients within the policy direction. Councillor Davis wanted to know what the current “cap” is for RRSPs. M. Sabey said an annual contribution cap of \$7,500 would be deducted from earned income. With regard to the number of families affected, he reiterated that he could not be more precise until the review process is completed. Staff are exercising their limited discretion by allowing a deduction of no more than \$100 per month for RRSP contributions. He added that considering RRSP contributions against earned income can be done if it is limited and done under a category called “other” and staff propose to do this.

Councillor W. Byrne asked how RRSPs would be treated in the case of self-employed individuals, i.e., would they be considered a personal or a business asset. Mr. Sabey said his guess would be that this would be a personal asset, as it is being derived from personal income and paid into an RRSP. Councillor Byrne posited that the policy could have a drastic impact on self-employed people and put them out of business and back on the caseload. She wanted to know whether liquid assets include a vehicle as this is an item that could put one over the limit. Mr. Sabey indicated that staff have to look at the entire circumstance of a person and look at all the items considered liquid assets: RRSPs are now part of the list, as well as savings, bonds; vehicles may or may not be considered. In response to a further question from Councillor Byrne, Mr. Sabey said contributions can't be made to a child's RRSP as it is the assets of the entire benefit unit that are considered.

Councillor A. Loney sought clarification as to whether the Region would be at risk of provincial “claw-back” if the policy change is implemented as staff suggests. The Social Services Commissioner, D. Stewart, said he believes the Province will allow the Department to assist people with disposing of their assets without penalizing the Region. He added that Ottawa-Carleton is “late in the day” implementing changes compared with other municipalities. Councillor Loney asked whether there is increased risk in further delaying implementation. Commissioner Stewart replied this would depend on the nature of the delay: he posited this would be more acceptable if the department were dealing with the changes on a case-by-case basis. In response to a question from Councillor Loney Mr. Sabey indicated that a full review

of financial eligibility is done once per year. If a client was contributing enough money to reach the \$5,000 cap, that client would be encouraged to be aware of the asset limit in order not to exceed it.

Councillor H. Kreling asked what other regions or counties across the Province are doing about the policy change. Mr. Sabey replied that smaller municipalities would have immediately implemented the changes. The City of Toronto has taken an approach that allows a six-month period, and this is essentially the approach staff recommend the Region take; larger regions have taken a phased-in approach. Councillor Kreling wanted to know whether OMSSA will be pursuing other strategies. Mr. Sabey replied in the negative. He pointed out that OMSSA's Child Care Policy Committee has explored the issue at length and has written to the Ministry but it has been greeted with a closed door.

Joanne Hightower, Co-Chair, Ottawa-Carleton Child Care Association

Ms. Hightower said the Ontario government is forcing subsidized parents with only RRSPs and no locked-in pension plan to dispose of this asset, while leaving those with locked-in pensions untouched and this is simply not fair. A majority of the affected parents are women or parents who are self-employed and their RRSP is their only vehicle to save for their retirement. Eliminating the ability to build a retirement fund creates a greater probability that these individuals will find themselves needing support from federal or provincial coffers in their retirement years. When parents lose their access to subsidized child care, they may use their RRSP to pay full fee and keep their children in the current program. This change will only defer the cost to the Region's child care budget, as these parents likely will be back looking for subsidy when their funds run out. Ms. Besharah said that, by losing access to subsidized child care, many families will have little recourse but to place their children in the unlicensed, unregulated child care sector. Pulling children from programs that provide them stability and security and provide peace of mind for their parents is not in the best interest of any family. She asked that the Department continue its leadership role by:

- further stalling the implementation of the directive until a full community assessment on parents and the child care system is completed;
- informing the Province of this and requesting an amendment to the directive that is in the best interest of Ontario's children, parents and the child care system;
- maintaining a continued leadership role at OMSSA, to push for community assessment impact studies before the implementation of any further provincial directives.

Joan Tierney, a sole support parent of a 5-year old girl attending Huron Day Care said she will lose her subsidy when the proposed change is implemented. This will have a drastic effect on her life. She is being put in the position of choosing between continuing, high quality child care for her child and her retirement future. Ms. Tierney posited she is being forced to use her RRSP and risk her financial future because the Canada Pension Plan will not be enough to support her when she retires. In addition, the amount of money she will need to pay for child

care will drastically increase her taxable income, and she will incur costs for exceeding the 10% withdrawal limit each year.

Ms. Tierney pointed out that, as a single parent, she struggles each day to make ends meet; she receives no child support and lives paycheck to paycheck. Paying full fee out of her monthly salary is not an option but neither is moving her child to cheaper, unregulated care. She has come to the conclusion that she is being discriminated against, along with other parents. She asked that the Committee stop the changes to the subsidy criteria until consideration is given to what this means to people like herself and other families in the same situation. She challenged the Committee to rise to the occasion and to support the parents and children of Ottawa-Carleton as it has in the past.

Replying to a question from Councillor Davis, the Committee's legal counsel, Alexia Taschereau-Moncion, said the judgement could be made that this is a discriminatory practice, however the Region has to implement provincial regulations. As to whether this would fall under the family category of the Human Rights Code, legal counsel said that, subject to doing the research, she thought a challenge to the policy change could be through judicial review or through a Charter challenge.

Councillor Davis asked whether the Corporation would not have the recourse or the obligation to take on a legal challenge if it considers something as a discriminatory practice. Commissioner Stewart replied that a court ruling would be needed on whether or not this is a discriminatory practice. In the past, when it was felt that provincial rules were not in the best interest of the community, the department interpreted the rules in the best interests of its clients. Mr. Stewart added there is less discretion to do this now, and failure to implement the policy change would result in an audit and in penalties being applied. A subsequent court ruling on whether or not the policy change is discriminatory would result in a reversal of policy. Councillor Davis expressed the belief that, as a Corporation, the Region has an obligation not to implement something it believes is discriminatory. She put forward a Motion calling for legal assistance to be provided to an individual or to a group wishing to challenge the provincial policy change.

Rachel Besharah, President, CUPE 2204, began by expressing her appreciation for the work that has gone into finding a solution that will have the least impact on parents and children, and on the fragile child care system. She made reference to recent changes in the treatment of the Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) which saw many parent-students forced from the system and into unregulated care. As well, inadequate funding for Ontario Works child care has forced families involved in the program to place their children in the unregulated system, or face losing their welfare benefits. Ms. Besharah said the most recent policy change will force middle income families out, many of whom pay partial child care fees. The staff report estimates that 900 children will be expelled from the system. Those who work with children know the difficult journey they face as they develop bonds of trust with their care providers. The provincial directive is short-sighted and will directly impact on families after a lifetime of work. The latest Statistics Canada figures show that only 39% of women and 42% of men are covered by workplace pensions. Many families try to deal with the almost daily media reports that the Canada Pension Plan is failing and will not meet the demands of the aging population by

investing in RRSPs. Their foresight should be welcomed and commended, not used against them.

Ms. Besharah said the Committee is being asked to stand behind the values and principles that have guided the development of child care services in the community for the past 25 years. This is in recognition of the important role governments play in the lives of young children and in supporting families to reach their potential.

Colette Francis, a parent with two young children, said she was deeply troubled by the change being introduced, as it will no longer permit her and her husband to have or contribute to an RRSP in preparation for the future. She called this an unfair policy that punishes people like herself, who have no other means to prepare for retirement. Mrs. Francis said if she is disqualified from receiving a partial subsidy, she will not be able to afford the high cost of good child care and will have to consider placing her children into cheaper, unregulated care. She said she and her husband are upset at being forced between taking care of ourselves in their old age and being a good parent now, by keeping their children in the kind of care that is good for them. She appealed to the Committee to reconsider the implementation of the policy or to challenge the provincial government in implementing it.

Dave Hagerman, Ottawa Federation of Parents' Daycares

Mr. Hagerman said that this unfair and discriminatory policy, along with the lack of pay equity, the lack of funding for wage enhancement grants and other measures have been beating the child care community. It is getting discouraged because there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. He asked that the Committee support Councillor Davis; Motion to provide counsel for other entities wanting to challenge the policy change, along with the changes to OSAP, through the courts. This would send a signal to the community that the Region will stand up for what it believes in. He asked that there be a Statement of Principle by a public body and by public representatives that a universally accessible and affordable child care system is an essential part of the social infrastructure in a modern society and that the current funding mechanisms are not working. Because there is the Québec model to go by, it is difficult to argue that modern governments can't afford this anymore. Mr. Hagerman said the Statement of Principle will help and encourage the child care community by indicating that action will be taken. The Statement of Principle can also be forwarded to OMSSA for support and to large municipalities, encouraging them to pass a similar Statement of Principle. Mr. Hagerman concluded by saying that the devastation wrought on families by these kinds of measures is too high

Sian Service, Board President, Glebe Parents' Day Care

Ms. Service said many parents will be affected by the policy change. When a person is self-employed, there are high and low moments, and there can be a loss of equity by divesting oneself of RRSPs. Ms. Service pointed out there is a fuzzy line between mandatory and voluntary pension plans. Many of the parents served at the Glebe centre are from the downtown core. For them, it is not a question of finding cheaper child care, its a question of

finding child care. There are long waiting lists and few people in the Glebe available to provide care.

Ms. Service said parents will either have to go to the suburbs or stop working and go on assistance. She called the Motions before the Committee excellent, and she expressed the hope they will be supported. Councillor Byrne said she appreciated Ms. Service bringing up the point that, if one is self-employed, having to liquidate the equity of RRSPs can jeopardize one's ability to keep one's business.

Fernando Felix, a parent, informed the Committee this, since the policy change has come into effect, it has affected his ability to afford child care, and he has had to decide whether to have another child. He said this has affected him deeply, because he really wanted to grow his family. His only option is to go off work, have reduced income and have a stay-at-home mom or eventually declare personal bankruptcy, because this is not part of the equation in terms of discounting the subsidy. Mr. Felix called this very threatening and discriminatory against working families who pay their taxes, and who try to do a good job day in and day out. He said all he wanted was good day care assisted by the government or by parents who can afford full fees. He posited this eliminates the middle class because one is either very poor with a subsidy or very rich and pay full fee. Mr. Felix expressed the hope the Committee will approve the Motion to provide legal counsel and move forward with an objection to the policy change.

Speaking to her Motion, Councillor Davis said it is not hard to see how wrong the policy change is, and that society is moving far away from equity. She indicated she has never seen anything that cries out so blatantly and is so clearly wrong. She expressed her support for all the Motions and she asked that the Committee do the same.

Councillor C. Doucet suggested that Councillor Davis' Motion be amended to include a legal challenge to the OSAP changes as well. Councillor Davis said she would not consider this a "friendly amendment" as she felt the Committee has not had much information about the OSAP matter and should have a report back if this is to be the case. Chair Munter requested that staff provide some general comments on the applicability or relevance of the OSAP situation when it reports back to Committee on March 2nd.

Councillor Loney said there is agreement the policy change is horrendous and there can be no good behind it. He said he thought his Motion was the fastest way to start moving on this item, by telling the Region's senior bureaucrats that Council is looking for a strategy to fight the change effectively. They will also have the opportunity to start consulting with other municipalities who may want to combine efforts. Councillor Loney thought waiting for someone to initiate the case, then coming to the Region for funding would be a slower process. Staff have indicated that \$2.5 million in child care subsidies may be at risk, therefore it is worth the effort and the funds to fight the directive. The alternative, i.e., paying \$2.5 million, will be a harder sell. Councillor Loney said the fact is this is a bad policy decision and the way to illuminate this is to proceed and probably through the courts.

Councillor D. Holmes said there have been many instances around the Committee table where the punitive policies of the Harris government have been discussed. The Committee has had to recuperate its energies to fight attacks on women and children, and the proposed policy change is just another nail in the coffin of organized and licensed child care. Councillor Holmes posited the Province would prefer to sell child care to the private sector, but since it is not profitable, the Province prefers to drive it out of business. She said she really felt the need to take a stand on this matter, because it is so discriminatory and it goes against every policy of the provincial and federal government about people saving for their future and not having to rely on government pensions. The Committee and Council have to be seen to be moving in a concerted way, making the public statement that the policy is unreasonable and discriminatory and indicating that the community will be receiving backing in the fight against the directive.

Chair Munter said it was completely amazing to think that a government would deliberately force a situation on people that could result in their being impoverished in old age and prevent them from being frugal and careful and setting money aside for the future. He pointed out this contradicts everything governments have told people to do, that is, plan for the future, be self-reliant; when people have done this, they are punished by losing their child care. Chair Munter called this behaviour reprehensible and he said he was pleased to hear there is energy around the table to take on this matter.

Moved by L. Davis

That, should an individual or a group of individuals presently using child care services wish to proceed to court on the provincial government's discriminatory new directive concerning RRSPs being treated as a liquid asset, that the Region's Legal Department provide the legal expertise to support such a challenge.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by W. Byrne

WHEREAS, a low-wage earner working for the federal government or large company with a company pension plan may qualify for a child care subsidy, but a low-wage earner with exactly the same salary, but self-employed or working for a small firm is to be forced to liquidate his/her retirement savings or lose his/her child care, and;

WHEREAS such a policy is discriminatory and penalizes people who have been frugal and prudent and attempted to save for the future:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Regional Council strongly object to this unfair policy, call on the provincial government to rescind it and request the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to take on this issue on an urgent basis, and;

FURTHER THAT this Motion be circulated to all regions/counties in Ontario, all three party leaders, the Minister of Community and Social Services and all local MPPS.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by A. Loney

That the Chief Administrative Officer, along with the Commissioners of Finance, Social Services and the Regional Solicitor develop a strategy to fight the implementation of the Province's policy change on RRSPs and child care. This strategy to include consideration of combining the Region's efforts with other municipalities and other entities or agencies, and, that a report on this matter be brought to the Community Services Committee at the March 2, 2000 meeting.

CARRIED, as amended

Moved by D. Holmes

That the formal letter from the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association be appended to the report to Council.

CARRIED, as amended

4. **CENTRE 454 - RENOVATION GRANT REQUEST**

That the Community Services Committee recommend Council approve a one time grant in the amount of \$83,000 towards renovation costs associated with the move of Centre 454.

CARRIED

OTHER BUSINESS

CANCELLATION OF 16 MARCH 2000 MEETING

The Committee agreed to cancel the 16 March 2000 meeting.

NEXT MEETING

17 February 2000.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

CHAIR

CO-ORDINATOR