

## Report says S.C. needs to become more welcoming to newcomers

Swift Current needs an attitude adjustment.

That's one of the findings in a consultant's report prepared for Action Swift Current, which is trying to develop a distinctive "brand" to help market the city.

A preliminary concept was put forward in the summer based on discussions with community groups to paint the city as welcoming, warm and inviting with the tagline "Swift Current – The Open Door City".

That idea will have to be abandoned after more extensive consultations held earlier this fall with stakeholders found the exact opposite is true, according to the report by the Calgary firm Parallel Strategies.

"Everyone kept saying how open they were. What that actually in reality is, is an aspiration to be open. When we went back and validated that, people feel that people are not as open they possibly should be – in particular with respect to ethnicity," Parallel Strategies president Larry Bannerman said in a telephone interview Thursday.

City Councillor and Action Swift Current member Jerrod Schafer said in an interview Tuesday more effort has to be put into making the city more attractive to newcomers.

"We talk the talk but we certainly don't walk the walk. We like to think that we're an open door community and a welcoming community and supportive of growth and new business. But what they found in the report is that we aren't. I think that's something we seriously need to address because from what I've heard, that's something we all want is to be that (open door) community."

In addition to finding ways to welcome new businesses, Schafer said work needs to be done to help change attitudes in the city.

"As a City Council, we need to sit down with other groups like Action Swift Current and find ways to change the mentality and attitude of Swift Current overall," Schafer said.

Parallel Strategies' report was prepared after meeting with 11 local stakeholder groups over three days in October. Various members of the community, ranging from retailers to local business people, realtors, police and health care providers were among those involved in the research.

"Yes, the City of Swift Current is accepting of new people, provided that they are married Caucasians with children and had lived in the community for not less than 30 years," reads one section of the report.

Bannerman emphasized his firm's research is an accurate representation of what was learned in October.

"It's really important to know that the internal stakeholder report is a summation of what the citizens of Swift Current told us," he said.

The report urges Action Swift Current to take steps to address the issue.

"We should encourage Action Swift Current to include a social behavioural modification plan as part of the ongoing repositioning for the city. This plan will be required to soften current citizens' positions on ethnicity, multiculturalism and immigration in order for the community to embrace newcomers of all types of backgrounds, warmly, genuinely and with sincerity," it reads.

Parallel's report also contains many positive findings about Swift Current. An over-riding theme that emerged during research is the belief by residents that one of the city's key assets is the high quality of life it has to offer.

Affordability, accessibility, education, health care, culture, recreation, environment and security were all cited as strengths.

Bannerman said he will be meeting with Action Swift Current, perhaps as early as this week, to present other branding options for the group to consider.

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