

Section I – Items for Alliance Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Meeting #4/20, Wednesday, November 18, 2020

FROM: Victoria Kramkowski, Government and Community Relations Specialist, Peel-York Watersheds

RE: **TRCA YOUTH COUNCIL ANNUAL UPDATE**

KEY ISSUE

Confirmation and approval of revised Youth Council Executive recruitment plan and review of 2019/20 Youth Council Summary Report

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS TRCA's Youth Council has been active for two years, and the 2019/20 Youth Council Executive are approaching the completion of their one-year term;

AND WHEREAS TRCA's Youth Council have adapted activities and meetings to an online framework as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic;

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 recruitment of additional Youth Council Executives to fill vacant seats be delayed until January 2021;

AND FURTHER THAT the Regional Watershed Alliance accept the appended report summarizing the work completed and evaluation of the Youth Council's second year.

BACKGROUND

Youth Councils are being deployed around the world as a means to engage and inspire youth. 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:

- a) Build capacity and engage youth by providing youth across the Toronto region with learning opportunities;
- b) 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;

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- c) 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
- d) Create fun opportunities for youth through entertaining and engaging learning opportunities.

The framework for the Youth Council was approved by the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) in February 2018 (RES.#R11/17). Recruitment for the first year of the Youth Council began during the fall of 2018. Participants could sign up as a general member or apply to be on the Youth Council Executive. Executive members serve as the guiding body for the Council for a one-year term and are responsible for the development of program activities and priorities that fit within the objects defined in the program framework.

RATIONALE

The 2019-2020 Youth Council executive was selected in November 2019 and included four returning members from the year previous. The Executive met at a workshop held at Toronto City Hall in January 2020 (details of this work planning can be found in Attachment 1). This workshop was facilitated by TRCA staff and included an introduction to the program framework and an introduction to work planning. The Youth Council Executive worked together to create a workplan to address program goals. This plan included a collaborative event with the UTSC Cricket Club in The Meadoway, a quarterly newsletter, and an outreach framework to enhance the network and develop new engagement opportunities. A communication framework was also agreed upon, which included monthly meetings and additional meetings to be booked as necessary.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impact to Programming

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 had spread far and fast enough to be declared a global pandemic. Across Canada, and much of the world, schools were shut down, businesses closed, and people were asked to remain in their homes to help slow the spread of the virus. Gatherings were prohibited, and many public spaces were closed. This had obvious implications for TRCA education and engagement programs, including for the Youth Council.

TRCA Education and Training

The Youth Council's goals and objectives align strongly with the work carried out by TRCA's Education and Training Division. The Youth Council framework was developed in consultation with Education and Training staff, and staff continue to be engaged by attending monthly meetings. Activities carried out by the Youth Council are done so in coordination with existing relevant education programs. For example, the Youth Council routinely utilizes networks created by Education and Training to advertise engagement opportunities for youth (for example, the Conservation Youth Corps, and the Community Learning Newsletter).

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On an annual basis, TRCA provides approximately 155,000 learning experiences for students and classes from schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). These experiences are delivered either through TRCA's in-school education services (e.g. Watershed on Wheels and Aquatic Plants Program), or in one of TRCA's education centres or conservation areas. With the current COVID-19 global pandemic, both in-school and out-of-class learning experiences have been cancelled.

Following the Stage 2 Re-Opening in Ontario, the Kortright Centre for Conservation and Black Creek Pioneer Village re-opened to the public on August 8, 2020 with safe operating protocols in place, however, TRCA's conservation field centres remain closed, while all in-school programming has been cancelled as restrictions related to access to schools have continued and are anticipated to continue.

To adapt to this uncertainty, since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, TRCA has initiated alternative programming and delivery methods as a means of adapting business operations to the changing circumstances while continuing to stay relevant. This includes inviting participants to take part in TRCA's #AtHomeWithNature and #VillageAtHome series on Facebook, along with several other home-based family activities, live interactive workshops, learning modules for students, and online exhibits.

To respond to the educational needs of local students, TRCA continues to develop resources and live learning experiences for classes that provide curriculum-linked lessons related to natural science, conservation and the environment. In order to better understand opportunities to intersect with vastly different learning environments, TRCA continues to work with area school boards and staff to determine how best to support students learning needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on Youth Council

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Youth Council initiatives and activities. Meetings were adapted to an online platform, and all in-person events that had been planned were inevitably cancelled. Engagement among the Executives during the pandemic has been mixed. Some members reached out to TRCA staff to explain that they were unable to commit the same level of participation that was expected of them as a result of competing responsibilities and the stress that is brought on as a result of the pandemic. Others continued to contribute their time in planning online events and participating in online meetings (a summary of initiatives carried out can be found in Attachment 1). The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the Youth Council Executive has resulted in some barriers to team building and to the delivery of events and initiatives. For example, it has taken time for the Executive to adapt to the online system, and it has also taken TRCA some time to develop the materials and platforms that the Youth Council could utilize for the continuation of their modified workplan. As the Youth Council Executive has successfully adapted to the new situation, we would like to continue to build on this momentum without disruption so that the current members have the same opportunities as the members from the first year. For this reason, we recommend offering the opportunity for all Youth Council Executive members to extend their membership, should they wish to, and postpone the recruitment of new members until 2021.

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Youth Council Highlights from 2019/2020

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Youth Council was still able to host events through virtual means. These events were created and delivered by the Youth Council Executive members, but were also supported, in part, by the Education and Training team through shared expertise and advertising utilizing the #AtHomeWithNature brand.

The Youth Council delivered the following virtual events:

Webinar: Invasive Species Q & A

This webinar was hosted by the Youth Council Executive and featured a panel discussion of invasive species in TRCA's jurisdiction. Panelists included York Region and TRCA staff. It was attended by 44 audience members.

Webinar: Systemic Barriers in Conservation and Outdoor Spaces

For this webinar, a small group of Youth Council Executives carried out research and prepared a presentation that covered colonialism and racism in the historic Canadian context, what barriers exist today, and what work is being carried out to address those inequalities. A panel discussion was chaired by the Youth Council, and a recording of the event is available on the Youth Council's website via YouTube. The event was attended by 42 individuals and the recording has been watched over 160 times.

Online Movie Night: Toad People

One of the most popular events held by the Youth Council was a movie night held at the Patagonia store in Toronto. Unfortunately, an in-person movie night was not possible, but the Youth Council Executive instead decided to hold an online movie night featuring the movie "Toad People" (53 min). The film discussed road ecology work taking place in British Columbia to protect endangered Western Toads. The road ecology work featured in the film is similar to TRCA's road ecology project at Heart Lake. After the film, a panel discussion was chaired by the Youth Council Executive, and featured TRCA staff from the Heart Lake road ecology project, and the director of Toad People. This event was well attended with 34 participants.

The Youth Council has plans to continue online engagement events for the remainder of 2020. Initiatives include a social media campaign around access to greenspace during the pandemic, and additional documentary film night.

Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategic priorities set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

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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

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

- Confirmation of extending terms with existing Youth Council Executive members.
- Launch an online recruitment campaign to fill vacated seats from Executive members who do not wish to extend their term.

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Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: **TRCA Youth Council Annual Update Report for 2019/2020**