



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Catherine McLeod, Manager of Culture and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

DATE: May 5, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSE-2025-011

SUBJECT: Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills: Status Update

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. CSE-2025-011, dated May 5 regarding Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills: Status Update, be received for information.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills, formerly the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan, closely aligns with and advances Council's Strategic Plan.
- The initiative is being developed in three interrelated Phases. This staff report covers Phase 1, Safe and Welcoming Workplace, focused on the Town as an employer and workplace.
- The objective of Phase 1 is to identify gaps and make recommendations to promote a respectful, engaging, diverse, resilient and welcoming workplace that supports employee needs and well-being - resulting in the efficient and effective delivery of quality municipal services.
- Extensive internal consultation was undertaken in the development of this plan, including the review of municipal best practices.
- Safe and Welcoming Workplace aligns with numerous existing and planned Town programs and policies (e.g. HR Strategic Plan, Staff Attraction and Retention Plan, Customer Service Strategy), which will be leveraged, as appropriate, to implement its recommendations.
- The results of an internal workplace audit were synthesized into a Framework to guide and organize the work going forward.

- Additional resources will be required to effectively implement Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills, which will include recommendations based on the Town as both an employer and workplace, and as a provider of municipal services.
- The initiative is being advanced as quickly as possible, recognizing resource constraints.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

1. Overview

Council approved the development of an EDI Strategy and Action Plan through the budget process in 2022, 2024 and 2025. Given the breadth and complexity of the undertaking, the initiative was approved to be undertaken in three interrelated and incremental phases that build on each other. The initiative's objectives align closely with Council's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, specifically:

- To be a place where all people feel welcomed, safe and connected (Vision)
- To efficiently provide services that foster a high quality of life for residents (Mission)
- To act with integrity and honesty, be transparent and accessible, stay connected and engaged with the community and undertake a respectful and caring approach (Values)
- Safe and Welcoming Communities (strategic priority)
- Ensure facilities and programs meet the evolving needs of the community and enhance outreach and engagement with our communities (objectives)

Taking into account the Strategic Plan's focus areas and the intended outcome of the initiative to support a workplace and community that are safe and welcoming, the initiative has been positioned as "Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills".

Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills is being developed in three interrelated phases (Figure 1):

- Safe and Welcoming Workplace (phase 1) – focuses on the Town as an employer and workplace.
- Safe and Welcoming Community (phase 2) – focuses on the Town as a provider of municipal services.
- Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills (phase 3) – culmination of phases 1 and 2, resulting in an integrated and actionable plan.

At the end of phase 3, Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills will be a comprehensive, corporate-wide 5-year plan to build and support a safe, inclusive, welcoming and engaging workplace where every person is respected and valued for their contributions and has equitable opportunities to develop and grow. It will ensure that Town programs and services are accessible and meet the needs of Halton Hills' increasingly diverse communities. The plan will provide a roadmap, including an implementation plan (e.g.

recommendations, priorities, short- and long-term actions, roles, timelines), measurement framework (Key Performance Measures, monitoring progress and impacts), engagement and accountability plan (for staff and community), and identify resource impacts and needs to address current and future needs.

Figure 1: Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills Phases



2. Context

As part of continuous improvement, Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills builds on progress made by the Town to date by identifying gaps, risks and recommended solutions. It builds on the Town's previous commitments, including:

- Endorsement of the Halton, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Charter ([ADMIN-2021-0041](#)), and;
- Joining the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities ([Resolution No.2021-0024](#))

Municipalities across Canada have established Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion goals and frameworks for municipal policy, program development, practices and service delivery to provide equitable outcomes for residents and staff. Incorporation of these approaches in municipal policies and programs has been shown to increase efficiency in, and customer satisfaction with, municipal services. Research also demonstrates that the application of inclusive practices in the workplace provides benefits, including staff attraction and retention (access to a larger talent pool, increased employee satisfaction, reduced employee turnover), and improved staff engagement and performance (increased innovation and creativity, improved quality of decision-making).

3. Project Guidance

This initiative is being led by the Manager of Culture and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, in consultation with the following committees:

- **Technical Advisory Committee:** A cross-departmental Technical Advisory Committee comprised of 12 Town staff was formed to provide comments on process and products, assist with issue identification and resolution, liaise with their departments/divisions to ensure cross-departmental awareness of the initiative and its progress, support staff engagement in consultation processes, and identify issues/challenges/ideas from their respective departmental perspectives and monitor the progress of the initiative. Members represented Human Resources, Clerks, Strategic Initiatives, Communications, Planning, Legal, Transportation and Public Works, Recreation and Cultural Services, and the Halton Hills Public Library.
- **Steering Committee:** A Steering Committee comprised of the CAO, Commissioner of Corporate Services, Commissioner of Community Services and Manager of Culture and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion was formed to monitor the progress of the study, provide comments during the study process, assist with strategic issue identification and resolution, and build internal awareness of the project.
- **Representatives of Council:** The Mayor appointed three representatives from Council to this project. Councillors Brass, Garneau and Hilson were regularly updated on the progress of Phase 1. The Councillors assisted with internal capacity building, issue awareness, Council engagement, and provided valuable input and suggestions to the initiative overall.

4. Project Readiness

To support the initiative, an INtroduction to INclusion training was provided to staff and Council in two separate sessions.

To further support the work of the Technical Advisory Committee, project assumptions and agreements were developed collaboratively to guide the committee's project engagement. These assumptions and agreements served to support a transparent process and create an accountable environment embracing learning and reflection. Specifically, the agreements stated in this document are the rules of engagement to support the TAC in engaging in challenging conversations and work.

5. Review and Consultation

INclusion INcorporated (the successful consultants) undertook an audit to contextualize the current state of belonging and inclusion for staff at the Town of Halton Hills. The

comprehensive audit process included multiple forms of data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, including:

- Background, Policy and Document Review

The policy and document review examined a sample of the Town's policies and guiding documents, including human resource (HR) policies, job descriptions, reports, and by-laws. This review was done to understand how key policies and documents may be driving inclusion or exclusion and to identify opportunities for improvement. Documents were provided to the consultants at the beginning of the process in December 2023 to provide a baseline. Policy developments or revisions have likely occurred since that time.

- Best Practices Review

A review of best practices, as they relate to inclusion and belonging in municipalities, was undertaken. Practices related to labour relations, human resources, service delivery and governance practices were reviewed.

- Staff Survey: BelongINg Metric

The BelongINg Metric is a quantitative assessment tool that uses an Inclusion Scale to assess people's lived experiences related to belonging, culture, expression, fairness, fear/psychological safety, respect, and trust within an organization. This tool also collects demographic information related to different social identities, including age, gender, identity, disability, race, language(s) spoken, and country of origin. A total of 264 staff surveys were completed.

- Staff Interviews

Eight one-on-one qualitative interviews were completed with Town staff to explore their experiences with inclusion, exclusion, and belonging in the workplace. Staff were identified through a voluntary process and represented a variety of identities and job functions across municipal staff and departments.

- Staff Focus Groups

Two focus groups with Town staff were facilitated to understand their perspectives on recommendations provided in the draft Existing Conditions Report. All staff who participated held non-supervisory roles within the Town. Participants in one focus group were between the ages of 18 and 30. Participants in the other focus group must have worked at the Town for less than four years. The purpose of the age and employment criteria was to engage with younger and early career staff who may not hold formal power within the corporation and are therefore less likely to have regular opportunities to share their experiences and perspectives.

This audit takes into consideration the current internal state of the Town with the understanding that related recommendations and actions will need further contextualization.

6. Existing Conditions Report

The key learnings from the audit process are summarized in the Existing Conditions Report (Appendix 1). The attached Report includes accompanying appendices covering the findings of the data sources outlined previously, as well as a glossary of terminology used throughout the related documents. Parts of Appendix 1 are confidential as they pertain to “personal matters about an identifiable individual including municipal or local board employees”, and were presented to Council in closed session.

The Existing Conditions Report identifies the key learnings of the audit and presents them in three pillars (themes), with strengths, gaps, and high-level opportunities for improvement and recommendations articulated for each. These are not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, they are only examples that aim to provide the Town with an initial understanding of the type of work that could be undertaken in the future. The recommendations will be further reviewed and built upon as Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills continues to be developed, with final recommendations specific to the Halton Hills context being presented at the culmination of Phase 3.

The three pillars identified are:

- Leadership and Decision-Making
- Employment Policies and Practices
- Connections and Culture

The pillars are interconnected and relate to and are informed by each other. Each pillar references qualitative and quantitative data gathered throughout the audit process to highlight the outcomes. An overview of the findings is provided in the next section by pillar.

6.1 Leadership and Decision-Making

This section considers how internal leadership and decision-making related to employment practices and processes have the potential to create exclusion. It explores how leaders are facilitating inclusive experiences for staff, and outlines opportunities to increase inclusion and belonging.

Learnings:

- Respondents to the staff survey reported largely positive relationships with their managers, indicating a level of trust and respect.
- Staff have an interest in being engaged in decisions, especially those related to organizational restructuring and succession planning.
- There is a lack of consistent channels to provide feedback or voice concerns.
- Some staff find it difficult to provide input to inform Town decisions and have concerns related to retribution, reprisal and fear of job loss.
- Decision-making should create opportunities to include diverse perspectives, unique needs, and the lived experiences of staff.

6.2 Employment Policies and Practices

This section considers the ways in which power dynamics are operating in the workplace, and the importance of building policies and processes that support the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce.

Learnings:

- The population of racialized individuals in the community nearly doubled in a five-year period, whereas the overall population increased by 2.9%. This demonstrates a disproportionate change in racial and ethnic diversity compared to the overall population growth within Halton Hills.
- The Town will continue to attract and retain a more diverse workforce that is reflective of the growing community.
- Power dynamics and accountability were primary themes emerging from the policy and document review.
- Policies and procedures can cause and reinforce inequities inadvertently.
- Internal expertise and resourcing are required to implement future policies, initiatives and programs.
- A review of comparator municipalities in Halton and York regions found that most comparable municipalities already have dedicated resources to advance EDI.

6.3 Connections and Culture

This section focuses on how and (potentially) why staff are experiencing the work environment in different ways and shares some insights into the culture within the corporation.

Learnings:

- In general, the culture within the Town is one where staff work together, feel respected and belong.
- Staff experience greater feelings of inclusion, respect, and cohesion within their teams, primarily within peer-to-peer relationships.
- Departments are siloed and each department has its own culture that is highly dependent on its staff team, including managers.
- Staff have different experiences within the workplace, particularly around the ability to access opportunities for promotions, additional responsibilities, and professional development.
- Staff experiencing disabilities and from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, had lower average responses in all survey categories: belonging, culture, expression, fairness, fear/psychological safety, respect, and trust, compared to staff who do not identify as part of these communities.

- Women had lower average responses in five out of the seven categories compared to men with the most significant differences reflected in the categories of fairness, culture and fear/psychological safety.
- Policy and procedure documents provided to managers often use subjective and vague language, leading to inconsistent implementation and creating opportunities for bias to influence decision-making.

The learnings from the Existing Conditions Report support the Town's commitment to continuous improvement, being a safe and welcoming workplace, and an employer of choice. Pending further review and consideration as part of phases 2 and 3, addressing identified gaps and the implementation of recommended actions will depend on the availability of resources. Resourcing is identified as one of the key report findings. At present, the Town does not have sufficient resources to ensure implementation.

7. Safe and Welcoming Workplace Framework

The results of the audit were synthesized into a Framework to guide and organize the work going forward. The Framework includes a commitment statement, pillars, focus areas and nine goals (3 goals per pillar) - as outlined on the following page.

Safe and Welcoming Workplace: 2025 – 2030

Commitment Statement	The Town of Halton Hills cultivates a respectful and welcoming workplace that adapts to employee needs, centres employee well-being, and promotes individual and corporate accountability. We strive to be more representative of the Town's increasingly diverse population and centre collaborative approaches to achieve equitable outcomes for employees and our community.		
Pillar	Leadership and Decision-Making	Employment Policies and Practices	Connections and Cultures
Pillar Description	Leadership and Decision-Making focuses on ensuring that actions and written documentation centre transparency and consider collective impact.	Employment Policies and Practices focuses on building practices and processes that support the recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce and that allow employees to succeed.	Connections and Cultures focuses on communication, cultivating a culture of learning, and addressing the multifaceted needs of all employees.
Focus Areas	Employee Engagement		
	Employee Well-being		
	Policy and Process		
	Attraction and Retention		
	Education and Training		
Goals	Policies, procedures, by-laws, and other documents create equitable outcomes for individuals	Recruitment and hiring processes create equitable outcomes for candidates	The Town supports employee well-being and creates opportunities for connection and relationship-building
	Leadership practices and corporate actions align with the Town's commitments	The Town consistently offers accommodations and proactively creates an environment that meets employee needs	Education is prioritized to support the creation of a culture where awareness and understanding are present
	Employee experiences and feedback are collected to inform decision-making processes, initiatives, and programs	Employment processes and practices create equitable outcomes	Employees are provided with equitable opportunities for advancement and promotion

This Framework will be used as an organizing principle and lens through which to develop recommendations and actions related to each goal. The recommendations will address both individual and structural considerations.

Examples of potential recommendations are included below. These and other recommendations will require further review and contextualization:

- Establish an internal staff working group/committee to drive the Plan's implementation and track progress.
- Identify a priority list of policies and procedures to review and update.
- Publish recruitment guidelines on the Town's website outlining the hiring process
- Develop a Safe and Welcoming Workplace Toolbox on The Hills to share information, resources and training materials with staff.
- Continue to offer intra-departmental project opportunities for employee collaboration, team building and knowledge sharing.
- Explore space opportunities to identify areas in Town facilities that could be used as multi-faith pray room(s).

The final plan "Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills" will include recommendations, roles, timelines, KPI's, monitoring, resource impacts, linkages to Town policies, plans and strategies, etc.

8. Related Town Strategies and Plans

The opportunities for continuous improvement and recommendations of Safe and Welcoming Workplace align with and help advance other existing and planned Town programs, policies and/or initiatives. Where appropriate and feasible, implementation of Safe and Welcoming Workplace and, ultimately, of Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills (Phase 3 deliverable), will be leveraged through existing and planned Town plans. Among others, these include:

- Human Resources Strategic Plan
- Staff Attraction and Retention Plan
- Customer Service Strategy
- Multi-Year Accessibility Plan
- Personal Policy Manual (PPM)
- Public Conduct Policy
- Public Engagement Charter
- Inclusion Policy (Recreation)
- 2021 Specialized Transit Plan
- Affordability Policy
- Youth Engagement Policy

9. Next Steps

This report completes Phase 1. Next steps in the development and implementation of Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills include:

- Launching Phase 2 of the project: Safe and Welcoming Community, focusing on the Town as a provider of municipal services.
- Leveraging opportunities for improvement that can be undertaken with very limited existing staff resources while phases 2 and 3 are in development to ensure continuous improvement.
- Identifying resources that will be required to implement Safe and Welcoming Halton Hills – the deliverable of Phase 3.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report identifies a safe and welcoming community as one of the Town's Strategic priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement was not needed as this report is administrative in nature.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Internal Consultation was extensive for this project and included:

- Meetings with Steering Committee (4 members)
- Meetings with the Technical Advisory Committee (12 members)
- Meetings with Mayor and Council Representatives
- Project page on The Hills intranet
- Staff Survey (264 responses)
- Staff Interviews (8)
- Staff Focus Groups (10 participants)
- Healthy Environment and Community Committee – Project Status Update provided in Committee package (February 27, 2025)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications.

All three phases of this project have already been approved by Council.

Reviewed and approved by,

Samantha Howard, Director of Recreation & Cultural Services

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer