



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Public Works and Transportation Committee

Date: September 12 2024

From: Kristina Nishi
Manager, Recycling and Waste Recovery

File: 10-6370-01/2024-Vol
01

Re: Green Ambassadors Program Update

Staff Recommendation

That the staff report titled “Green Ambassadors Program Update” dated September 12, 2024 from the Director, Public Works Operations, be received for information.

Suzanne Bycraft
Director, Public Works Operations
(604-233-3338)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Community Social Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Climate and Environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Parks Services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
SENIOR STAFF REPORT REVIEW	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

As a part of the City's ongoing commitment to sustainable waste management, circular principles and youth recognition, the Green Ambassadors Program (the Program) has developed into a youth-led initiative that spans topics across environmental stewardship.

The purpose of this report is to provide Council an update on the Green Ambassadors Program.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #1 Proactive in Stakeholder and Civic Engagement:

Proactive stakeholder and civic engagement to foster understanding and involvement and advance Richmond's interests.

1.4 Leverage a variety of approaches to make civic engagement and participation easy and accessible.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #5 A Leader in Environmental Sustainability:

Leadership in environmental sustainability through innovative, sustainable and proactive solutions that mitigate climate change and other environmental impacts.

5.1 Continue to demonstrate leadership in proactive climate action and environmental sustainability.

5.3 Encourage waste reduction and sustainable choices in the City and community.

This report supports Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026 Focus Area #6 A Vibrant, Resilient and Active Community:

Vibrant, resilient and active communities supported by a wide variety of opportunities to get involved, build relationships and access resources.

6.3 Foster intercultural harmony, community belonging, and social connections.

Analysis

Green Ambassadors Program History

The Green Ambassadors (GA) Program is a City of Richmond youth volunteer program comprised mainly of secondary school students (ages 13 to 18) that was created to provide waste education and recycling support for the Richmond O-Zone during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games as part of the City's *I Can Help* volunteer legacy project. After the conclusion of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, interest from the youth community around environmental stewardship initiatives remained strong with youth volunteers particularly enthusiastic about the hands-on nature of the Program. GAs were not only learning about sustainable waste management

practices, but applied those learnings through direct actions operating event recycling stations and educating the community on how to recycle correctly. GAs were also able to experience tangible benefits from their involvement by measuring their waste diversion performance at each event. Their enthusiasm and desire to continue led to the Program being maintained.

The Program continues to operate, with a yearly intake of Richmond secondary school students who are often members or executives of secondary school's "Green Teams" or clubs. Since 2016, 931 Richmond students have participated in the program, contributing 19,375 volunteer hours.

Green Ambassadors Program Foundation and Benefits

Routed
Routed in volunteerism, the Program includes benefits to both the GAs and the City through the following four main pillars:

1. Youth volunteer opportunity
2. Waste diversion
3. Sustainable waste management education
4. Youth engagement

1. Youth Volunteer Opportunity:

GAs are a reliable and welcome presence at City public events such as the Steveston Salmon Festival, Maritime Festival, Children's Art Festival, and the Cherry Blossom Festival. The GAs team up in pairs and oversee the garbage and recycling stations throughout the events, providing immediate guidance and education to the public about how to properly recycle their items at the event. This face-to-face interaction not only gives the GAs an opportunity to develop their communication skills while engaging and educating the public, but also insight into how City events take place and the importance of representing the City positively. GAs also support general community events as much as possible – events such as Breakfast with Santa and the Grand Prix of Art. GAs not only benefit from learning and experience, but are able to apply the various volunteer opportunities available through the Program to accumulate volunteer hours which contribute to a student's secondary school Career Life Connection (CLC) volunteer hour credit requirement for graduation.

The Program offers an avenue to inspire Richmond youth to engage with municipal operations and find personal benefit in volunteering with the City. This introduction to volunteerism is encouraged to continue upon graduation from the Program through the City's ICanHelp volunteer program, Partners for Beautification Program and more generally with other Richmond organizations within the community.

2. Waste Diversion

While fulfilling their volunteer hours, GAs also provide a key benefit of waste diversion to the City and the events they support. Richmond has long been a leader in sustainable event practices and the presence of GAs at City events reinforces a commitment to responsible waste management. Stationed throughout event sites in their signature green t-shirts, GAs engage with the public, answering questions and providing best practices for sorting recycling and garbage correctly at waste stations. By showing rather than telling, GAs provide meaningful information for Richmond residents at the exact point of recycling which Richmond residents can then

incorporate into their home recycling routine. This integral role of educating the public on sustainable waste management has resulted in the City having a consistently high waste diversion rate for City events. In 2023 on average 89% diversion was achieved. A breakdown of kilograms diverted and diversion rate per event in 2023 can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Waste Diversion Rate by Event 2023

Event	Diverted from Landfill (kg)	Diversion Rate (%)
Steveston Salmon Festival	854	85.91
Richmond Garlic Festival	147	90.76
Richmond Maritime Festival	315	91.20
Total	1,316	

GAs take information gleaned on how to recycle correctly and sustainable waste management tips and lead by example, sharing their learnings at home and with their schools through the Green Teams. For example, one Green Team has implemented flexible plastic recycling in their classrooms, which they then bring to the Richmond Recycling Depot, and another started a campaign to reduce their schools use of single-use utensils.

3. Sustainable Waste Management Education:

In addition to their role as ambassadors at City and community events, the GAs also attend monthly symposiums hosted by City staff at Richmond City Hall. The symposiums offer an opportunity for each schools Green Team to research and present on sustainable and/or environmentally related topics that interest them. The Green Teams lead the presentation accompanied by a slide deck, and encourage discussion and conversation on the topic. This offers the opportunity to develop and refine presentation and facilitation skills, as well as more soft skills such as communication, teamwork and problem solving.

The symposiums also provide an opportunity for networking between schools, and access to School District and City staff. Both the School District and the City provide monthly updates to the students on current events and sustainable focused programming geared towards youth and have used the opportunity to present to students on a number of topics including the single-use plastic ban, electric vehicles, renewable energy, flood protection and public speaking.

4. Youth Engagement:

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Program supported initiatives and events related to the City's Ecological Network Management Strategy; including fish habitat health through storm drain marking, organized shoreline clean-ups, removal of invasive species and the former, youth-led Richmond Earth Day Youth Summit (REaDY Summit). In-person event support was suspended amidst the COVID-19 pandemic but the symposiums were able to shift to an online platform which allowed the students to continue to meet monthly and maintain their connections. Most pre-pandemic initiatives including shoreline clean-ups, in-person symposiums and invasive species removal resumed in January 2023, with a GA class of 144 students contributing 1,606 volunteer hours.

Youth Strategy 2022-2032 Alignment

The Program provides many benefits for youth in the community and further supports the City’s *Youth Strategy 2022-2032* (the Strategy). The Strategy has a vision that “all youth in Richmond are safe, valued, respected and have the supports, opportunities, and resources to live rich and fulfilling lives.” The Program aligns with and supports several aspects within the Strategy which are highlighted in Attachment 1.

Current State Assessment

The coordination of the Program is assigned to a Waste Reduction and Recycling Coordinator with support from auxiliary staff members. The administration of the Program is currently managed within existing staffing levels as time permits with additional auxiliary support. City staff manage and lead the program through a number of activities including:

- GA recruitment in partnership with the Richmond School District, teacher sponsors and school Green Teams.
- GA performance statistics to track volunteer hours, training hours and symposium attendance.
- Facilitation of monthly symposiums and continuous communication with GAs through social media platforms.
- GA education and training on environmental initiatives and sustainable waste management principles such as proper waste diversion and sorting, as well as, skills such as presenting, facilitating, communication and further soft skill development.
- Event and scheduling organization.
- Recognition and overall student engagement.

Since implementation in 2010, City staff have maintained the Program and a summary of the Program’s events and volunteer hours from 2016 to 2023 is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of GA Events from 2016 to 2023

Year	GA Supported Events	GA Meetings, Training & Planning Sessions	Total Volunteer Hours
2016	19	10	2,660
2017	23	12	3,520
2018	24	10	3,210
2019	20	11	4,167
2020	4	10	1,137
2021	6	10	1,731
2022	12	14	1,344
2023	12	14	1,606
Total	120 events	91 sessions	19,375 hours

Further detail on the current state of the GA program is provided in Attachment 2.

Future Opportunities

While reviewing the current program and engaging the current GAs, alumni, and key stakeholders, staff identified reoccurring comments and feedback on how to improve and build upon the already successful Program. Staff will explore this feedback as potential future opportunities:

- Cross organizational alignment to enable GA support beyond waste diversion outreach and education.
- Linking skill building and career development by providing access to City staff and other professionals in “green” careers.
- Exploring opportunities to refresh and relaunch the former youth REaDY Summit incorporating feedback from GAs and other stakeholders.
- Exploring collaboration between elementary school and secondary school Green Teams to foster a mentorship and environmental stewardship connection.
- Collaborating with School District No. 38 and Metro Vancouver to gain a better understanding of existing curriculum materials and how the City can support sustainable messaging, education and volunteerism in the classroom.
- Introducing GAs to reuse, repair and repurpose initiatives to support a circular economy including the general reduction of community emissions as defined in the City Community Energy Emissions Plan.

These opportunities will be integrated, as appropriate, as part of keeping the Green Ambassador Program interesting and dynamic for GAs, while also transitioning toward the City’s circular economy objectives.

Financial Impact

None.

Conclusion

Developed out of the desire to showcase the City as a leader in sustainable event waste management practices during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, the Green Ambassador Program has flourished into a coveted youth-led, volunteer program that invests in our Richmond youth, encouraging them to lead Richmond residents in more sustainable practices. The Program builds a strong base of future community advocates and ambassadors for responsible waste management and sustainability practices, while building youth skills and supporting volunteer hours required for youth graduation requirements.



Kristina Nishi
Manager, Recycling and Waste Recovery
(604-244-1280)

Youth Strategy 2022 - 2032 - Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priority	Explanation	Program Alignment
Strategic Priority 1: Foundation	<p><i>1.1 Continue to foster positive and meaningful connections between youth and safe, supportive adults in community.</i></p> <p><i>1.2 Increase opportunities for youth to connect with peers and develop supportive positive relationships and a sense of belonging including youth from equity deserving groups.</i></p>	Event volunteering, symposiums, clean-up events
Strategic Priority 2: Voice	<p><i>2.3 Increase public awareness and education of the positive contributions youth make in the community.</i></p> <p><i>2.4 Continue to provide and enhance formal opportunities for recognition and celebration of youth in Richmond (e.g. through events and communication campaigns) including specific youth identified from equity-deserving groups.</i></p>	Event volunteering, networking, symposiums, Green Ambassador Graduation
Strategic Priority 4: Opportunity	<p><i>4.1 Ensure a range of programs and services that prioritize wellness, learning and skill development are available for youth.</i></p> <p><i>4.4 Develop additional volunteer and paid opportunities for personal growth and development and for youth to gain job readiness skills, training and employment.</i></p> <p><i>4.9 Expand opportunities for youth to learn about and engage with local government.</i></p> <p><i>4.10 Involve youth in advancing City initiatives such as sustainability and climate-action projects.</i></p>	Symposiums, event volunteering, networking, sustainable waste management

Green Ambassador Program: Current State Details

GA Recruitment: Currently, GAs are recruited through their respective secondary school Green Teams which are school clubs that focus on environmental initiatives. These are legacy relationships, graduating Green Team members introduce the incoming executive to the GA Program and current GA members promote the GA program within the school. City staff support succession planning and techniques for actively recruiting new members through “Club Days” at schools. School Green Teams provide sustainable initiatives and events within their schools including leading school yard clean-ups, bottle/can drives, campaigns for the reductions of single-use plastic and pollinator gardens. School Green Teams operate independently from the Program, but membership often overlaps. City staff support Green Team initiatives by providing access to resources such as recycling carts, clean-up tools and a forum to discuss current campaigns and provide guidance.

GA Program Performance Statistics for 2023: GAs sign-up to volunteer on behalf of the City on an event-by-event basis. In the 2023/2024 school year, the Program had 150 active GA’s including current students from seven out of ten Richmond secondary schools and returning alumni. These 150 students supported eight events including large-scale City events such as the Steveston Salmon Festival, Richmond Garlic Fest and Richmond Maritime Festival, diverting 1,315.95 kilograms of waste from the landfill, and played an integral role in community events like Breakfast with Santa and the Grand Prix of Art. The 2023/2024 GAs also attended eight symposiums and one workshop at Richmond City Hall, presenting on a variety of student-selected topics including fast fashion, plastic waste pollution, pollinators and wild fires.

GA Education and Training: Green Ambassador leaders, generally executive members of their respective school’s Green Teams, also take part in skill-building including strategizing campaigns with other members. By facilitating monthly gatherings, City staff are able to maintain ongoing contact with Green Ambassadors, provide key messages about City initiatives which can be shared at school or at home and promote sustainable programs and services available to GAs throughout the Lower Mainland. This provides built-in recruitment opportunities for upcoming City events, and open invitation for potential GAs to engage with the City and other organizations.

Recognition: At the end of each school year, staff organize the Green Ambassador Graduation Ceremony which takes place in Council Chambers where students are recognized by staff and the Mayor for their hard work and volunteer contributions.