

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

TO: Members of Council
FROM: Mayor Don Cousens
PREPARED BY: Marilyn Scott, Executive Coordinator to the CAO
DATE OF MEETING: 2002-Feb-04
SUBJECT: Character Community

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Town of Markham Council approve a resolution declaring Markham a “Character Community”.

And that a Town of Markham Character Council be established to work in consultation with the York Region Character Council and the Steering Committee.

PURPOSE:

This report provides an update on the work done to date to establish York Region as a “Character Community” and to request Council’s approval of a resolution to designate the Town of Markham as a “Character Community”.

BACKGROUND:

On June 7, 2001, the York Region Council approved the establishment of a Steering Committee to develop a proposal for a “Character Community” in York Region. The Steering Committee is chaired by Markham Mayor Don Cousens, and includes in its membership Markham Regional Councillor Tony Wong and Markham’s Director of Corporate Quality and Strategy, Stephen Chait. In addition, the other Steering Committee members are leaders from a broad range of government, community, school, business and media interests.

Support for the “Character Community” initiative in York Region has been demonstrated over the past seven months by representation from local area municipalities, the education sector, media, business and the community. This broad base of support was instrumental in demonstrating to the Steering Committee that York Region was ready to further embrace a region wide initiative and on January 24, 2002, the Regional Municipality of York approved a resolution to establish York Region as the first municipality in Eastern Canada to become a “Character Community”. York Region will be officially launched as a “Character Community” on Tuesday, February 12, 2002 at 11:00 a.m. at the York Region Administrative Centre in Newmarket.

The report also recommended that the local area municipalities be requested to approve a resolution to officially declare their municipality a “Character Community”.

DISCUSSION:

Defining Character Community

A “Character Community” is a community in which the elected officials, community leaders, business, school boards, health professionals and citizens recognize and promote the importance of good character. In a “Character Community” everyone works together to ensure that families are strong, neighbourhoods are safe, education is effective and businesses in the community are productive. A “Character Community” encompasses the whole community’s effort to create a climate that recognizes, supports and celebrates positive attributes and behaviours.

A “Character Community” works best when the entire community endorses and promotes the development of positive attributes. York Region has a good start on this initiative with the involvement of the Public and Catholic School Boards who are active promoters of character education and media support from MetroLand newspapers and Rogers Television.

Since its inception in June 2001, the Steering Committee has developed and adopted a goal and mission statement, drafted a list of attributes, explored progress in other organizations and sponsored training and education opportunities.

Education and Training

A critical component in becoming a “Character Community” is educating the community on what a “Character Community” is and how it can be achieved.

On November 29, 2001 the Steering Committee hosted a training session, which included a panel of five international “Character Community” experts and was attended by fifty community leaders and residents.

Mary Jane Aguilar, one of the panellists from the November 29, 2001 training session, was invited back to York Region to deliver two, one day “Character Community” training sessions on January 24 and January 25, 2002. Over 80 representatives from business, government, youth, educators and the citizens-at-large attended the sessions where character attributes were defined and character-building activities that can be initiated by the training session participants in their own organizations were identified. The evaluations of the training were positive.

Character Council

A region-wide “Character Community” initiative such as the one endorsed by York Region can promote efforts through a broad base, however it is recognized that to achieve complete success the initiative must be embraced at the local municipal level. It is now an appropriate time to pass the project onto the communities within the Region. It is recommended that the Town of Markham declare itself a “Character Community” and

that a Town of Markham Character Council be established to work in consultation with the York Region Character Council and Steering Committee.

“Character Community” Resolution

To demonstrate its support for the Region’s “Character Community” Initiative the Town of Markham’s Council is requested to approve a resolution to declare themselves a “Character Community”. The Resolution is attached in Appendix 1.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

There are no financial implications to be considered in this report. External funding sources for the “Character Community” initiative are currently being pursued.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

None

Mayor Don Cousens

Chair – “Character Community”

APPENDIX 1

A Resolution

To Designate the Town of Markham as a Character Community

WHEREAS, the people of the Town of Markham wish to strengthen our citizens, families and community as a whole by encouraging excellence in character.

WHEREAS, we desire to build a community where families are strong, homes and streets are safe, education is effective, business is productive, neighbours care about one another and citizens are free to make wise choices for their lives and families; and

WHEREAS, our schools should be a safe atmosphere where character is exemplified, taught, and rewarded and where learning is encouraged; and

WHEREAS, encouraging employees by recognizing positive character qualities has resulted in an increase in workplace morale, employee safety and corporate profits; and

WHEREAS, the emphasis of positive character qualities in every sector of society can only occur as individuals commit themselves to exemplifying character in their personal lives and inspiring others to do the same;

WHEREAS, there is a need for positive role models among our young people to help foster a community culture where good character is praised and encouraged; and

WHEREAS, people who demonstrate positive character qualities and moral choices improve the health, safety and welfare of their fellow citizens, resulting in a lower financial burden upon the taxpayers for the costs of services that protect and enhance our quality of life; and

WHEREAS, citizens of the Town of Markham can alleviate many current societal problems by embracing positive and constructive character qualities, which distinguish between right and wrong.

THEREFORE, be it resolved, that the people of the Town of Markham pledge our commitment to character and designate ourselves as a Character Community in order to formally launch a town wide initiative to encourage character in our schools, businesses, government, media, community groups, and families and we urge the leaders of each of these organizations to support and contribute to this endeavor.

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