



Report to: General Committee

Date Report Authored: May 2, 2011

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

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**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.

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**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

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Paul Ingham  
General Manager, Operation

5/26/2011

**X** 

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Peter Loukes  
Director, Operations

5/26/2011

**X** 

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Brenda Librecz  
Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

26/05/2011

**X** 

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Kimberley Kitteringham  
Town Clerk**X** 

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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