

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE- MARCH 3, 2015

OPEN STREETS INITIATIVE

Recommendation

The Interim City Manager and Manager of Environmental Sustainability in consultation with the Director of Recreation and Culture, City Clerk and Commissioner of Planning recommend:

1. That the City of Vaughan recruit a citizen led Vaughan Open Streets Working Group to assist with developing a project plan to host an Open Streets Vaughan event in the summer of 2016.

Contribution to Sustainability

Leadership and action are core principles that guide our actions on sustainability. This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council in the *Green Directions Vaughan*, the Community Sustainability and Environmental Master Plan:

- Goal 5, Objective 5.2: to continue the City's role in advocacy and information sharing on environmental issues; and
- Goal 1, Objective 1.1: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards carbon neutrality for the City of Vaughan's facilities and infrastructure.
- Goal 4: Objective 4.1: to foster a city with a strong social cohesion with a specific action (4.1.9) to support outdoor recreation activities that engage citizens as described in *Vaughan's Active Together Master Plan*.

An Open Streets initiative will provide an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in community recreation programming that closely aligns with two of the City's Master plans.

Economic Impact

There is no immediate impact at this stage of the planning process. A final budget will be developed in partnership with the Vaughan Open Streets Working Group which will be highly dependent on the route length, location, activities, security staffing and other such variables. Corporate sponsorships are expected to be main revenue source. Should there be additional costs associated with the City's participation in an Open Streets event, staff will submit a request, as part of the 2016 budget consideration process outlining the associated costs prior to committing to undertake any related initiatives.

Communications Plan

The Vaughan Open Streets Committee will be tasked with building awareness of the public about the event. Should funding be secured to run the event, the Environmental Sustainability Office will work with Corporate Communications to develop a communications plan to promote the initiative to the community throughout the City which will compliment the efforts by the Vaughan Open Streets Committee.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to report back on the administrative, logistical and financial resources required to execute an Open Streets initiative in the City of Vaughan and recommend how best to implement such an initiative in the future.

Background - Analysis and Options

At the June 17, 2014 Committee of the Whole meeting a member's resolution directed that the Environmental Sustainability Office work with Development Engineering and Infrastructure Planning Services and Recreation along with community partners to explore the feasibility of piloting an Open Streets day.

An Open Streets event involves temporarily making the Streets open to people and closed to cars over a 4-5 hour period. The streets would be made available to residents as 'paved parks' for recreational and cultural activities. The main objectives of an Open Streets event are to promote healthier lifestyles, improve social cohesion, develop new ways of interacting with a community catalyze economic reactivation of a community and protect the environment by improving air quality through reduced vehicle emissions.

The Ciclovía event in Bogota, first established in 1974, has long been considered the hallmark Open Streets event. Currently Bogota holds a Ciclovía or open streets event every Sunday and holiday from 7am to 2pm (total of 72 events a year) on a network of 121 km of streets. Between 2008 and 2013 more than 90 cities in the U.S. hosted an open streets event. An estimated 600,000 - 1,400,000 people participate in these events. In 2014, Kingston, Toronto, Thunder Bay and Windsor all initiated efforts to host an Open Streets event. These Ontario events measured success through a variety of means including post event evaluation surveys, on-site questionnaires and attendance numbers.

City of Vaughan staff formed an Open Streets advisory working group which included participation from York Region's Active and Sustainable Transportation team and York Region Public Health staff as well as a Vaughan resident with interest in active transportation. The advisory working group met on four occasions to discuss the key elements of an Open Streets initiative.

The Open Streets event is different than other festivals as the focus is on promoting environmental sustainability, physical activity, social cohesion and exploring the City in fun, healthy and active ways. Open Streets allow people to actually see what is possible in their city and builds an engaged audience on issues related to active transportation, public spaces and building healthier communities. The event promotes healthier living by making exercise a part of a weekly lifestyle and in the process helps to decrease childhood and adult obesity, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, promote mental wellbeing and reduce emissions that impact local air quality and climate change. Typically, these types of events turn the street into paved parks where people of all ages, abilities and social, economic and ethnic backgrounds can come out to enjoy activities together while improving their health. Regular Open Streets events can be an effective way to promote active transportation and healthy built environments as well as a significant way to increase regular physical activity.

Administrative and logistical resources

Each of the Ontario municipalities implementing Open Streets events in 2014 used slightly different organizational approaches. A non-profit led approach seemed to be the most prevalent although City staff led was also figured into some municipalities plans. A large number of volunteers would be required to support the event particularly on the day the event was held. Training volunteers would also be a key task to ensure success of the event. The environmental non-profit organization, 8-80 Cities, who were heavily involved in the planning of the Open Streets

TO event received a grant to develop an Open Streets toolkit which is scheduled for release in March 2015.

The advisory working group reviewed several options for locations to host the inaugural event. After reviewing lessons learned from other jurisdictions it was decided to short list options that included public places (i.e. parks, community centres) as anchor points, roads with secondary access points, local business presence. The two primary sites included Major Mackenzie, following the Santa Claus parade route, and the Disera Drive from New Westminster to the Promenade Mall.

Event planning would be major requirement in executing an Open Streets event. There would be a significant number of activities to coordinate such as active lifestyle demonstrations, classes, entertainers and other engagement activities. Event planning could be handled in a variety of ways including by City staff, a local area non-profit organization, a volunteer-led committee supported by City and Regional staff.

Other key stakeholders, such as Smart Commute North Toronto Vaughan, YRT/VIVA and Vaughan Bicycle Users Group (BUG), who have synergistic mandates to an Open Streets event would be invited to participate in the planning and execution of the event.

Achieving buy-in from the business community is vital to the success of an Open Streets event. The Open Streets TO organizers coordinated a forum several months in advance of the event and made several presentations and visits to business improvement associations in the event area.

Financial resources

Private sector sponsorships were the primary means of securing support for Open Streets initiatives in Ontario. All of the municipalities where the events were hosted provide some in-kind support for the event.

Policing costs were identified as a significant component of an Open Streets event. The Toronto Open Streets event, which was a 14 km route, allocated one third of its cost to policing with two officers stationed at each major intersection.

Recommended approach

A Vaughan Open Streets Working Group similar to the staff supported, citizen led, Earth Hour Vaughan Working Group may be the best way to move forward with planning and executing an Open Streets event in 2016. The Working Group would require a few volunteers to become actively engaged and be supported by City of Vaughan and York Region staff. The Working Group could meet regularly throughout 2015, host a forum about the event, begin approaching prospective sponsors while developing a budget and building relationships with key stakeholders. The Working Group would be well positioned to submit a budget request, through the Environmental Sustainability Office, for consideration to the 2016 budget process.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and supports the City's strategic goal of service excellence with the specific objective of leading and promoting environmental sustainability

Regional Implications

The Regional Municipality of York has strong interest in an Open Streets event as it has strong correlation to active and sustainable transportation as well public health. Regional staff from the

aforementioned areas were involved in the initial working group and may continue to be involved in Vaughan Open Streets Working Group should it be created, There has yet to be an Open Streets event held in York Region.

Conclusion

Open Streets involves temporarily making the Streets open to people and closed to cars over a 4-5 hour period. Often, organizers will set up activity areas where people can try new things for free. The benefits of an Open Streets event including encouraging participants in physical activity which can have long term impacts on their health, environmental benefits from reduced air emissions from cars, offers new economic opportunities for businesses situated along the route, and builds a stronger sense of community, cultural identity, and social engagement by increasing the amount of interaction that occurs between participants of all ages, incomes, occupations, religions, and races.

Responding to a Council members resolution, staff from Environmental Sustainability, Development Engineering and Infrastructure Planning Services, Recreation, as well as York Region Public Health worked with community partners explore the feasibility of piloting an Open Streets day. This advisory group met on several occasions to discuss administrative, logistical and financial resources. The recommended approach is to create a volunteer Working Group supported by City of Vaughan and York Region staff. The Working Group could host a forum about the event, begin approaching prospective sponsors while developing a budget and building relationships with key stakeholders.

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