

Anti-Racism committee provides report to Council, calls on Town to adopt new measures

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After months of meetings and planning, the local Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Racism and Discrimination Task Force presented their blueprint and recommendations to Shelburne Town councillors.

During the council meeting on Monday (Oct. 5), taskforce chair Alethia O'Hara Stephenson and vice chair Althea Casamento presented councillors with the recommendations made by committee members. The recommendations for council were broke down into three categories; short-term, medium-term and long term.

"The recommendations are a summary of what we've heard from the delegations, the surveys, the stories and focus groups," said O'Hara Stephenson.

Casamento started the presentation off with the recommendations for council with a short-term focus of between three and six months.

The committee first advised that council take part in the alliance with other municipalities against racism and racial discrimination, join the declaration of Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racisms and Discrimination as well as develop an anti-racism/oppression policy. Implementing an action plan for the recommendations and documenting the progress on the town website was also advised.

"Town website content will be more reflective of the diverse community. The Town is to encourage its partners such as the library, faith groups, CDRC and service clubs to provide programs and events that reflect the diversity of the community," read Casamento. "The Town website will add a feature to allow visitors to have content translated into different languages again reflective of the community. The Town to utilize existing space for art to be displayed such as town hall and the art will be representative of our diverse community."

Council was also in this time frame recommended to support diverse initiatives including days, dates and events, having a quarterly newsletter highlight these and also establishing safe spaces for marginalized groups.

Casamento went on to present recommendations for council with the time frame of six to twelve months, considered to be medium term. Recommendations included the town working with the BIA and EDC to provide mentoring, support or grants for BIPOC (black, Indigenous, and people of colour) owned start-ups, Community Grant funding for BIPOC youth and that sponsor events promote values of inclusion and diversity. Included in this time frame was sharing the recommendation with the Police Service board and OPP.

The Town was also encouraged to put links for formal complaint processes on the town website, engaging in Diversity Equity & Inclusion training, have an equity audit every two years, and ensuring hiring processes and town policies are through a diverse lens

Long Term Recommendations

Addressing the long-term recommendations for council O'Hara Stephenson went on to cover the proposed changes over the next two years.

The committee suggested that the town work with local faith groups to ensure shared space, enhance trails with markers highlighting

history, and implementing policies that recognize contributions of BIPOC individuals.

The committee also suggested the setup of a position for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion which O'Hara Stephenson said has been established in other municipalities.

"It is important that we take the approach of looking at forming such a position to ensure that we are able to continue with the great work we've already started on with this taskforce," said O'Hara Stephenson.

Final recommendations from the committee comprised of the town sponsoring or giving scholarships, supporting local cultural sports clubs and events.

Open forum meetings at Town Hall to acquire quarterly and appointing an individual as an honorary member of council as a representative of the communities diverse needs, were also suggested.

In the presentation to council O'Hara Stephenson also provided recommendations for local business and for the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB).

Following the death of George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer in May and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protest that took place globally and in Shelburne, the Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Racism and Discrimination Task Force was established.

A 2016 census of Shelburne notes that of the then 8,126 population consisted of 9.5% Black, 4.9% South Asian, and 2.2% Indigenous (Metis and First Nations). The total minority population made up 20.1% of the town's total population.

The committee distributed a survey between the months of July and August with the results of it shared during the Monday presentation. Some of the findings included examples of racialized children being treated differently in school environments, racial profiling by police, and instances of hate and discrimination between children.

"The situation assessment provides a picture about the nature and the frequency of incidents occurring around racial discriminations," said Casamento. "The situation also highlights the pressing need for effective solutions."

Councillors provided their comments on the presentation during the meeting following its conclusion.

"I just want to commend every member on the taskforce for all their hard work in what truly came together tonight," said Coun. Shane Hall. "Obviously we still have challenges that lay before us, but as a council we have that obligation to our resident and that is to ensure we take action."

"The Town of Shelburne has come a long way, there has been a lot of work that has been done, a lot of great work that has been done, but what the taskforce has pointed out there is still work to be done," said Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson.

Council received the recommendations from the committee, but did not make any final decisions, allowing councillors to go over what was presented. Council will go through each of the recommendations at a future council meeting that has not yet been determined.