

Sensational!



*Heart of the
Rideau Canal*

Local Immigration Partnership Council

CELEBRATION EVENING DISCUSSION SESSION REPORT

Last Updated July 4, 2011

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CELEBRATION EVENING DISCUSSION SESSION REPORT

1.0 Introduction

A Celebration Evening was hosted on Thursday June 16, 2011 to officially launch Smiths Falls Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) program. The event served to build the community's awareness and excitement about the initiative. Further to the subject of this report, it also provided a forum for involving stakeholders in the identification of focus areas for the Smiths Falls Local Immigration Partnership Council (LIPC).

The LIPC is a strategic planning body working to facilitate a collaborative and comprehensive approach to newcomer integration in the community. The first phase of the initiative extends until March 31st, 2012. During this period, the LIPC will be developing a local settlement strategy and a corresponding implementation plan, meanwhile gathering the information and feedback necessary to support these deliverables.

2.0 Methodology

Approximately 60 people participated in the Celebration Evening discussion sessions. A broad range of stakeholders were present including representatives from the newcomer community, business sector, public services and local government.

Participants were assigned to one of four discussion groups, each led by an LIPC staff or member. Discussion sessions were an hour long and followed the agenda available in *Appendix A*. Responses were recorded in point form on a flip chart by the group facilitator with more detailed notes being taken by an assigned recorder.

To identify priorities, participants were asked to place a sticker on the flip chart paper next to the three points they perceived to be of greatest importance. The themes which received the most votes were later shared with the larger group.

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3.0 S.C.O.T. Analysis

The intention of this section is to summarize the main themes identified during the discussion sessions. Please note that opposing opinions were recorded and that which is presented here reflects what was indicated by the majority. All feedback however will be taken under consideration as the initiative proceeds. For complete discussion session notes, please see *Appendix B*.

The italicized numbers following the titles indicate the approximate number of votes received when participants were asked to indicate “*Which of the themes identified should the LIPC focus on?*”

3.1 Strengths

The following themes were identified from responses to the question, “*What are Smiths Falls’ strengths regarding the settlement and integration of newcomers?*”

A. Cost of Living (14): Respondents felt that Smiths Falls offers a cost of living, including purchase prices for residential units, which is lower than in city centers and surrounding communities.

B. Settlement Services (10): The various settlement services that are currently available in Smiths Falls including ESL classes, welcome wagon and newcomer ambassador training were identified as assets.

C. Public Infrastructure: Participants highlighted Smiths Falls’ public infrastructure inherent to its role as a service center as a strength. Examples most commonly cited included municipal services, the hospital and educational institutes.

i. Educational Institutes (9): Relative to its size, Smiths Falls was felt to have good educational opportunities including several high schools and post secondary institutes.

D. Location (7): Smiths Falls’ proximity to larger city centers was identified as beneficial as it increases the possibilities for employment and connections with cultural communities available to newcomers.

E. Community Atmosphere (6): Respondents perceive Smiths Falls to be a safe and friendly community, characteristics sought by newcomers.

F. Municipal Leadership (2): The strong and supportive leadership provided by Smiths Falls Town Council and Staff was felt to be a critical asset in successful newcomer settlement.

G. Natural Amenities (1): Respondents identified the natural environment including green space and the Rideau Canal as a strength for Smiths Falls.

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H. Investment Opportunities: The available business and investment possibilities were recognized as advantages for facilitating the economic integration of newcomers.

3.2 Challenges

The following themes were identified from responses to the question, “*What are Smiths Falls’ challenges regarding the settlement and integration of newcomers?*”

A. Economic Integration (32): Participants named a shortage of job opportunities as the primary barrier for newcomers.

B. Awareness about Services (12): Feedback indicated that improvements are needed to better communicate information to newcomers regarding settlement services, thereby increasing local awareness of their availability.

C. Transportation (10): Respondents felt current transportation services are neither frequent nor affordable enough to facilitate newcomers capitalizing on the aforementioned benefits offered by nearby city centers.

D. Health Care Professionals (9): The shortage of local health care professionals (most notably doctors) was identified as a challenge for newcomers.

E. Social Integration of Newcomers (6): Participants cited limited opportunities to meet and develop relationships with other residents as a hindrance to newcomer retention.

F. Understanding of Diversity (3): Despite comments indicating that Smiths Falls is becoming more accepting of new residents, others highlighted the need for a greater understanding and appreciation of diversity to be a welcoming community.

G. Critical Mass of Newcomers: Respondents cited the relatively small size of the Smiths Falls newcomer community as a barrier to providing an array of cultural and religious opportunities.

H. Residential Rental Opportunities: Rental housing was identified as a limitation to newcomer settlement in Smiths Falls for a number of reasons including a shortage of affordable units, reference requirements and negative experiences with landlords.

I. Age Specific Initiatives: Participants felt a challenge in Smiths Falls is the shortage of opportunities for demographic cohorts outside the working age group including recreational activities for youth and affordable senior’s homes.

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3.3 Opportunities

The following themes were identified from responses to the question, “*What opportunities exist for making Smiths Falls more welcoming?*”

A. Internet Communication: The internet, and more specifically the Smiths Falls Immigration Portal, was identified as an effective medium for centralizing and distributing information to newcomers and was highlighted as a resource to build upon.

B. Improvements to Transportation: The need for improvement to transportation services is recognized within the community and initiatives are underway to address it. For reasons listed above, this would be a great opportunity for newcomers in the community.

C. Secondary Migration: Newcomers who have settled in city centers and metropolitan areas represent a large and promising target market that Smiths Falls could capitalize on.

3.4 Threats

The following themes were identified from responses to the question, “*What threats could hinder the community’s ability to be welcoming?*”

A. Competition: Immigration attraction and retention is becoming an increasingly common component of community development, creating competition for newcomers and increasing the possibility of newcomers relocating after settling in Smiths Falls.

B. Retention: Outmigration of both youth and newcomers to city centers was identified as a threat for small towns and rural areas looking to settle newcomers.

C. Professional Credential Recognition: A threat relative to all Canadian communities is restrictions with credential recognition for internationally trained professionals.

4.0 Focus Areas

Based on the themes present throughout the S.C.O.T. analysis, the LIPC identified the following four (4) focus areas.

1. **Economic Integration** encompasses all factors which affect a newcomer’s ability to participate economically in the community, including:

- Training and credential recognition
- Job prospects
- Entrepreneurial and investment opportunities

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2. A **Supportive Social Environment** is the product of two distinct but related focuses:

- Social integration of newcomers with local cultural networks and residents at large
- Community wide understanding and appreciation for diversity

3. **Provision and Promotion of Services**, specifically regarding:

- Settlement services which are targeted specifically to newcomers
- Public services that apply to all who relocate to the community including education, housing and health care.

Raising newcomer's awareness regarding the availability of these services is of equal priority.

4. Developing the **Sustainability of the LIPC** in order to ensure the initiative's long term viability.

5.0 Conclusion

Work groups or subcommittees have been established to address each of the focus areas identified. The Smiths Falls Local Immigration Partnership Council is recruiting additional membership for each of these groups. Those interested should contact:

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Appendix A: Discussion Session Agenda

CELEBRATION EVENING
Discussion Session
AGENDA

1. Objective and Format

2. Participant Introductions and Expectations

3. Discussion Questions

- i. **STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES:** What are Smiths Falls' strengths regarding the settlement and integration of newcomers? What opportunities exist for making the community more welcoming?

- ii. **CHALLENGES & THREATS:** What are Smiths Falls' challenges regarding the settlement and integration of newcomers? What threats could hinder the community's ability to be welcoming?

- iii. **PRIORITIZATION (*By Vote*):** Which of the themes identified should the LIPC focus on?

- a. _____
b. _____
c. _____

- iv. **IMPLEMENTATION:** How can the community address these priority areas?

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Appendix B: Complete Discussion Session Notes

B.1 Strengths & Opportunities, Challenges & Threats, and Prioritization

The number in parenthesis indicates the approximate number of votes received when participants were asked to indicate “Which of the themes identified should the LIPC focus on?”

No.	Discussion Topic	Group #1	Group #2	Group#3	Group#4
1	Strengths and Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (6) Settlement services are already available • (5) Community has a friendly and familiar feeling • (4) Educational opportunities and Infrastructure within the community • (2) Examining transit, Viarail and buses in the future offering more trips to the city • (1) Proximity to cities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (1) Facilitates commuting which helps with employment ○ Connections to cultural networks in the city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3) Availability of language classes • (1) Ambassador program • (1) Affordable • (1) Website info accessible • (1) Quality Education • (1) Access to services- housing, family, education • Friendly residents in the community • Peaceful environment • Support of key leaders/mayor • Newspaper sharing positive stories about local newcomers • Access to services, including welcome wagon • Increasing awareness of LIP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (3) Strategic location • (3) Education – several schools right in town • (3) More affordable housing than Perth or Carleton Place • (1) Friendly and approachable leadership • (1) Proximity to larger centres • Number of accessible services available in community – library, hospital, etc • Safe • Caring and friendly people • Seems to be (more) open community • Experienced mayor with a human touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small town atmosphere: (1) schools and (7) hospital/health care • (7) Cost of living • (2) Affordability • (1) Friendliness of the town – welcoming • (1) Rideau Canal (heritage site) • Convenience – daily resources • (1) Lots of culture resources • (1) Proximity to the States • Willingness of Town to start initiative for immigrants • Excellent transportation routes • Proximity to markets

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (1) Supportive and helpful Town staff and Council • (1) Affordable residential opportunities for relative to larger centers • Local newcomers willing to participate in settlement and integration efforts, i.e. LIP program • Sense of safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural awareness • Proximity to Ottawa & gateway given position on the Rideau Canal • Increased/improved transportation • Accreditation transfer/ acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of religious worship spaces (churches) and opportunities • Business opportunities for tourism, health services (CCAC) • Investment opportunities for land • Proximity to water – recreation, allows people to associate • Greenspace – clean air and water • Transportation services improving – starting shuttle service on weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent municipal services • Small town atmosphere that is more closer to the newcomers’ atmosphere they are used to • Build relationships with immigrants in big cities to bring them to smaller cities • Communications through the internet
2	Challenges and Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (4) Awareness of Services and visibility of services • (2) Shortage of available health care providers locally • (2) Lack of understanding and respect for diversity • (1) No health card application centers here (have to travel to major city centers) • (1) No retention through relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (8) Employment • (2) Medical Access • (3) Employment and income stability • (1) Business Support • (1) Housing • (1) Transportation • (1) Business closures • (1) Lack of cultural knowledge • Weather • Substance abuse • Funds for healthcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (9) Lack of public transportation- local bus and trips to Ottawa • (8) Lack of job opportunities • (8) Creating awareness of services available • (5) Healthcare – need to attract doctors so hospital not overcrowded • (1) Developing social interactions when newcomers work so hard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (7) Employment opportunities • (4) Socioeconomic status- too many residents on assistance • (2) Doctor shortage • (2) Not enough activities for the youth • Rural to urban migration

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomer credential recognition • Residential renting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Minimum availability/ vacancy ○ Renting experience (needing references, bad attitudes from landlords) ○ Cost • Credential recognition & matching to needs of the community • Counseling/ support services for newcomer youth • Employment (depending on economic status, ie. entrepreneur) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social assistance • Availability of cultural food • Opportunities for youth • Lack of places of worship • Substance abuse • Lack of translation services • Elderly – affordability and availability of nursing homes • Sex education • Attitude • Other communities looking at attraction • Affordable housing • Family ties/homesickness • Youth outmigration • Nightlife/ social engagement • Lack of age specific activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting critical mass of immigrants from any group • Younger generation leaving for Toronto/ Montreal and reducing community’s appeal to other younger people 	
3	Priority Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settlement services are available but need to be better promoted • Friendly, familiar feeling in the community • Educational opportunities & infrastructure available within the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Social Integration & peer involvement • Availability of language courses and other settlement services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public transportation • Lack of job opportunities • Making people aware of services available for newcomers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Hospitals and health care • Cost of Living

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B.2 Implementation

Where time permitted, discussion groups were asked, “How can the community address these priority areas?” Two of four groups recorded responses which are listed below.

- Build on/advertise the success of newcomers who have been in the community
 - Publish and Advertise success stories more (related to assets), Ram says having his success story on the immigration portal actually helps businesses
 - More stories on website
- Develop and implement an education strategy to increase cultural understanding and awareness, including exposure through festivals and music, etc.
- Capitalize on and market the unique assets of the community Culture Days
- Create a temporary shelter where people can stay when they arrive
- Have a single and visible first point of contact and source for information
- Offer support services for spouses
- Increase sport, recreational and entertainment offerings and promotion
- Increase availability of counselling and settlement services
- Farm community gardens
- Facilitate social Integration through host program, peer Involvement, etc.
- Youth Forum statistics;
- Host a round table for lower income youths
- Offer different and expanded post-secondary courses by having a bigger campus
- Promote self employment
- Partner with local businesses to gain job info
- Collect labour market information
- Review tax structure
- Promote economic development in the town to gain investment
- Improve access to other jobs markets in larger centres, example commuter service
- Local programming via media
- Promotions and events to showcase culture
- Publish newspaper articles in other languages

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