

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE- FEBURARY 7, 2005.

CITY OF VAUGHAN "PARK AMBASSADOR"

Recommendation

The City of Vaughan Safe City Committee through its Chair, Councillor Bernie DiVona, recommends:

1. That the "*Yellow Jacket*" volunteers be designated as "Vaughan Park Ambassadors".
2. An appropriate member of the Safe City Committee be appointed to monitor the participation of the "Park Ambassadors" monthly from May to October, and on a year to year basis in accordance with the revised terms of reference.
3. The City of Vaughan Legal Department review, amend or modify as considered necessary or appropriate the attached "Terms of Reference" that outline the City of Vaughan's expectations and responsibilities of the "Park Ambassador".
4. The City of Vaughan Corporate Communications Department will provide the "park ambassadors" with any flyers, announcements, city maps or other information that will promote the City of Vaughan.
5. The City of Vaughan Corporate Communications Department and staff provide support for the launch of the "Park Ambassador" program for 2005 by using the City Page, and the website consistent with past practice.

Purpose

The purpose of these recommendations is to encourage residents of Vaughan to volunteer to be the "eyes and ears of their community" by volunteering to become a "Park Ambassador" in their neighborhood park. The Yellow Jacket program provides the opportunity for volunteers to report damage to parks, repairs required, concerns raised by users of the park, in a non-confrontational manner. The expanded program will also provide the opportunity for the volunteers, now " Park Ambassadors" to relay information about City services, City events and City initiatives to the public and to report any illegal activity to the police, By-Law or to Parks. (The program was launched and funded primarily through corporate sponsorships. The Safe City Committee will continue to work with the corporate sector to fund the program.)

Background - Analysis and Options

At its meeting of July 27th, 1998, Minute No. 348, Council received a report from staff indicating that the Safe City Committee was prepared to launch a Parks watch programme based on a similar "Yellow Jacket" programme which was operating in the City of Toronto at the time. The City of Vaughan launches a yearly "Yellow Jacket Program" of its own that encourages resident volunteers to walk through their neighborhood parks wearing a distinctive yellow jacket bearing the words "Park Volunteer" on the back. Part of their mandate is to report any illegal activity in the park and the other part is to be a visible presence serving to discourage illegal behavior.

The Safe City Committee, at its meeting of December 9th, 2004, agreed that the current program appears to reflect more of a patrol or authoritarian image than is desired. It was also agreed that there was a need for more volunteers, formal training, better, water repellent jackets, the addition of yellow golf shirts for hot summer months, a formal reporting system and an opportunity to relay good news about the City of Vaughan to local residents.

The Safe City Committee felt that if the volunteers were seen as ambassadors who are in the park to pass out helpful information about the City of Vaughan they would be viewed as more approachable and would still serve the purpose of being a visible presence in the park. The Committee also felt that anyone wishing to report an illegal activity would be more likely to approach them since no one would know if they were asking for City information or if they were reporting an illegal activity.

The Ambassadors would carry information such as the telephone numbers of City departments, numbers for local and regional councillors and the mayor's office, city maps, Road Watch pamphlets, advertisements for special events etc. They would be required to report on the dates and times they were in a specific park and any information that may be useful to expedite repairs or improvements to the park based on their conversations with Park users.

Ambassadors would be required to take a City sponsored course on "Tactical Communication" to learn how to deal with difficult people. They would also have to take a short class on City of Vaughan services, departments, special events and become familiar with the Mayor's and Members of Council contact numbers.

Ambassadors would have to agree to walk through their neighborhood park on an average of at least once per week in spring through to the fall to maintain their status as a Park Ambassador. This would be monitored via their reports by the Safe City appointee. Short status reports would be faxed, e-mailed or mailed to the Safe City Committee.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2007

This report is consistent with Vaughan Vision 2007- 1.1 "Improve community safety through design, prevention, enforcement and education" and- 6.2 "Develop Innovative External Communications Initiatives".

This report recommends a change from the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have not been allocated.

Conclusion

By changing the focus of the Yellow Jacket volunteers from patrollers of parks to that of Park Ambassadors who promote the City of Vaughan and by improving training and reporting, residents are more likely to join the program and the City is more likely to retain them for a longer term. This initiative is aimed at improved communication, a higher public profile for the City and the reduction of vandalism through the enhancement of a visible presence in the parks beyond By-Law and York Regional Police.

Attachments

Terms of Reference

Report prepared by:

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Respectfully submitted,

Councilor Bernie DiVona, Chair Safe City Committee

City of Vaughan

Park Ambassador Terms of Reference

1. The City of Vaughan welcomes volunteers to the **Park Ambassador** program.
2. Goal:
3. The object or goal of the program is to recruit and train local citizens of 16 years of age or older to act as Ambassadors for the City of Vaughan by being a visible presence in neighborhood parks, by providing information about the City of Vaughan to neighbors and friends, and by relaying information to the City of Vaughan Safe City Committee about concerns or problems in the park.
4. Requirements:
5. Volunteers must complete the following requirements to be named as a Park Ambassador and to maintain their status as a Park Ambassador:
6. They must be a resident of Vaughan.
7. They must be at least 16 years of age.
8. A course in "Tactical Communication" provided by the City must be completed.
9. A short seminar on City Services, special events and attractions must be attended.
10. Ambassadors must be in their park on an average of at least once per week spring through to fall.
11. Ambassadors must wear the identifying golf shirt or jacket supplied by the City of Vaughan while in the park.
12. Once per month each Ambassador will submit a report on when they were in the park and any positive or negative encounters they had via fax, e-mail or regular mail.
13. Each Park Ambassador will accept for distribution to the general public various flyers or announcements for community events authorized by the City of Vaughan.
14. Each Ambassador will attend an annual meeting of all ambassadors for updates to the program.