

BUDGET COMMITTEE - JANUARY 12, 2009

RECREATION AND CULTURE FEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Recommendation

The Commissioner of Community Services, Director of Recreation and Culture and Area Recreation Managers, recommend:

1. That the Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program contained in this report be approved.

Economic Impact

There is no net economic impact to the 2009 budget. Staff will pursue the 2009 required funds, estimated to be \$30,000, through donation, corporate sponsorship and grants. Assistance will be provided based on funds available.

Communications Plan

The Recreation and Culture Department will advertise the Fee Assistance Program in the Community Centres, Recreation Guide and on the City's website. York Region Community Services and Housing and social service agencies in Vaughan will also be informed of the program.

In order to pursue funding, communication of this plan will be made to potential donors and sponsors through promotional material.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to obtain Council approval for the new Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program which provides a framework for the administration of fee assistance to low-income Vaughan residents. Endorsement of the new program will allow staff to pursue funding.

Background - Analysis and Options

The Active Together Master Plan for Parks, Recreation, Culture & Libraries, in its extensive consultation process, identified the need for a fee assistance program to improve access to recreation programming by "orienting its financial assistance or subsidy program to be based on a person's ability to pay".

According to York Region Community Services and Housing, based on 2006 Census data, demographics are shifting – more children, more seniors, more complex ethno-cultural mix, more people with disabilities and more non-traditional families. York Region has seen increases in unemployment rate and the low income residents. The gap between those with means and those without has widened. Population grew by 22% since 2001 being the third highest growth rate in Canada, first in Ontario. 20% (178,000) are children, 70% (623,000) are working age and 10% (92,000) are seniors.

With the population growth, the number of low income residents increased in all municipalities except for East Gwillimbury. As of 2006, York Region's low income rate is 13% or 112,501 residents. 15% (32,477) of York Region's children are living in low income households. Since 2001, the number of low income residents increased by 55% and the number of children in low income households increased by 62%. **In the City of Vaughan, 10% of the population, or 25,209 residents are living in low income.**

The recommended Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program will complement and enhance the existing User Fee and Pricing Policy, which recommends fee assistance “to ensure adequate access to recreation and cultural services by lower-income residents and meet the needs of citizens with low incomes”.

The need for effective policies to ensure affordable access to recreation services may be more pressing today than at any time in recent years. With the rising emphasis on user fees there is a growing concern that recreation services will become less accessible to some members of the community.

The City of Vaughan does not currently have a formal fee assistance policy or program. In the past few years there has been an increasing demand for fee assistance for recreation programming from Vaughan residents. In 2007, there were 31 requests for fee assistance for recreational programs, 28 children assisted through York Region’s PLAY and 49 assisted by the Canadian Tire Jump Start program (see below for information on these programs). In 2008, there were 63 requests for fee assistance for recreational programs, 39 children assisted through PLAY and 58 assisted by the Canadian Tire Jump Start program.

Fee Assistance in Other Municipalities

To assist in the development of fee assistance program for Vaughan, staff benchmarked with surrounding municipalities and the following are the findings:

- City of Mississauga’s Gerry Love Foundation provides subsidy for one program or camp per year to children and youth under 16 years of age up to a maximum of \$128.00. Funding is provided by donations. This program is being discontinued in 2010 in place of a fee assistance program.
- City of Brampton’s CARE program provides up to \$135.00 per year for children and youth under 18 years of age. Funding is provided by donations.
- Town of Markham Fee Assistance Policy provides up to one program per child per session, is City funded and uses LICO to provide three levels of subsidy. There is no annual limit per child.
- Town of Richmond Hill’s Program provides up to 30% subsidy for one program per session per child is City funded and uses LICO to provide levels of subsidy. There is no annual limit per child.

The fee assistance programs in the cities of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa were also examined for the point of comparison.

Benefits of Fee Assistance

The Recreation and Culture Department understands the benefits to individuals and families that are derived from recreational opportunities. The Department also recognizes that the ability to participate in these opportunities may be difficult, or limited, for persons with low-income. The Fee Assistance Program will provide opportunities and improve supports to citizens to participate in recreation and at the same time ensure that the process is clear and easily understandable.

The Department acknowledges the important role of community-based agencies and other levels of government to develop easy ways for low-income persons to access recreation programs. The strategy will include collaborative approaches to streamline processes and make the most effective use of collective resources.

The foundation of the Fee Assistance Program is based on the values of human dignity and respect, health and wellness, social justice and quality of life. Building on these values, the

program will create an environment of cooperation and inclusiveness to help create recreational opportunities for individuals and families at every experience.

Low income can also impact on health. Research into the social determinants of health has linked a person's work, income, and housing situations to their health status. The "Physical Activity Strategy" of the Recreation and Culture Department's "Active Together Master Plan" has a goal to increase physical activity of Vaughan residents by 10% by 2020. Given that research indicates that income is a determinant of the physical activity of an individual, special approaches such as providing fee assistance must be taken to include all segments of the population.

Fee assistance should abide by three main principles to ensure success of the program:

- 1) Fee assistance should not have a complicated application process;
- 2) Fee assistance should allow applicants flexibility for how the assistance can be used;
- 3) Fee assistance should be advertised so that all citizens are aware of the program.

Proposed Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program

The Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program is designed based on LICO (Low Income Cut Off). LICO's are set by Statistics Canada to indicate where families spend 20% more of their income than the Canadian average on food, shelter and clothing. Total income refers to income from all sources, including but not limited to employment, before deductions and taxes are calculated. Individuals or families with a combined total income greater than these amounts are not considered "low-income" families and are not eligible for this program.

Low Income Cut Off's are adjusted based on urban area population and are cross referenced with the total number of persons in a household.

2007 Low Income Cut Off (before tax) for Urban Area population of 100,000 – 499,999

1 person	2 persons	3 persons	4 persons	5 persons	6 persons	7 persons +
\$18,659	\$23,228	\$28,556	\$34,671	\$39,322	\$44,350	\$49,377

To be eligible for fee assistance individuals or families must:

- 1) Have a combined total family income less than the LICO;
- 2) Submit a completed Fee Assistance Application Form with the previous year's income tax return (Notice of Assessment) attached for all income sources;
- 3) Provide proof of City of Vaughan residency by attaching a copy of a property tax bill, utility bill, driver's license or similar documentation with the applicant's address on it;
- 4) Reapply annually.

The total subsidy amount available is up to a maximum of \$200.00 per child during a 12 month period. Fee assistance is provided based on the User Fee and Pricing Policy Service Categories:

Basic Level Programs – no payment required unless program fee exceeds \$200.00

Value Added Programs - 25% payment required

Premium Programs – 50% payment required

The customer pays the total balance that is over the maximum subsidy amount.

Example 1: A Value Added program registration fee of \$92. will require \$23. to be paid by the resident (\$92. - \$23. = \$69). This uses \$69. of available assistance and leaves \$131. available to be used in the 12-month period (\$200. - \$69. = \$131).

Example 2: A two-week Premium summer camp fee of \$285. will require \$142.50. to be paid by the resident ($\$285 \times 50\% = \142.50). This uses \$142.50 of available assistance and leaves \$57.50 available to be used in the 12-month period ($\$200.00 - \$142.50 = \$57.50$).

Other Fee Assistance Programmes Offered to Vaughan Residents

York Region provides fee assistance to City of Vaughan residents for children aged 4 to 12 for community recreation programs and summer day camps. They offer the following programs:

1) PLAY (Positive Leisure Activities for Youth) Program:

Subsidies are available for youth to attend recreation and sport programs, such as swimming lessons, dance lessons, or sport programs, in your local municipality. Program fees cannot exceed \$90.00 per child for 1 session. If approved for subsidy, applicants complete the PLAY registration with their local recreation department.

2) Summer Day Camp:

Subsidies are available for children to attend summer day camps offered by the Recreation and Culture Department. Camp fees are covered in full, however not all camps are available for families receiving a fee subsidy. Once approved for subsidy, applicants register with their local recreation department.

Canadian Tire Jump Start is another program available to Vaughan residents. JumpStart is a funding source provide by the Canadian Tire Foundation for Families. The JumpStart program is delivered by a network of local chapters. Currently, Woodbridge, Maple and Thornhill have chapters that provide assistance to Vaughan residents. Funding is provided for eligible children for participation in active programming, or for purchase of sports equipment from a local Canadian Tire.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/Strategic Plan

In consideration of the strategic priorities related to Vaughan Vision 2020, the report will provide:
STRATEGIC GOAL: Service Excellence

- Pursue Excellence In Service Delivery
- Enhance and Ensure Community Safety, Health and Wellness

This report is consistent with the priorities previously set by Council and the necessary resources have been allocated and approved.

Regional Implications

None

Conclusion

The Fee Assistance Program will provide low-income families in the City with the financial assistance required for increased participation in recreational programs. The approved Active Together Master Plan identifies the need for a fee assistance program to improve access to recreation programming.

The recommended Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program will complement and enhance the existing User Fee and Pricing Policy established by the City in 2005, which

recommended fee assistance “to ensure adequate access to recreation and cultural services by lower-income residents and meet the needs of citizens with low incomes”.

Attachments

1. Recreation and Culture Fee Assistance Program

Report Prepared By

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Respectfully submitted,

Marlon Kallideen
Commissioner of Community Services

RECREATION AND CULTURE FEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

TERMS OF REFERENCE

CONTENTS

- Purpose
- Goals
- Definitions
- Eligibility
- Eligible Programs Per Individual
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- Associated Policies and Procedures

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Fee Assistance Program is to provide fee assistance that is fair, equitable, and easy to access for low-income Vaughan residents.

Vaughan Vision 2020 states that Vaughan will “Enhance and Ensure Community Safety, Health and Wellness”. The Recreation and Culture Department understands the benefits to individuals and families that are derived from recreational opportunities. The Department also recognizes that the ability to participate in these opportunities can be difficult, or limited, for persons with low-income.

The Active Together Master Plan recommends improving access to recreation programming by “orienting financial assistance based on a person’s ability to pay”. The User Fee and Pricing Policy recommended fee assistance “to ensure adequate access to recreation and cultural services by lower-income residents”.

The foundation for the program is based on the values of human dignity and respect, health and wellness, social justice and quality of life. Building on these values, the “Fee Assistance Program” will create an environment of cooperation and inclusiveness to help create recreation opportunities for individuals and families at every experience.

The Fee Assistance Program will provide opportunities and improve supports to increase participation in recreation. At the same time, the Program will ensure that the information to citizens is clear and easily understandable.

GOALS

The goals of the program are as follows:

1. To provide a simple application process for families/individuals requesting fee assistance from the City of Vaughan.

2. To allow options for how fee assistance can be used.
3. To provide staff with an objective formula and process to assess both eligibility and subsidy rate of submitted applications.

DEFINITIONS

The definitions pertaining to this program are as follows:

Low Income Cut Off (LICO)

Low Income Cut Off's based on Urban Area population of 100,000 – 499,999 are cross referenced with the total number of persons in a household. LICO's are set by Statistics Canada to indicate where families spend 20% more of their income than the Canadian average on food, shelter and clothing.

Low Income Cut Off (before tax) 2007 for Urban Area population of 100,000 – 499,999

1 person	2 persons	3 persons	4 persons	5 persons	6 persons	7 persons +
\$18,659	\$23,228	\$28,556	\$34,671	\$39,322	\$44,350	\$49,377

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for fee assistance individuals or families must:

1. Have a combined total family income less than the LICO.
2. Submit a completed Fee Assistance Application Form with the previous year's income tax return (Notice of Assessment) attached for all income sources.
3. Provide proof of City of Vaughan residency by attaching a copy of a property tax bill, utility bill, driver's license or similar documentation with the applicant's address on it.
4. Reapply annually.

ELIGIBLE REQUESTS PER INDIVIDUAL

- The total subsidy amount available is up to a maximum of \$200.00 during a 12 month period.

Payment by Customer:

Basic Level Programs – no payment required unless program fee exceeds \$200.00
 Value Added Programs - 25% payment required
 Premium Programs – 50% payment required

- The customer pays the total balance that is over the maximum subsidy amount.

Example 1: A Value Added program registration fee of \$92. will require \$23. to be paid by the resident (\$92. - \$23. = \$69). This uses \$69. of available assistance and leaves \$131. available to be used in the 12-month period (\$200. - \$69. = \$131).

Example 2: A two-week Premium summer camp fee of \$285. will require \$142.50. to be paid by the resident (\$285 x 50% = \$142.50). This uses \$142.50 of available assistance and leaves \$57.50 available to be used in the 12-month period (\$200.00 - \$142.50 = \$57.50).

PROCESS

1. Applications are available at any Community Centre or may be downloaded at www.vaughan.ca.
2. All applications dropped off at community centres are to be forwarded through inter-office mail in a CONFIDENTIAL envelope to the Administrative Technician.
3. Applicants will be informed if information is missing.
4. Using the LICO formula, staff assesses the eligibility and calculates the subsidy rate.
5. A form letter correspondence will be prepared and mailed to the applicant informing them of their subsidy rate. A copy of the letter will be kept on file. The letter will instruct the patron to contact a Registration Technician to complete registration. The Client should fax/drop-off the forms before the registration date. Fee Assistance Application Form will be attached to the registration form.
6. Fee Assistance is not available for online registration or IVR.
7. Submission/approval of application does not guarantee program choices
8. All registrations are to be processed at Client Services.

ASSOCIATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This program is not meant to negate any other departmental policy or procedures. The Fee Assistance Program is compatible with the following policies:

- Active Together Master Plan
- User Fee and Pricing Policy