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Community Voices Talk of Inclusion

Burlington, March 23, 2005: Community Development Halton today released a report containing findings and recommendations on social inclusion in Burlington. *Inclusive Cities Canada – Burlington: Community Voices, Perspectives and Priorities* was prepared by Community Development Halton (CDH) for a Civic Panel of community leaders from human service agencies, municipal and regional organizations, and community groups in Burlington and Halton Region. The Civic Panel is co-chaired by Mayor Rob Maclsaac and CDH Executive Director Dr. Joey Edwardh.

The report is based on findings from focus groups, small group discussions, interviews and a survey that together involved nearly 250 members of the community. Burlington is one of five cities across Canada participating in the federally-funded Inclusive Cities Canada initiative. The others are Saint John, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver/North Vancouver. All five cities released their reports today.

Inclusive Cities Canada is a unique participatory research initiative examining social inclusion as a framework for building people-friendly cities, promoting good urban governance and developing strategies to support urban diversity. The aim of Inclusive Cities Canada is to strengthen the capacity of cities across Canada to create and sustain inclusive communities for the mutual benefit of all people.

“The composition of Burlington’s Civic Panel, and the participation of so many local individuals and organizations, speaks highly of our community’s commitment and leadership

in helping Burlington, and communities across Canada, build social inclusion,” says Mayor Rob Maclsaac.

An inclusive city is one that strives to reduce inequality and addresses the concerns of those who are vulnerable for reasons of poverty, racism or fear of difference, age or mental or physical disabilities. It provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults.

The report is a first step in ongoing work. “We are discovering that, as communities change, we need to engage in a conscious process to continually monitor and foster social inclusion,” says Dr. Edwardh. “A key recommendation is the establishment of an ongoing Inclusive Burlington Civic Panel to continue this work. Burlington participants recognized many programs and services in the community that already contribute to social inclusion. They have also suggested many positive changes that can be made to policies and practices at various levels of government, by organizations and the community at large, which informed the Civic Panel as it developed its recommendations.”

The report can be found online at www.cdhalton.ca and www.inclusivecities.ca

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Burlington participants overwhelmingly support the building of social inclusion and identified core building blocks of social inclusion, including:

- Investment and re-investment in social infrastructure
- Poverty reduction
- Secure and adequate employment
- Alleviating shortages of affordable, accessible and supportive housing
- Effective, affordable, accessible mass transit
- Affordable, appropriate child care
- Developing in the community at large, awareness and attitudes which foster social inclusion and civic engagement
- Improving the social inclusion of groups identified as vulnerable, such as youth, seniors, newcomers, those living in poverty and those living with mental or physical disabilities
- A wide variety of free and low-cost activities
- Physical accessibility of public and private buildings, amenities and spaces

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Priority Recommendation

Pertains to the establishment of an ongoing Inclusive Burlington Civic Panel

- To include municipal and regional government, human service agencies, community groups, and representatives of various diversities in Burlington.
- Mandate to monitor and evaluate the state of social inclusion and to recommend and advocate policies and practices, to all levels of government and to the public, that continue to ensure a socially inclusive Burlington

Communication, Awareness and Knowledge

Recommendations include measures related to:

- Enhancing awareness of the city's growth and changing socio-demographic characteristics
- Integrating or continuing to integrate diversity-competence training into existing learning programs for staff of local authorities
- Developing partnerships to orient and assist newcomers to Burlington
- Federal initiatives to assist in the settlement of newcomers
- Fostering civic engagement and awareness
- Fostering community awareness of programs and services through 211 and 311 services

Social Development and Infrastructure

Recommendations include measures related to:

- Reduction of poverty
- Funding for social, educational, recreational and transit programs and services
- A National Early Learning and Child Care and Development strategy
- Economic development to provide adequate income and working conditions
- Affordable, accessible and supportive housing
- Social assistance
- Minimum wage
- A National Housing Strategy
- Partnerships to address gaps in human services, including shelter needs, services for those with mental illness, affordable supportive housing, accessible housing and funding for home care
- Reinvestment in social infrastructure by Federal and Provincial governments
- Public transit within Burlington, the Region of Halton and the Greater Golden Horseshoe area
- Life and employment skills training
- Employment opportunities through economic development strategies
- Recreation and arts programs
- City planning for social inclusion

Civic Engagement and Community Problem-Solving

Recommendations include measures related to:

- Enhancing local awareness of community issues
- Advisory committees to local government
- Incorporating social inclusion as a “lens” in decision-making
- Enhancing resident engagement in local government