

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE – MAY 31, 2011

HOSTING THE 2011 YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK OF YORK REGION'S SIXTH ANNUAL ECOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

Recommendation

The City Manager and the Manager of Environmental Sustainability, in consultation with the Director of Economic Development recommend:

1. That the City of Vaughan partner with the Youth Environmental Network of York Region to host the Youth Environmental Network of York Region's Sixth Annual Ecological Conference in October/November 2011; and,
2. That Council authorize the execution of a letter agreement with Youth Environmental Network of York Region.

Contribution to Sustainability

Leadership, advocacy and education are a few of the core principles that guide our actions on sustainability. An example of how the City can demonstrate all three principles is to share sustainable best practices in a conference setting. Therefore, by engaging and educating the youth of our community through a conference the City is contributing to the sustainability of Vaughan.

In addition, a new theme that will be integrated into the Sixth Annual Ecological Conference will be focused on youth entrepreneurship and the impact that our future businesses will have on our overall quality of life. To create a vibrant community, business leaders of tomorrow must understand, learn and create sustainable business practices.

Economic Impact

The estimated cost to the City to host the Sixth Annual Ecological Conference, including workshop speakers honorariums, participant expenses and administrative expense is \$7,500. These costs have been allocated in the 2011 Operating budget of the Office of Environmental Sustainability (\$2,500) and Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre (\$5,000). In addition, the City of Vaughan would make available the Multi-Purpose room and several Committee rooms on the day of the conference.

Communications Plan

A more detailed communications strategy will be developed in partnership with Corporate Communications. However, the Youth Environmental Network of York Region are committed to securing strong participation from Vaughan area high schools. The Network will be using a variety of measures including traditional print and social media to encourage York Region youth to attend the event. Wherever possible, the environmental club at each high school will be contacted prior to the summer break to begin to generate interest and awareness of the Conference. When the 2011|2012 school year begins in September, the Youth Environmental Network of York Region will be sending additional communication about the Conference to each high school.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the benefits to the City of hosting the Youth Environmental Network of York Region's Sixth Annual Ecological Conference at Vaughan City Hall in October/November 2011 and confirm the City as a hosting partner.

Background - Analysis and Options

Youth Environmental Network of York Region

The Youth Environmental Network of York Region (YENYR) is a group of students working to raise awareness of the environment among young people in York Region. The Youth Environmental Network has grown from a group of five Markham students in 2008 to a network of more than 300 youth volunteers across York Region. YENYR has developed a strong relationship with the York Region Environmental Alliance who have been at the forefront of supporting a youth network within York Region that is dedicated toward awareness of environmental issues and actions.

The YENYR members encourage their peers in the communities in which they live to contribute to the well being of the community through local environmental and sustainable initiatives and action plans. YENYR also works to facilitate and enhance cooperation between youth environmental groups.

Annual Ecological Conference

Coordination and delivery of an Annual Ecological Conference for Youth is one of YENYR's core activities and has been previously hosted in Markham, Aurora, and Richmond Hill. Most recently, at the Fifth Annual Ecological conference held at the Markham Civic Centre on November 26, 2010 the conference attracted approximately 300 attendees. High school students from across York Region are invited to attend this full-day event and are accompanied by a teacher. A maximum of 10 students per school are permitted to attend to ensure a fair balance of students from across the Region. Participants from the same school are also encouraged to carpool and in some cases the school will bus students. Every effort will be made to minimize the impact on parking at the host site.

Generally, the conference agenda has a keynote address, opportunity for the high school environmental clubs to network and share best practices and then participate in assigned breakout sessions that cover topics such as; climate change, toxics reduction, climate change, water conservation, sustainable consumption, local food, sustainable production and consumption, social activism. The YENYR coordinating committee, which oversees the conference has in the past, secured high-level keynote speakers such as; Justin Trudeau, Severn Cullis-Suzuki and David Williams.

As previously noted, Staff in the Environmental Sustainability Office and the Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre will be introducing a new learning opportunity at the conference – Youth Entrepreneurship.

Youth Entrepreneurship – Environmental and Sustainable Practices

The development of the green sector can be very rewarding both from a social and financial perspective. Youth participation in developing this emerging business market forms a stronger understanding of the balance between the environment, society and the economy. The proposed youth entrepreneurship session will focus on encouraging the participants to consider the Summer Company program opportunities to become entrepreneurs by operating their own green business during the summer. The Summer Company is a great opportunity for

enterprising young people to obtain a provincial grant of up to \$3,000 who want to start and run their own summer businesses while receiving hands-on business coaching and mentoring from local Vaughan community business leaders through the Vaughan Business Enterprise Centre.

A tradeshow type display will be set up to showcase the Summer Company Program. By engaging youth of our community in this setting the City is recognizing youth as assets and leaders in supporting and continuing to build healthy environmentally sustainable communities and creating a springboard for promoting the Summer Company Initiative.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 20|20 Strategic Plan

This report is consistent with the Vaughan Vision 20|20 priority to lead and promote environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, hosting the Youth Environmental Network of York Region's Sixth Annual Ecological Conference addresses the following objectives outlined in *Green Directions Vaughan*:

5.1 To share sustainable best practices and ideas between and among municipal staff and the community

5.2 To continue the City's role in advocacy and information sharing on environmental issues

Regional Implications

Educating the youth in York Region in environmental and sustainable best practices affects the quality of life across the Region. Any lessons learned from hosting the conference will be shared with other municipalities within York Region who may be interested in hosting future events. York Region staff that have responsibility for promoting sustainability will also be invited to attend the event to learn how best to engage this demographic of the population.

Conclusion

Hosting the Youth Environmental Network of York Region's Sixth Annual Ecological Conference at Vaughan City Hall in 2011 is an excellent opportunity to engage youth in sustainability issues by showcasing how the City of Vaughan is leading by example and highlighting how Vaughan based businesses are contributing to a sustainable future.

Through *Green Directions Vaughan*, staff have identified Youth as one of the targeted demographics in the environmental education strategy for citizens that is currently under development. Engaging youth at the Environmental Network of York Region's Ecological Conference will provide a strong foundation for implementing the citizen environmental education strategy.

Attachments

N/A

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Respectfully submitted,

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