

### Item for the Information of the Regional Watershed Alliance

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance  
Wednesday, March 22, 2023 Meeting

**FROM:** John MacKenzie, Chief Executive Officer

**RE: TRCA YOUTH COUNCIL 2023-2024 EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP AND  
2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

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#### KEY ISSUE

To receive Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) approval of the composition of the 2023-2024 TRCA Youth Council Executive and present the 2022-2023 Youth Council Annual Report and provide highlights of the Youth Council's term.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

**WHEREAS TRCA's Youth Council has been active for four years, and the 2022 Youth Council Executive have completed their most recent one-year term;**

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the Youth Council Executive's term be extended for an additional year for those members who wish to continue;**

**THAT the Regional Watershed Alliance accept the recruitment of additional Youth Council Executives to fill vacant seats;**

**AND FURTHER THAT RWA accept the appended report summarizing the work completed and evaluation of the Youth Council's 2022-2023 term.**

#### BACKGROUND

Youth Councils are deployed around the world to engage and inspire youth and to gain perspectives from youth as an advisory body. TRCA's 2017 Community Engagement Strategy recommended the development of a Youth Council. The program framework of the Youth Council was developed by TRCA staff and Regional Watershed Alliance members. The ultimate goal of the Youth Council is to build healthy communities. This is achieved through four program objectives:

- Build capacity and engage youth by providing youth across the Toronto region with learning opportunities;
- Build a youth network/strengthen existing networks through creation of a broad network of youth in the region that is interested in environmental and sustainability issues;
- Identify youth perspectives by developing an understanding of youth opinion around current environmental issues and how these might be incorporated in the work of TRCA and its partners; and
- Create fun opportunities for youth through entertaining and engaging learning opportunities.

## Item 10.2

The framework for the Youth Council was approved by the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) meeting on February 21, 2018 (RES.#R11/17).

Youth Council members may either join as a General Member or an Executive Member. General Members can take part in Youth Council events and initiatives and there is no significant vetting process to join as a General Member, nor any limit on the number of General Members. The Executive Membership consists of ten members and serves as the guiding body for the Youth Council. Executive Members are responsible for the development of program activities and initiatives that fit within the objects defined in the program framework, in collaboration with TRCA staff. Executive Members have a one-year term with the possibility of extension for an additional year and are appointed through an annual application and selection process, in accordance with TRCA's Public Appointments Policy and Regional Watershed Alliance Terms of Reference. The most recent 2022-2023 Youth Council Executive term ends in March 2023.

### **RATIONALE**

#### **Appointment of the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive**

The ten members of the 2022-2023 Youth Council Executive were selected in February 2022 and include four returning members from the previous year. For the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive term, it is recommended that the following existing members who were eligible to have their terms extended by an additional year and chose to continue on the Executive, be appointed for the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive Term:

- Bumika Srikanthalingam
- Elly Akkuyu
- Erinn Lee
- Jessica Castellucci
- Vamika Sharma

Recruitment to fill the Youth Council Executive vacancies for the 2023-2024 term was held from December 19, 2022 to January 31, 2023 and 28 applications were received. Of these applications, it was deemed that 26 applicants met the minimum criteria for Youth Council Executive membership based on age and residential or school attendance location within TRCA's jurisdiction. Youth Council Executive applications were reviewed by relevant program staff and by exiting members of the Youth Council Executive ineligible to continue due to the two-year term limit. As a result, it is recommended that the following applicants be approved as members of the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive:

- Fatima Abidi
- Sabrina Capista
- Fallon Hayes
- Benjamin Muller
- Dhara Parsania
- Lauren Smith

## Item 10.2

### **2022-2023 Youth Council Achievements**

The 2022-2023 Youth Council Executive was selected in February 2022 and included three returning members from the year previous. The program continued with virtual monthly meetings throughout the year but was able to organize several in-person events between Spring and Fall 2022, including one Executive retreat.

New and returning Executive members first met in March 2022 and brainstormed new events and initiatives, assigned meeting roles, and agreed upon a communication framework for the year including meetings on the last Tuesday of each month, use of Slack for regular touchpoints, a monthly newsletter, and additional meetings to be booked as necessary.

The Youth Council Executive worked together to create a workplan to address program goals. New ideas for the year included an online scavenger hunt, an environmental history walking tour of the Toronto Islands, art in nature events, and furthering learning on Indigenous perspectives and reconciliation. The TRCA Youth Council Executive was further able to hold in-depth discussions of the program's structure and goals at an in-person retreat in September 2022, which prompted renewed ideas to increase the program's marketing and outreach efforts, in turn increasing participation in, and impact of, Youth Council initiatives.

As health and safety restrictions further lifted in 2022, the Youth Council was able to return to some in-person programming but continued operating in a hybrid capacity. Virtual meetings and webinars for information sharing and discussion continued to be preferred for time and cost savings, while place-based and hands-on activities were a highlight of individual events held in person. The ten Youth Council Executive members participated very actively throughout the 2022-2023 term, and they continue to show great passion and dedication as volunteers and representatives of TRCA. Participation in single Youth Council events and initiatives by general Youth Council members and members of the public fluctuated greatly depending on the topic, reinforcing the need for continued marketing efforts for each individual event, as social media and word of mouth often generated more interest than e-mail communications. Frequency of Youth Council newsletters increased this past year to nearly monthly and the number of Youth Council members (Executive and General) increased by 152 to a total of 396.

One theme of this term was the rising interest in career options within the conservation sector and increased engagement between the TRCA Youth Council and TRCA staff. Collaborations occurred between the Youth Council and the following TRCA divisions and teams: Restoration and Infrastructure, Erosion Risk Management, Aquatic Monitoring and Management, Conservation Parks and Lands, and Community Learning. Marketing and Events staff continued providing essential support for the program's communications. There was opportunity to have the Youth Council Executive represented at TRCA signature events, such as Bike the Creek.

This year featured several outreach activities and collaborations. The Youth Council Executive was invited to speak at an Ontario Science Centre documentary screening opening and to the Brampton Environmental Alliance. One member of the Youth Council Executive also represented a youth perspective on the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail External Advisory Group to discuss trail strategy and community engagement.

## Item 10.2

Internally, collaborations included events with TRCA's Conservation Youth Corps program on a Meadoway planting and hike in Scarborough, as well as a workshop at the Peel Climate Action Leadership Retreat.

These events or outreach initiatives were created and delivered by the Youth Council Executive members, under the guidance and/or with the support of TRCA staff.

- Developing Your Environmental Career Webinar (February 2022)
- TRCA Bike the Creek (June 2022)
- Presentation at Ontario Science Centre into Nature's Wild screening (June 2022)
- \*Brampton Environmental Alliance presentation (June 2022)
- \*Participation in the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail External Advisory Group (June to December 2022)
- \*#DiscoverTRCA Summer Challenge (July to September 2022)
- Toronto Island Environmental and Flood History Tour (August 2022)
- Youth Council Executive Retreat at Kortright Centre for Conservation (September 2022)
- Meadoway Planting and Hike Event (October 2022)
- Peel Climate Action Leadership Retreat at Albion Hills (October 2022)
- Traditional Craft Workshop with Diane Montreuil (November 2022)
- \*Youth Council Town Hall Webinar featuring Anil Wijesooriya (November 2022)
- \*Infrastructure Planning Webinar featuring Beth Willison and Shirin Varzgani (January 2023)
- \*Virtual KAIROS Blanket Exercise (February 2023)
- 10 e-mail newsletters sent to the Youth Council General membership list in 2022
- \*Social media promotion including 3 video testimonials from Youth Council Executive members

\* denotes a virtual event or initiative.

Full descriptions of the events can be found in the TRCA Youth Council Annual Report (**Attachment 1**)

### **Program Evaluation and Recommendations**

The 2022-2023 Youth Council Executive was consistently and highly engaged throughout their term. They delivered a wide variety of events that ranged from walking tours to webinars to learning opportunities about Indigenous culture and history. The continued engagement could be attributed to several factors including:

- strong mentorship from returning Youth Council Executives who helped to establish expectations and norms from the outset;
- opportunities for individual Executive members to gain leadership and public speaking experience;
- increased programming related to careers in the conservation sector, and;
- a shift back to in-person events with place-based and hands-on activities.

The positive impact of the Youth Council program for Executive members can be seen in their continued interest in leading activities, interest in connecting with TRCA staff in various divisions, and the application of their experience in furthering their own careers

## Item 10.2

and aspirations. This includes several Executive members citing Youth Council experience as being a positive factor in successfully finding work in the environmental field. The Youth Council program also positively benefits General members and members of the public through providing free or low-cost learning opportunities, as seen by the number of first-time participants in many Youth Council initiatives in 2022.

While the program has seen much success in meeting goals and objectives, after undertaking a program evaluation process, the following is a summary of the recommendations for program improvement:

- Continue hybrid program delivery with online offerings for presentations and discussion forums, and in-person offerings for place-based or hands-on activities;
- Continue network building and marketing the TRCA Youth Council, tapping into other TRCA education and public-facing programs and TRCA connections with municipal partners;
- Strengthening the connections between the Executive and General members of the Youth Council through individual outreach to new General members and open Executive meetings, on occasion;
- Building a communication platform to re-engage former Youth Council Executives to champion initiatives and attend events
- Continue efforts to broaden the recruitment of the Youth Council to include more members from diverse communities through more deliberate recruitment strategies with different groups/agencies who work in target communities
- Continue to find synergies between TRCA's work and strategic goals/priorities and the work of the Youth Council

### **Relationship to TRCA's 2022-2034 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

#### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.2 A culture of diversity, equity and inclusion contributing to community well-being

#### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

#### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.4 Inspired communities take environmental action

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

Funds are available in TRCA Government and Community Relations program accounts for watershed engagement and community projects to support the recruitment, convening and ongoing activities of the Youth Council. Staff will work with the Regional Watershed Alliance Youth Council working group and with the Youth Council itself to ensure that the scope of work reflects available budget and staff support. For the calendar year of 2022, in addition to TRCA staff supports, approximately \$3000 of funding was required to support Youth Council events and initiatives.

## Item 10.2

### **DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE**

Implement recommendations in Attachment 1 into TRCA Youth Council program delivery.

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**Date: February 17, 2023**

**Attachments: 1**

Attachment 1: 2022-2023 YOUTH COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT