**Council Direction:**

This report is presented for the information of Council.

**Information:**

Over the past three years, the City’s practice of recognizing various religious observances has evolved into a program which aims to give recognition to religious occasions of significance; providing an opportunity to embrace the recognition of the diversity of faiths adhered to by members of our community. Having visible signs of celebration of diverse religious observances may help the community to move towards welcoming the diversity in all aspects of the community’s life.

One of the aims of the Ontario Human Rights Code is to “create a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and feels able to contribute to the community”, (Policy on Creed and the Accommodation of Religious Observances, Ontario Human Rights Commission, w.w.w. May, 2005). Considering the desire expressed by many in the community to retain the traditional Christmas messages, it is equally important to give recognition to the observances of other faith communities in Hamilton in order to show respect and to ensure a feeling of belonging in their community.

Following consultation in 2005 with the Interfaith Council, the Committee against Racism and a representative of the Community Coalition against Racism, staff have followed a program since mid 2005 recommended by the Interfaith Council and endorsed by the Committee against Racism as follows:

**Current Program**

- Print ads recognizing major religious occasions are continuing and will be determined in an ongoing fashion in conjunction with the Interfaith Council, as well as, representatives of the major faith groups in Hamilton;
Continuation of traditional signage observing Christmas (the mountain, City Hall, Gore Park);
Central signage recognizing these observances at City Hall – central signage at City Hall is planned, on an interim basis, during the reconstruction of City Hall; banners are to be displayed during the construction timeframe, either at the front of City Hall or in another alternate central site (Hamilton Place, etc.);
Recognition of these observances on the City’s website – work is still underway with respect to diversity matters on the City’s portal;
Offering of display case in City Hall for information displays about these observances – this has been done intermittently in the past and will be reinstituted following the reopening of City Hall following construction.

In 2006, this program has, and will, give recognition to the following significant occasions:

- Eid-al Adha, Eid-el-Fitr (Muslim)
- Chinese New Year
- Easter, Christmas (Christian)
- Ridvan (Baha’i)
- National Aboriginal Day
- Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah (Jewish)
- Diwali (Hindu)
- Guru Nanak’s Birthday (Sikh)
- Kwanzaa

It is intended that the future program will largely follow the interim program, with the exception that it is hoped that there will be a consistent central location for electronic signage at City Hall, with the re-opening of City Hall at the end of the reconstruction period, approximately 2010, and there should be an ability to offer a display case for information displays about these observances.

Staff will continue, as necessary, to liaise with the Interfaith Council to continue with the program of embracing the diversity of faiths adhered to by our community members.

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Joseph L. Rinaldo
General Manager
Finance and Corporate Services