



Report to: General Committee

Date Report Authored: May 2, 2011

SUBJECT: Parks Ambassadors Program
PREPARED BY: Nory Takata, Parks Planner – Operations, Ext. 3226
Bill Wiles, Manager By-laws Enforcement and Licensing, Ext. 4851

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report entitled Parks Ambassadors Program be received; and,
- 2) That Council approve the Town's participation in York Regional Police's Parks Ambassadors Program commencing in the Spring of 2011; and,
- 3) That the estimated 2011 costs of \$5,000 for the program be funded equally from the 2011 Operating budgets within the Operations and By-law Enforcement & Licensing departments and the 2012 anticipated costs will be addressed in the 2012 budget process; and,
- 4) That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Not applicable.

PURPOSE:

To seek authorization to implement a Parks Ambassadors Program in Markham in the Spring of 2011.

BACKGROUND:

Staff within the Parks and By-law Enforcement & Licensing Divisions provide services and resources to ensure all parks, pathways, and trails within the Town are well maintained, safe, and enjoyable for residents to use. With over 200 parks and vast pathway and trail network in Markham, being able to regularly monitor these areas to ensure well maintained, safe and enjoyable public spaces is a challenge.

To efficiently address this challenge, staff is recommending that interested community volunteers be engaged to assist in the reporting of areas of concern and maintenance issues.

Staff have researched the potential to implement York Regional Police's (YRP) Parks Ambassadors Program in Markham. YRP's program was implemented to address a gap in their existing Community Crime Prevention programming that specifically covers parks and open spaces. Much like Neighbourhood Watch and other similar programs, the Parks Ambassadors Program engages volunteers from the community to become the "eyes and ears of the community", to augment or extend the reach of police and municipal by-law enforcement

resources, currently committed to community park safety (For details on the YRP Program see Appendix 'A').

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

Proposed Markham Park Ambassador Program

Staff from YRP and the Town are proposing the establishment of a Park Ambassador Program for Markham. Under the proposed program, qualified and trained community volunteers help ensure that all parks, pathways, and trails within the Town are well maintained, safe, and enjoyable for residents by providing regular "walk throughs" of public spaces. Park Ambassadors will have access to an automated system for reporting matters, and matters reported will be automatically assigned to enforcement and maintenance resources, or directly to YRP. The program is intended to provide the following:

- Expand the frequency and monitoring parks, trails, and open spaces;
- Improved service times for Police, By-law Enforcement and Operations staff;
- Provide visible community engagement and inspire others to do the same;
- Add a 'friendly presence' - Park Ambassadors can also perform valuable outreach on many fronts as a 'point of first contact' with residents, while making their rounds in parks; and,
- Improve real time tracking of destructive behaviours and increase overall coordination, response and strategic prevention action between police and Town Staff.

Park Ambassadors will be recruited from across the Town through a recruitment campaign. They will receive training on their role from both York Region Police and Town Staff. Ambassadors will be expected to provide observation roles only and will be instructed not to engage persons engaged in unacceptable behaviour. As observers, the Ambassadors will be trained to report matters of an urgent nature immediately to the appropriate enforcement service agency for follow-up.

Current Park Enforcement Programs

Presently both York Regional Police and the By-law Enforcement & Licencing Division provide bike patrols within Town Parks. These patrols have occurred both jointly and independently in the past. While effective with the enforcement of regulations, available resources limit patrols in individual parks and maintenance issues are not regularly identified. The Park Ambassador Program will also increase the effectiveness of enforcement resources by identifying areas of concern and allowing specific resources to be assigned to address issues.

Adopt-a-Park Program

While the Town's Adopt-a-Park Program asks participants to act as additional eyes and ears for the community by reporting any vandalism or evidence of unacceptable activity in the adopted park, not all Adopt-a-Park Groups visit their parks on an ongoing regular basis to effectively perform the role defined for Parks Ambassadors.

Ambassador Program Details (see also Appendix 'B' - Markham Park Ambassador Program Table)

Procedures/Policies- Document policies and process maps will be produced to ensure Ambassadors clearly understand their role and know how to undertake their role safely.

Recruitment- Staff are proposing to contact Markham Ratepayer Associations, Sports Field User Groups, and local Service Groups, in addition to a general newspaper recruitment advertisement to attract volunteers to the program. There already are ratepayer associations that have expressed interest in the program.

Training- York Regional Police will provide a mandatory training session for all approved volunteers and all training sessions will include additional training components delivered by By-law Enforcement/Operations staff. All volunteers must be 18 years or older (16 years if accompanied at all times by an adult) and receive a favorable clearance letter from YRP before entering the program.

Identification- Park Ambassadors will be provided with clothing (or other items) to identify them. Their training program will set out requirements regarding identification. Distinction yellow clothing (or other clothing) based on other Parks Ambassadors programs is recommended.

Reporting of Field Activities- Reporting on activities will be through an electronic form available on the Town's Portal and through a fax option. The Contact Centre will be responsible for the receipt of all reports and the creation of work orders for Operations Staff and compliant folders for Enforcement Staff. The Contact Centre will also produce monthly reports. Park Ambassadors will be trained on how to report matters directly to the police and will have checklists to detail how to report and the various agencies responsible for park services.

Year End Program Wrap & Program Report- At the end of 2011, a report of on the Markham Parks Ambassadors Program overall performance and statistics will be produced by Staff. The report will identify successes and issues with the 2011 program and will include recommendations for implementation in 2012.(should the continuance of the program be recommended). Staff will also hold a meeting/ reception for program participants to acknowledge and thank them for their participation and to obtain their feedback and suggestions on the program.

Communications- Corporate Communications will provide communication services for the Program assisting in the production and publication of program awareness, recruitment, and results publications. Assistance with the production of training materials will also be provided.

2011 Program Performance Targets

Trained Park Ambassadors:	40
Reported Matters:	500
Field Service Response:	Within 24 hrs.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)

The 2011 anticipated costs of \$5,000 for the proposed program will be borne by the Parks and By-law Enforcement & Licensing Divisions through the 2011 Operating Budgets. Costs will be incurred for the printing of training materials, program communication materials, checklists/contact lists for Parks Ambassadors and costs for clothing (or similar items) to identify Ambassadors.. 2012 funding requirements will be addressed in the 2012 budget process.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

The engagement of community volunteers for this program will be in accordance with the Town's Human Resource policies regarding the engagement of volunteers (including without limitation, the completion of release/ waiver forms)

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The Parks Ambassador Program aligns directly with the following areas of strategic focus: Municipal Services, Parks, Recreation, Culture and Library Leisure Master Plan/Public Safety and Diversity, and less directly, Environment.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Legal, Communications and Community Relations, Contact Centre, ITS

RECOMMENDED BY:

5/26/2011

27/05/2011

X Paul Ingham

Paul Ingham
General Manager, Operation

5/26/2011

X 

Peter Loukes
Director, Operations

5/26/2011

X 

Brenda Librecz
Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

26/05/2011

X 

Kimberley Kitteringham
Town Clerk**X** 

Andy Taylor
Commissioner, Corporate Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A' - York Regional Police Parks Ambassadors Program

Appendix 'B' - Markham Park Ambassador Program Table

Appendix 'C' - Park Ambassador Reporting Process Map

Appendix 'D' - Municipal Park Ambassador Programs

York Regional Police

Parks Ambassadors Program



Community Services Bureau – Community Mobilization Unit
May 2009

In 2007/2008 Constable Houghton, the 2 District Crime Prevention officer, in partnership with the Town of Richmond Hill Parks and Recreation Department and the Westbrook Residents Association created a pilot program in the Westbrook Community of Richmond Hill. This first group of 14 Richmond Hill Park Ambassadors has now been in operation for one year and their involvement has continued into 2009. The Community Mobilization Unit is currently in discussion with the municipality to expand the program across the town. In addition there are discussions with representatives from the Town of Markham to create a pilot program in Ward 1 of their municipality.

The 2008/2010 business plan identified that "York Regional Police create a park safety program with community partners." That program is the Parks Ambassadors Program and is actively being pursued by the Community Services Bureau, Community Mobilization unit.

STRUCTURE

The program is run under the guidance and coordination of the Municipality's Parks and Recreation Department. Police provide support through training of volunteers and completing the volunteer clearance letters at no cost to the volunteers.

Citizens who are already out in the community have the ability to access the manager of each department within the town to advise of issues they observe. This could be property damage, maintenance issues etc. They are given the knowledge of how to appropriately contact the



DUTIES OF A PARK AMBASSADOR:

- Walk through their neighbourhood public spaces wearing our distinctive yellow "Park Ambassador" golf shirt/jacket
- Direct all concerns to the appropriate municipal staff person by cell phone, email or fax
- Provide advice to residents on how and who to contact for local issues
- Act in a totally non-confrontational manner being a good witness and report issues
- Serve as a goodwill ambassador for the Municipality
- Provide valuable information to friends and neighbours about municipal services, programs and events
- Participate in local municipal-sponsored events such as new park openings, concerts, etc

TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Due to the importance and need to ensure that volunteers have the appropriate knowledge and understanding of the program proper training is a necessity. The following provides details in which consistency between the programs should remain.



- Awareness of basic crime prevention Principles and what is suspicious or criminal behavior
- CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) awareness
- How to access Emergency and Municipal Services
- How to access Emergency and Municipal Services
- Be provided with an understanding and knowledge regarding local events, special events and any other functions that they might want to promote and attend.
- Establish expectations for use of "Ambassador" attire

Do

- Treat your Safety as number one, Walk with a buddy
- Share knowledge with others in the community
- Report to police when a crime is suspected or witnessed.
- Use the access numbers to report issues to the correct department or agency



Don't

- Confront persons involved in anti social and or criminal behaviour
- Pick up needles or anything that may be hazardous to your health
- Become involved in anything that you are not trained to do (i.e verbal arguments, fights, animal control)

CONCLUSION

This program is being marketed to all municipalities across the region. York Regional Police will assist in the development of the program with each municipality and training of participants. The goal is to have this program active in all municipalities by the end of 2010. The extent to which each program is used will be dependant upon each municipality accepting the concept and their willingness to manage a group of residents.



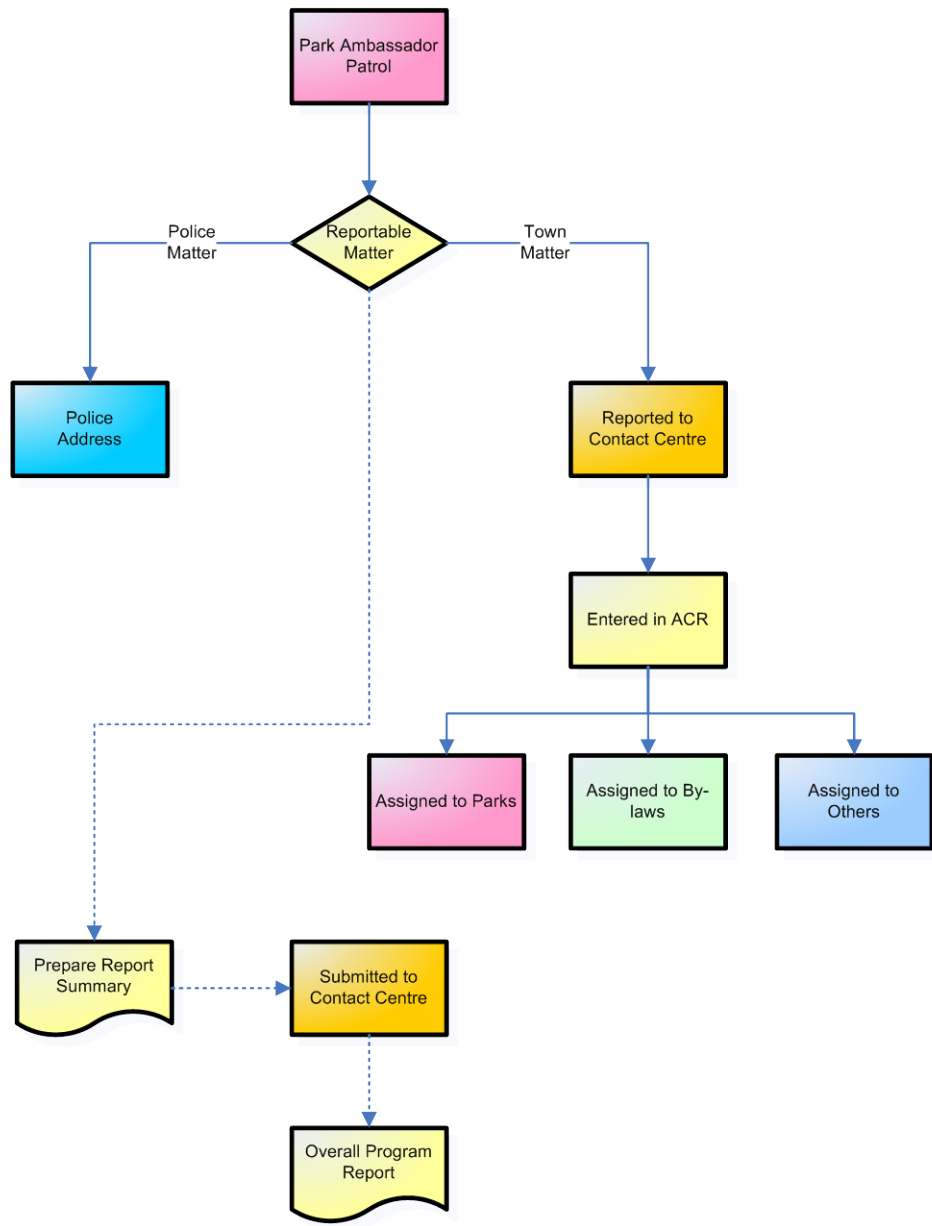
This program fills the gap left by other crime prevention programs due to their structure and focus. It uses people already spending time in the community and arms them with the knowledge and ability to make a meaningful contribution within their community. It allows for a rapid notification of criminal and anti social behaviors to be reported to the authorities and be dealt with efficiently. It creates the perception in the eyes of the public that the community is safe and secure. It promotes guardianship and takes back parks for legitimate use for the community by members.

Appendix 'B'- Markham Park Ambassador Program Table

#	Program Component	Resources
1	<u>Procedures/ Policies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Document & Process Mapping to standardize activities and to establish safe and sustainable field practices Checklist provided to Ambassadors with contact information and required details for reporting of concerns and issues Quality Control Checklist developed for use of staff overseeing field program 	Parks & By-laws York Regional Police ITS Contact Centre Legal
2	<u>Recruitment</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invitation to all Markham Ratepayer Associations Invitation to all Sports Field User Groups Invitation to Markham Service Clubs At-Large recruitment through newspaper/ Portal Applicants to be screened by York Regional Police 	Parks & By-laws York Regional Police
3	<u>Training</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Program delivered by York Regional Police Parks & By-law Staff present information on Markham Park Maintenance and Park Regulations Awareness of Park System and Facilities 2 to 3 Training Session 	York Regional Police Parks By-laws
4	<u>Identification</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of clothing for identification Yellow jackets being considered 	Parks & By-laws
4	<u>Reporting of Field Activities</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electronic Reporting available on Portal (Fax copy available for those without a computer) Standard Form developed for Markham Information, includes references to matters reported to YRP Monthly report automatically generated from data Contact Centre coordinates creation of work orders Establish service levels and monitor for Town performance Monthly staff report/ YRP review of data for further action/ follow up 	Parks & By-laws ITS Contact Centre York Regional Police
5	<u>Year End Program Wrap-Up & Reporting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition for Park Ambassadors Report to Council on 2011 Activities Recommendations for 2012 Program, including any budget requirements Review of program governance and overview 	Parks & By-laws York Regional Police Corporate Communications
6	<u>Communications</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Awareness of Program Posters for Public Buildings Recruitment materials for distributions 	Corporate Communications Parks By-laws York Regional Police

Appendix ‘C’- Park Ambassador Reporting Process Map

Park Ambassador Reporting Process Map



Appendix 'D'- Municipal Park Ambassador Programs

Municipality	Year Started	Partnerships	Mandate
Vaughan	2007	YRP, Corporate sponsorships	Conduct safety audits of parks.
Barrie	Proposed 2011	Barrie Police	Residents/groups (over 18 years of age) "adopt a park" and report damage or criminal activity in parks, as well as keeping the park clean.
Richmond Hill	2008	Pilot project with YRP	Identifying vandalism and maintenance concerns. Must be 18 years of age or older to participate.
Mississauga	none	Park Watch	City provides 24 hour "hot-line" to call in to report suspicious activity, damage etc.
Aurora	Proposed 2011	YRP	Not yet established – in talks with YRP
Toronto	none		No immediate plans to introduce this program.
Windsor- Bike Ambassador Program	2004		Promote bicycle safety through education and community activities; increase compliance with the Highway Traffic Act by all users; safe and responsible trail use in parks and environmentally sensitive areas.
Ottawa-Carleton Street Ambassador Program	1997	Police, Social Services, Health	To address the problem of aggressive panhandlers through the visual presence of teams of "good will" ambassadors, providing residents and visitors with tourist information as well as information on existing social programs. Ambassadors identify aggressive panhandlers, communicate the zero tolerance message on aggressiveness and provide a link with the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service.
Rouge Park Alliance	Proposed 2011		Public education, welcoming to Park, suggestions on trails/ paths for visitors to take, nature interpretation, observe & report suspicious activities, to receive first aid training
Banff National Park			Speaking with visitors, answering basic questions, promoting park learning experiences and activities, modeling ideal park etiquette, and reporting any problems that could threaten the health and well-being of people and park resources.