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YORK CHILDREN'S WATER FESTIVAL

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 21, 2003, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Region of York continue to sponsor annual York Children's Water Festivals (YCWF).
2. Future festivals be managed and co-ordinated under the scope of the Water for Tomorrow Program as outlined in this report.
3. Future festivals be fully funded by The Regional Municipality of York in principle at an estimated annual cost of \$74,400 subject to budget approval.
4. Children attending future festivals not be required to pay an admission fee.

2. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this report to present recommendations pertaining to the implementation of future York Children's Water Festivals.

3. BACKGROUND

In May 2003, the festival celebrated its fifth anniversary as the York Children's Water Festival (YCWF) held at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area. As in the past, the Festival was organized as a partnership between York Region and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

The festival is an environmental education initiative which provides interactive instruction and encourages participation by over 3,400 students in grades two to five from York Region about water conservation, water protection and related environmental issues. It is organized and administered through an externally contracted festival co-ordinator hired by York Region and through the dedicated work of many York Region and TRCA staff. To date, funding for this educational event, including the festival co-ordinator's salary, has been raised exclusively from environmental foundations and private business.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Future Festivals

The YCWF endorses the goals set out in the Region's Vision 2026. The festival is committed to promoting the Region's unique natural heritage by educating elementary school children on the importance of protecting the quantity and quality of groundwater, surface water and streams. As a result of the various interactive activities at the festival, the children leave with an enhanced awareness of the importance of groundwater and what they as residents in

the Region can do to conserve and protect our water resources. Children attending the festival are also given the opportunity to plant trees as part of the ongoing naturalization project at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area. This activity imparts the importance of protecting environmentally sensitive areas such as the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe to the students attending the festival. The tree planting activity supports the Region's Greening Strategy and is made possible through the Forestry department's donation of the trees.

Infrastructure for a growing Region is a goal that is upheld through the festival. Planting of trees, promoting York Region's Water For Tomorrow program, partnering with community, Regional, and government agencies to endorse a long-term water strategy and ensure a safe and healthy water supply for residents of York Region are all being addressed through this four-day festival.

4.2 Organization and Facilitation of Future Festivals

Previous YCWFs have been organized and facilitated by an organizing committee made up of volunteers and a hired part time co-ordinator. Since the co-ordinator and many of the committee members are new each year, the festivals have not been consistently managed and thus not benefited from previous experience as they should have.

It is recommended that, under the guidance of the full-time co-ordinator, a steering committee consisting of York Region and Toronto Region Conservation Area (TRCA) staff and community partners continue to be established each year to provide vision and direction. Organizing and facilitating the YCWF will be completed under the umbrella of the Water for Tomorrow Program and its staff.

4.3 Free Admission of Students at Future Festivals

Previous festivals have charged children attending the event an admission charge. The charge has increased from \$5.00 per child to \$7.00 for the 2003 festival. Comments have been received from several teachers that the charge is now excessive and one school decided not to participate due to the charge.

It has also been challenging reaching the maximum attendance level for each festival. In order to achieve full registration at previous festivals, schools from outside the Region have been allowed to participate and instead of limiting registration to Grades 4 and 5, it has been extended to Grades 2, 3, 4 and 5.

It is recommended that the admission charge be eliminated making future festival free for all children to attend.

The Regional Municipality of York and its residents directly benefit from youth education and the YCWF. Educating children, our future water customers, will help ensure source protection and lower water demands. They will grow up with positive attitudes towards source protection and the wise use of water.

It is the ultimate goal of the festival to have all York Region children attend at least one festival during their school years. This can be easier to achieve by limiting attendance to one grade level. In addition, activities can be designed to be more appropriate for one grade level than several grade levels.

The Water for Tomorrow curriculum provided free of charge to schools for Grade 7 students represents an extensive resource for teachers in York Region. In addition to the lesson plans, overheads and video for the teachers, activity books are provided to each Grade 7 student annually. The same rationale, that is, no cost to the student, should apply to the YCWF.

4.4 Festival Partners

The YCWF organizing committee is committed to working with municipal, provincial, and federal government partners along with the Toronto Region and Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authorities to ensure that children attending the festival are provided with information on water quality, protection and conservation with a community and global perspective. High school students participating as volunteers and various non-governmental groups providing activity centres and displays helps to foster effective working relationships with community agencies and organizations. Local community partners would continue to be encouraged to partner with in-kind contributions that could perhaps offset the budget but more importantly would maintain the local community presence.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The YCWF is not a registered charity and due to changes in the Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment Fund (TDFEF) applicant qualifications, the festival will no longer be eligible to receive funding from this organization. TDFEF has provided the majority of the funding for the YCWF each year, making the events possible.

In order for the festivals to continue it is recommended that future festivals under the scope of the Water for Tomorrow Program be 100% funded by York Region. The Water for Tomorrow Program, which includes an extensive education component, was initiated to encourage water efficient technology and conservation in order to reduce future water demand and defer costly infrastructure.

All York Region residents benefit from the continuation of the YCWF. The continuation of the festival will ensure that York Region youth understand the importance of our water resources and their role in keeping it safe for theirs and future generations. Positive attitudes and habits pertaining to the wise use of water will be established at a young age and carried on through life.

In order to facilitate the construction of replacement activity centres, ongoing management/co-ordination and actual running of the Festival, funding support of \$74,400 per year will be provided from the Water and Wastewater Branch, Transportation and Works Department. The cost of water efficiency and conservation represents the cheapest “source” of water supply for the Region at about 25% of the cost of new surface water supplies. Water use efficiency measures and education help to defer the need for major capital expenditures and can assist in reducing supply allocations for local municipalities. The budget for the York Children’s Water Festivals would be incorporated into the 2004 10 year capital plan.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities recognize the benefits and have been very supportive of the York Children’s Water Festival. The Honourary Chair of the YCWF for the last five years has been a municipal councillor and many municipal dignitaries attended the 2003 festival to show their support. Continued implementation of the *York Children’s Water Festival* will assist in ensuring a safe and reliable supply of water into the future.

7. CONCLUSION

The *York Children’s Water Festival* is an important tool for communicating and educating the residents of York Region on the importance of our water resources and their role in keeping them safe for future generations. Support of the Festival provides York Region with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to issues regarding the protection of our water resources and the health of our communities.

Based on the success of the Festival program, the organizing committee recommends that York Region look to providing a long-term plan, including financial support that will ensure that this important program can continue and, if possible, be expanded.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.