



COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES MEMORANDUM

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TO: MAYOR J. LEHMAN AND MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

FROM: C. SWAN, MANAGER OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES, COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

NOTED: D. MCALPINE, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES

RE: PARKS AMBASSADORS

DATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide members of Council with a summary concerning the activities of the Parks Ambassadors at the waterfront over the summer of 2020.

The Parks Ambassadors played an integral role in our COVID-19 waterfront health and safety response. Daily tracking sheets indicate the Parks Ambassadors addressed over 4800 individuals and groups at the parks to seek compliance with various regulations covering: physical distancing, congregations, tents, cooking appliances and general by-law infractions. This number does not reflect responding to questions or general conversations. It also does not include the actual number of individuals in each group the Ambassadors approached or those individuals/groups with whom Ambassadors communicated with more than once.

Their Role

The Parks Ambassadors team consisted of six previously laid off City employees who agreed to be re-deployed to assist at the waterfront. The focus of their position was to promote the community, offer education and awareness of the related City by-laws, and encourage visitors to keep themselves and other visitors to our waterfront safe through physical distancing. They regularly explained protocols or emergency orders and helped to resolve disputes between visitors.

From June 26, 2020 the team worked every weekend and holiday, and regular shifts throughout the week. Originally their last day was scheduled for Labour Day, September 7, 2020. This was extended until September 13, 2020 due to the consistently higher number of visitors at the parks and concerns related to a possible increase in COVID-19 positive cases.

Their route started at the north shore trail head to Johnson's Beach, along to Heritage, Centennial, Southshore, Minet's, Gables, and Dock Road Park. Tyndale and Wilkins were covered until mid-July. Each Ambassador wore a recognizable uniform, photo-identification and carried a two-way radio and telephone to allow for immediate communication with Municipal Law Enforcement, Police, Marina, Lifeguards, Service Barrie, Parks Operations and other staff as needed.

Training

Enforcement Services, Service Barrie, and the Health and Safety branch of the Human Resources Department staff delivered the initial orientation and training. Enforcement Services provided general knowledge regarding the common by-laws and infractions anticipated at the waterfront, and methods to de-escalate situations. Guidance on personal protective equipment, working in hot and inclement weather, and dealing with sharps and biohazards was provided by Health and Safety staff. Service Barrie shared their frequently asked questions and their recent experience with COVID-19.



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Municipal Law Enforcement Officers and Ambassadors were in regular communication with each other. This served to build the knowledge base of the Ambassadors and in turn, the Ambassadors made Officers aware of those situations which required escalation. Ambassadors also supported the Lifeguards by managing non-water safety related questions and events, and were available to provide assistance as needed.

Ambassadors were briefed daily on changes that may impact the visitors to the parks and to the City, including the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit's COVID-19 protocols, the Provincial and Mayoral emergency orders, municipal by-laws, and Access Barrie's media releases. Daily debriefings at the end of each shift and check-ins within the team during the shift allowed for immediate response on any emerging areas of concern, sharing knowledge learned, and what actions were required to mitigate problems going forward.

Comments Received

Some of the more common non-COVID-19 related concerns included: bikes on the walking paths/boardwalk, e-bikes in the parks, dogs off leash or on the sand, watercraft anchored close to the shoreline and swimming areas, beach/park etiquette, alcohol use, smoking, feeding waterfowl, and the public unable to use the pavilion at Heritage Park due to a number of individuals who stayed at that location most of the day.

In addition to calls to Enforcement or Police, the Parks Ambassadors also reported on matters identified through their patrols to appropriate departments for action such as trip hazards or broken equipment. The responsible departments responded quickly.

During the heat of the summer, people arrived at the beaches earlier and stayed later into the evening. When tents and barbeques were prohibited, Ambassadors tried to connect with visitors as soon as they arrived to help minimize any inconvenience.

It was common for the Ambassadors to be approached by visitors who were aware of others violating by-laws but did not wish to be involved. As the summer progressed, there was a marked increase noted by the Ambassadors in the frustration level of visitors who were approached for any infraction. Thankfully that number was relatively low in comparison to the overall number of visitors to the parks.

Ambassadors received positive comments from many self-identified Barrie residents, who went on to state they appreciated the work of the Ambassadors. Self-identified non-residents also stated they travel to Barrie's beaches because they are beautiful, and people here are so welcoming. Many individuals commented that they hoped tents and barbeques would continue to be prohibited beyond this summer. Anecdotally, comments included the noticeable difference in perceived congregating with allowing only single-pole umbrellas and the waterfront was more visible for those on the grass, and the absence of the barbeques meant there were no piles of used, sometimes smoldering, charcoal left behind and damaging the grass and tables.

There were many indications of consideration for others as demonstrated by individuals providing their umbrella(s) to families with young children, and groups relocating to allow others to use the beach while maintaining physical distancing.

Overall the Parks Ambassadors were a successful component of the City's response to COVID-19 along the waterfront and the enjoyment of Barrie amenities.