

NO: R089

COUNCIL DATE: May 10, 2021

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **May 4, 2021**
FROM: **General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Culture** FILE: **0290-01**
SUBJECT: **Union of BC Municipalities 2021 Community Excellence Awards**

RECOMMENDATION

The Parks, Recreation & Culture Department recommends that Council:

1. Receive this report for information;
2. Authorize staff to submit an application to the Union of BC Municipalities (“UBCM”) Community Excellence Awards for Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning; and
3. Instruct the City Clerk to forward a copy of this resolution to the UBCM Awards Program in support of the City’s application.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to obtain a Council resolution supporting the submission of one project for 2021 UBCM Community Excellence Awards, which is a requirement for submission. The Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning project provides a suite of materials to support Surrey teachers in taking their learning into parks, in a format that is accessible and flexible. Resources include information on how to prepare for park visits, local nature knowledge, a variety of activity ideas and templates for self-guided studies of our local plants and shade trees.

BACKGROUND

The UBCM Community Excellence Awards are an annual event, recognizing and celebrating excellence in local government projects or programs which can serve as “best practices” for other local governments.

For 2021, awards will be given in four categories:

1. The Excellence in Governance category recognizes governance processes and policies that are outcomes-based and consensus oriented; that encourage citizen participation in civic decision-making; are inclusive, open and transparent; and exemplify best practices in accountability, effectiveness, and long-term thinking;
2. The Excellence in Service Delivery category recognizes the actual production and provision of goods and services to the community;

3. The Excellence in Asset Management category recognizes effective management of existing and new infrastructure in order to maximize benefits, reduce risk and provide satisfactory levels of service to community users in a sustainable manner; and
4. The Excellence in Sustainability category recognizes projects or programs that meeting current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

In addition, the UBCM has advised that applicants are encouraged to include any COVID-19 pandemic response actions and/or activities in their applications.

Following inter-departmental discussion on the status of various City initiatives that could be considered for an award and a review of the UBCM awards categories and criteria, staff have developed an application and supporting material for one recent initiative that is a good fit for the UBCM Community Excellence awards. The project meets the requirements of the awards program and is complete or at a stage where outcomes have been demonstrated.

The application is Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning in the Service Delivery category. The City has been successful in the annual UBCM awards program in the past, winning several Community Excellence awards. Since 2011, the City has been successful in receiving the following awards:

- 2011 “Overall Excellence” award for local governments across BC;
- 2011 “Best Practice, Website” award for the surrey.ca website re-design;
- 2012 “Best Practice, General” award for the Safe and Active Schools Program;
- 2012 “Excellence in Partnerships” award for the Kensington Prairie Community Centre;
- 2013 “Best Practice, Social Media” award;
- 2014 “Best Practice, Operations” award for the Erosion and Sediment Control Permit On-line Reporting tool;
- 2015 “Excellence in Action” award for the Street Light Copper Replacement program; •
- 2015 “Best Practice, Community Connections” award for the MySurrey App;
- 2016 “Excellence in Leadership and Innovation” award for the BioPod Initiative; and
- 2020 “Excellence in Service Delivery” award for Surrey Makes Personal Protective Equipment (“PPE”).

The criteria for awarding a project in each of the four categories include the degree to which the project or program demonstrates organizational leadership, innovation, partnerships, public engagement and financial best practices, and the degree to which the outcomes of the project or program are transferable to other UBCM members. Award applications are required to be accompanied by a Council resolution indicating support for submitting each project for a UBCM award.

Awards will be announced and presented at the 2021 UBCM virtual convention in September 2021.

DISCUSSION

Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning Project

With the growing movement to get children outdoors, there is ever-increasing demand from schools for access to natural areas and for opportunities to incorporate environmental stewardship into their teaching practice. The Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning

provide a suite of materials to support Surrey teachers in taking their learning into parks, in a format that is accessible and flexible. Resources include information on how to prepare for park visits, local nature knowledge, a variety of activity ideas and templates for self-guided studies of our local plants and shade trees.

Resources are designed to support teachers new to outdoor learning, as well as more experienced teachers looking to deepen their practice, while building students' awareness of environmental stewardship and our collective responsibility to care for the spaces where children learn and play. Resources are designed for grades K-7 and can also be adapted for early years and secondary school audiences.

A core group of teachers and administrators provided guidance on the research and development of the project, sharing valuable feedback and assistance in piloting the new resources, and ensuring that the final resources would meet teachers' needs. SEED 36, Surrey's local chapter of the Environmental Educators Professional Specialist Association ("EEPSA"), has also been supportive and helped to raise awareness among their members.

To promote the launch of these new resources, organic and targeted social media posts and a video have been shared on platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, as well as through Surrey's "Teachers in the Know" newsletter and online.

Staff have been invited to present on these resources at several professional conferences for teachers and outdoor educators, including the provincial Classrooms to Communities Conference and the upcoming Surrey Teachers Association Convention.

The resources continue to be developed and adapted to ensure they continue to meet the needs of Surrey teachers in the years to come.

Project Measures

The success of the project will be measured by social media reach, website page views and resource downloads. Feedback from Surrey teachers will continue to be solicited and evaluated and has been very positive to date. Teachers and administrators who were involved in the development stage of the project will be consulted on an ongoing basis, to ensure resources continue to be relevant and valuable. Positive feedback has also been received from teachers and staff from other municipalities, as well as BC Parks.

Project Outcomes

The goal of the Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning project is to increase Surrey elementary school students' access to nature by empowering teachers to take their learning outdoors. With quality resources to support them, teachers can ensure their time spent outdoors is rich in educational experiences and supports students' learning outcomes, as well as their physical and mental health.

Introducing students to the outdoor spaces in their local community will also contribute to their sense of belonging and of place. By encouraging students to take their learning home, the positive impact will extend to their families as well. By promoting environmental stewardship, the project will also help to foster sustainable behaviours and ultimately contribute to the preservation, health, and biodiversity of Surrey's natural areas.

Staff consider that the project is a strong candidate for an award, and that it meets the intent of the UBCM Awards program.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The project submitted for UBCM 2021 Community Excellence Awards supports the objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter 2.0. In particular, this work relates to Sustainability Charter 2.0 themes of Inclusion, Ecosystems, Education and Culture, and Health and Wellness. Specifically, the project supports the following Desired Outcomes ("DO") and Strategic Directions ("SD"):

- Community Pride and Engagement – DO21: All residents have opportunities to be meaningfully engaged in civic issues and to contribute to community life;
- Community Pride and Engagement – DO23: Numerous active local clubs, groups and agencies contribute to the community's well-being;
- Natural Areas, Biodiversity and Urban Forest – DO4: Surrey residents support biodiversity conservation and are stewards of natural areas and urban forests on both public and private lands;
- Natural Areas, Biodiversity and Urban Forest – SD1: Increase public awareness of biodiversity issues through a comprehensive education program;
- Learning – DO2: Surrey children and youth have access to a high quality comprehensive and inclusive educational system, and opportunities that include experiences in and out of school; and
- Wellness and Recreation – SD6: Provide opportunities for all residents, especially children, to interact with green spaces and trees.

CONCLUSION

The Urban Forest Resources for Outdoor Learning project selected for submission for a 2021 UBCM Community Excellence Award meets the criteria of the awards program and is an exemplary project worthy of an award in the relevant category.

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