Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

Values: Honesty, Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Respect, Excellence, Teamwork

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<th>TO: Mayor and Members Committe of the Whole</th>
<th>WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE</th>
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<td>COMITTEE DATE: September 14, 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Implementation of 211 in Hamilton (FCS10079) (City Wide)</td>
<td>PREPARED BY: Jane Lee (905) 546-2424 ext. 2654</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUBMITTED BY: Jane Lee, Acting General Manager Finance &amp; Corporate Services Department</td>
<td>SIGNATURE:</td>
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Council Direction: Not applicable.

Information:

In the spring of 2010, the City of Hamilton was informed by the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton that 211Ontario would be launching 211 service for the people of Hamilton in September, 2010. 211 service in Hamilton will be provided by 211 Niagara, (run by Information Niagara) who will also be providing service to Haldimand County, Norfolk County, the City of Brantford and the County of Brant. After hours and holiday service will be provided by Toronto 211.

The 211 system will be launched on September 24, 2010. Following the launch, callers in Hamilton will be able to call 211 to get local information and appropriate referrals regarding community resources, and human services agencies. Representatives of the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton, 211Ontario and 211Niagara will be present at the Committee of the Whole meeting on September 14, 2010 to make a presentation and respond to questions from the members of Council. Attached as Appendix A to Report FCS10079 is a copy of the questions staff posed to 211Ontario and their responses.

Background:

In August, 2001, the CRTC approved the use of 211 as a three digit telephone number for access to community information and referral services, and has become a standard in North America. 211 service is defined as follows:
“211 connects people with reliable information, and provides access to a broad range of community resources, social, health and related government services and programs.

By dialing 211, callers are directly connected to certified information and referral specialist, trained to assess each caller's needs, provide accurate information, and advise people about the most appropriate service or program available.”

211Ontario.ca is a “…user-friendly resource for anyone who is looking for human services in Ontario, offering a fully searchable, bilingual point of access to over 56,000 community, social, health and related government programs and services in Ontario.” (from www.211Ontario.ca)

As a follow-up to the CRTC decision in 2001, a conceptual plan for providing 211 service across Ontario was developed by the provincial United Way organization and the provincial Inform Ontario agency, proposing that the province would be divided into a number of areas, covering several municipalities, for provision of 211 services.

Since the 211 plan was developed for Ontario, a number of communities have already implemented 211 service, although implementation has been relatively slow. At the present time, 211 service is available in Ontario in Toronto, Ottawa, Peel Region, Halton Region, Windsor-Essex, Niagara Region, Simcoe County and Ontario North (Thunder Bay and District) representing approximately 57% of the province’s population. The plan for 211Ontario is to expand access to 211 services to the majority of the province by June of 2011.

**Implications for the City of Hamilton**

There are a number of areas of possible implications for the City of Hamilton.

1) **Funding Model**

The CRTC decision establishing 211 as a three digit number for access to community information and referral services did not establish a funding mechanism for the service. A stable funding model does not yet exist. Existing 211 services in Ontario are funded through collaborative efforts of the Province of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, United Way agencies and municipalities.

As the 211 system relies on a database of local resources and services available, they rely on the information & referral data presently provided and maintained by Inform Hamilton and their community partners of Dundas Community Services, Flamborough Information and Community Services and Ancaster Community Services.

The City of Hamilton has been requested verbally, as has the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton, to continue to provide the current level of funding to Inform
Hamilton for information and referral services, as the municipal contribution to the implementation of 211. The city has provided grants (through the Community Partnership Program) for information and referral services to Inform Hamilton and the other community partners (Ancaster Community Services, Dundas Community Services and Flamborough Information and Community Services) for many years. In 2010, grants for Information and Referral to the 4 community agencies total $167,793. Inform Hamilton receives $81,228 in 2010 for information and referral services. The United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton also provide funding to Inform Hamilton to support information and referral services.

In the long term, 211Ontario is intending to work with the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton to establish a more stable funding model. They will also work with AMO to include municipalities formally into the funding model. The funding model for all municipalities has yet to be determined. In the interim, 211Ontario and the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton have verbally asked that the City of Hamilton continue to fund Inform Hamilton at the existing level to maintain the database of local community serving agencies and resources.

As more information becomes available on the proposed funding model for 211 and municipal funding expectations are better known, it may be necessary for Council to review the levels of funding provided to programs currently receiving funding from the Community Partnership Program for information and referral programs.

2) City of Hamilton Call Volumes
A number of factors were reviewed to try to anticipate possible implications to the call volumes at the City of Hamilton. Calls for municipal services received by 211 will still be referred to the City. Inform Hamilton and the community partners currently provide to callers the same type of information that 211Niagara will provide (providing information and referral to community services), and their annual call volume is quite low. During the first 7 months of 2010, Inform Hamilton received 2,061 calls, giving an estimated annual volume of calls of approximately 3,500. Experience in the first few years of 211 implementation in other municipalities has not resulted in major impacts on the call loads at the municipal level. This may change over time, depending on the usage of 211 services. As well, 211Ontario is intending to improve their 211Ontario website – with more residents encouraged to go online for their information, fewer phone calls should result.

3) Call Routing
The approval of 211 by the CRTC did not provide a mechanism for enhanced routing to allow for calls to be routed within their municipal boundaries, rather than within the telephone exchanges. Telephone exchange boundaries cross municipal boundaries. The decision requires that an agency or municipality implementing 211 would have to choose to take calls from all callers within telephone exchange boundaries, regardless
of which municipality they live in. In other words, an implementing agency would have to take all or none of the calls in a specified exchange. When Halton implemented 211 service in 2007, the City of Hamilton was requested and agreed to provide consent to Halton Region for 211 to be implemented in 3 exchanges which cross the municipal boundaries into the City of Hamilton. The 3 exchanges and household counts in 2007 were as follows:

Campbellville exchange - 22 households in Hamilton, 2312 in Halton
Hunter exchange – 54,713 households in Hamilton, 1189 in Halton
Waterdown exchanges – 10,541 households in Hamilton, 399 in Halton

On February 14, 2007, Council passed the following motion:

a) That the City of Hamilton consent to the inclusion of three shared telephone exchanges (Campbellville, Hunter and Waterdown) in the implementation of 211 by the Regional Municipality of Halton at this time, provided this continues to be at no cost to the City of Hamilton or its constituents; and

b) That this matter be reviewed in the future at such point in time that 211 service provision is proposed for the remainder of the City of Hamilton.

As anticipated by the motion in 2007, the 2 exchanges with the majority of households in Hamilton (Hunter and Waterdown) have been re-directed so that calls originating from these exchanges will be responded to by 211Niagara. As 211 service providers share the information database across the province, Hamilton residents in the Campbellville exchange will continue to be able to access the same information and referral services through 211Halton.

211Ontario has now been designated as the approval agency for the telephone exchange boundary matters, so the City of Hamilton is no longer required to consent to any of these changes or to the implementation of 211 in Hamilton.

**One Number to Call**

Access to human services available in communities is important to the health and well-being of community members. With many agencies providing a variety of services, it can be difficult for community members to figure out which agency is responsible for what service and to find the appropriate contact information to access those services. Services such as 211, increase the ease with which people can access needed services, and is therefore of benefit to the community.
211 Questions

Q: Define 211 - how is 211 different from a municipal call centre (211 mentions that it provides access to government services), relationship to 311 and municipal call centres.

We define 211 as a two-channel information system, which provides access to a broad range of human services.

211 is designed to provide access to human services, whether provided by the government or the non-profit sector, whereas, 311 municipal call-centers generally offers callers access to municipal government services.

When the CRTC assigned 311 to improve access to municipal services, it did so, but positioned 311 as distinct and complementary to 211. This was an intentional separation during the creation process of the 211 and 311 systems.

Q: What is the typical uptake of 211 (web and telephone) for new locations?
- start-up vs. mature, % and # of calls and web access per 1,000 population.

Phone: We anticipate that within the first year; between 5 to 10% of the population will access the 211 service, depending on the extent of awareness building and marketing activities. We expect this number to grow to 20% within five years. However, since 211 is a relatively new service and our experience is still limited, we cannot be sure where 211 will top out.

Web: The website is currently available province-wide. It is more difficult to gauge and track the website usage on a community-by-community basis through IP addresses. However, we have been able to collect accurate metrics in terms of hits, unique page views, etc.

Q: Do municipalities see an increase or decrease in telephone calls because of the implementation of 211 service in their community?

Studies that were done prior to the implementation of 211 indicated that a citizen looking for human services would on average make seven calls before finding the right service. With the availability of 211 in a region, municipalities should experience a decline in erroneous calls.
Q: How much is the 211 cost per call and cost per call minute? (Niagara and provincial average)

211 costs vary from provider to provider, based on volume of calls received. High volume providers see cost per calls of about $5 – 6.00. The median cost per call in Ontario is currently $8.00 per call. We anticipate this cost will drop as call volumes continue to grow. The average call time ranges between 1.5 - 2.5 minutes.

Q: What is the current call rate for information Niagara?
Niagara’s current cost is approximately $7.50 per call.

Q: How much does 211 cost to run each year (province) and how are the funds spent?

The cost of 211 at current operational levels is approximately $8 million. At maturity, the cost will be approximately $13 -15 million dollars, but again, this range will depend on the success of marketing initiatives and the volume of calls received.

Approximately 75% of the funding received, goes towards the salaries of staff who answer the phones. The remaining 25% covers technology, overhead and administration costs.

Q: What is the cost of the operation of the 211 Corporate office?
The operational cost of Ontario 211 Services Corp is approximately $750,000.

Q: What is the current cost for 211 for municipalities? What are these costs based on?

There are currently no fixed costs for municipalities. Some municipalities have shown great leadership and currently fund 100% of the cost of 211 in their communities, while others are funding significantly less.

Deloitte has recommended that the municipalities share 20% of the cost of delivering 211 in their communities. These costs are based on historical patterns of municipal support for the provision of human services, and information and referral services and the perceived value of 211 services to municipal residents.

Q: What are we, the City of Hamilton, being asked to do for the implementation of 211? (i.e. what are we being asked to fund and how for 2010?)

We are asking the City of Hamilton to leverage it’s goodwill to support the implementation and promotion of 211 to its citizens by using existing channels of communication (i.e. website, piggy-backing on mailings etc.)
We are not asking for direct funding at this time. 211 proposes to leverage existing investments that the city makes in the Inform Hamilton database, and will ultimately be seeking an agreement between the provincial government and the municipal sector through the MOU table process, designed to facilitate cost sharing agreements.

**Q: When would the municipal funding for 211 change?**

It will change once agreements are in place between the provincial government and the municipal sector, and as a similar agreement is reached and implemented with Ontario’s United Ways.

**Q: Estimated date for budget purposes?**

We are making active efforts, but I prefer not to speculate on the timing of matters we don’t control.

**Q: How long has the province committed funding for?**

The province has committed ongoing funding to 211, currently that commitment is for $4 million annually.

**Q: Who currently funds 211? What does the province currently fund? What are municipalities expected to fund?**

The provincial government is a significant funder of 211. Municipalities, particularly those who were early implementers, are significant funders. The federal government through Citizenship and Immigration Canada has also been a strong supporter of 211 in communities that receive large number of newcomers. The Ontario Trillium Foundation has provided significant project funding, but it is not seen as a long-term project funder. Various United Ways, as the main proponents of 211, have contributed significant funds to the development and delivery of 211.

The province currently provides Ontario 211 Services Corporation (O211SC) with $4 million dollars annually and the bulk of those dollars are distributed to the eight Service Providers for service delivery, expansion and system development.

In the short term we expect to leverage existing municipal investments; in the long-term we expect municipalities to contribute 20% of the total cost of 211’s service delivery.

**Q: How does 211 link into the province’s Poverty Strategy?**
The province has positioned funding for 211 in its overall Poverty Reduction Strategy.  
Please provide a backgrounder.  Please see the following link:  
http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/growingstronger/report/btc/chapter4.aspx,  
look under the section on “smarter government”.

Q: What information currently exists regarding who contacts 211? Are there demographic profiles of 211 users (telephone and web) that can be shared?

211 does not collect personal information about individual callers but, we do collect significant demographic information about callers. From demographic data collected, we know, for example, that 2/3 of callers are women, 60% of callers lack full-time employment and 10% of callers are seniors. We also know that 94% of callers follow up on referrals received and 87% of callers report finding the help they needed.

Yes, we can share the demographics profiles of 211 users.

Q: Which communities currently have 211? Which ones are planning to launch in 2010?

Approximately 57% of Ontario residents have access to the 211 service and those communities are spread throughout Ontario. (see attached map)

We have a map which shows the planned expansion of 211 coverage to June 2011. (see attached map)

Q: Are the calls currently categorized? Are they informational vs. triage? First call resolution vs. transfers? Can reports from the Niagara call-centre be shared?

Yes, calls are categorized. 211 Service Providers categorize calls based on 19 service categories. Calls are both informational and triaged calls.

211 does not provide fulfillment for callers, in terms of access to service, instead we provide connectivity using established techniques of information and referral.

Yes, reports from Niagara can be shared. Please see attachments from Niagara 211.

Q: What metrics exists for the 211 website? Is there an effort to drive citizens to the web instead of the telephone?
Standard website metrics such as hits, visitors etc. are available. Significant enhancements to the website and its capacity to collect metrics will be implemented in the near future.

**Q: Estimated date for implementation?**
Within a year.

**Q: Who uses the website?**

Both citizens and Service Providers are able to use the website, however the majority of users are front-line professionals including police officers, clinicians, community workers, etc. who use the site as a primary tool in service delivery.

**Q: Are there demographics for website users? Is it Service Providers or citizens using the site?**

Again, the demographics for website usage are weaker than those for the phones, primarily because of the anonymity of the Internet. Our information about citizens is based on Internet surveys, which poses an inherent problem to the reliability of this data because it is dependent on the degree to which people participate in those surveys and whether or not this is truly representative of all users of 211.

We do encourage callers who are making simple information requests to use the web channel wherever possible. For example, a client who know what service they need and are simply seeking a phone number.

In the case of more vulnerable callers, a 211 Information and Referral Specialist can play a key role in helping direct callers to the specific services that satisfy their immediate needs, while also recommending other services the client might require. Part of what a trained Information and Referral Specialist does is probe for root-causes, and assist with navigating the system.

**Q: How many “hits” did 211Niagara website experienced last year?**

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<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Hits</td>
<td>2,854,566</td>
<td>3,621,787</td>
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<tr>
<td># Unique Visitors</td>
<td>201,423</td>
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<td>301,846</td>
<td>318,796</td>
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<tr>
<td># Visitor Sessions</td>
<td>457,576</td>
<td>604,963</td>
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**Q: What steps have gone into making the site usable and useful? What plans are underway to improve the site?**

Significant work was done to ensure that the website met the requirements of a broad range of users, including users with various disabilities. We recently
completed a project with a firm that specializes in website usability and are in the process of implementing those usability enhancements.

There are a number of initiatives underway to enhance the user experiences and move the site from a first generation search site into a more interactive one that engages users more effectively.

- Is there a different principle between servicing on the web versus servicing on the telephone?

Yes, we see a significant difference between clients who are being serviced through the web vs. the phone, the most obvious being the degree to which the phone enables the 211 Information Specialist to probe for root-causes of the caller’s problem. The 211 Information Specialists are trained to probe for underlying issues and connect to other services that address multiple needs of clients, an element not possible on web interactions. The human touch available over the phone is a critical piece, which is not picked up by a web search.

- Does 211 direct calls to the City of Hamilton’s human services departments? What protocols are followed for this?

Yes, we would direct calls to the City’s departments that providing human services. In the case of emergencies and personal endangerment, we work closely with 911 first responders, and other crisis service providers.

Specific protocols are required for 911 and crisis service providers.

Q: Does the contract with Inform Hamilton, for data collection provide for the maintenance only of the same information that is currently provided on the 211Ontario website, or does it include requirements to streamline and reorganize the data?

There is currently no contract between Inform Hamilton and 211, however we anticipate there will be an agreement between Inform Hamilton and Information Niagara concerning the access to data records required by 211 Ontario. The scope of the records being included is subject to discussions by the Inclusion/Exclusion Task Group, a sub-committee of 211 Service Providers. A Compensation model is currently under development to remunerate Data Providers for the records that are used by Ontario 211

Q: How will the data on the 211 website be shared with the community who funds the data collection? What if any are the long-term plans for sharing the data? Will the ownership of the data change with the change in funding?
The data on the 211 website is shared openly as the site is publically accessible to anybody with internet connectivity/access. In general, one of the key value propositions of 211 is that human services data can be professionally collected, managed and then shared broadly with community stakeholders, thus eliminating the current duplication and overlap of effort and expense.

No, we do not believe ownership of data will change with changes in funding. In most cases, data that is supported by investments from governments and United Way is viewed as a community asset.

Q: Who can we contact at AMO to get the municipal perspective/position on 211 funding?

While there has been dialogue with AMO over the years about 211, there has not been a specific discussion with AMO recently. However the AMO Executive Director is aware of 211 and we anticipate meetings at the staff level in the near future as we move to bring the issue of 211 funding to the MOU table.

Q. When do you anticipate our financial support (UW and City) is expected to begin?
We are making active efforts, but I prefer not to speculate on the timing of matters we don’t control.