

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, November 04, 2020

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SCHOOL CROSSING GUARD PROGRAM REVIEW

FROM:

Zoran Postic, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To provide the findings of the School Crossing Guard Program (SCGP) review.

Report Highlights

- The City has operated the SCGP for over 30 years to ensure safe travel for elementary school children. There has been consistent program growth over the last 10 years.
- A SCGP review has been completed which includes a scan of municipal best practices, an internal and external SCGP assessment, stakeholder engagement, and a staff engagement survey. The review is built on a framework of safety, program sustainability, and policy development.
- Key program review findings include: (1) The City compensates School Crossing Guards (SCGs) at the lower end of the pay scale in comparison to other municipalities; (2) the supervisor to staff ratio is significantly higher than other municipalities; and, (3) vacancies and shortages of standby SCGs have made it extremely difficult to maintain program deliverables.
- Legal Services, Risk Management and Human Resources have identified the need for periodic field inspections to ensure consistent oversight of staff and to be able to evaluate SCG requirements at warranted locations.
- SCG Policy and Procedures are outdated since 2011 and have been recommended to be updated in alignment with Provincial Guidelines.

Recommendations

1. That this report be received.

Background

School Crossing Guards are an important part of the City of Vaughan community. The City has operated the SCGP for more than 30 years, ensuring the safety of children is a top priority.

The SCGP was established over 30 years ago to provide assistance to elementary school children when crossing roads on their way to and from school. The SCGP (1) determines appropriate locations for SCGs; (2) hires, trains, implements and inspects SCGs; and, (3) works with local schools, YRDSB, YCDSB, York Region Public Health, York Region Police, parents/guardians, and the community to provide safer crossings. As the City's population grows, the SCGP evolves to manage the growing number of requests for SCGs. Today, the City has assigned crossing guards to assist children cross safely at 114 locations.

The most recent SCGP report was brought to Council on April 9, 2013. Council directed that the annual program review be deferred until the spring of 2015, and that staff promote children walking to and from school via the *Active Routes Are the Way to Go Program*, an initiative targeted at creating a safer and healthier mode choice for students, staff and families to travel to and from school, and to manage traffic congestion near schools. Due to staff and corporate changes over the past several years, the report was deferred. The Active Routes Are the Way to Go Program has also evolved to the *Active School Travel Program*.

The Highway Traffic Act (HTA) sets out the rules of the road in Ontario, including the operation of school crossings and the role of the SCG. With new crossing types such as pedestrian crossovers and roundabouts becoming more common as a form of intersection control, programs have been developed across the Province with respect to the implementation and standardization of school crossings. In 2017, the Ontario Traffic Council (OTC) developed a SCG Guide to enable uniformity in the implementation of SCGPs across the Province.

A SCG Program Review has been completed that includes a best practices program review of other municipalities, and a staff engagement survey.

Three studies were conducted to inform this review:

1. Exp Services Inc. (EXP) was retained as an independent consultant to review the City's SCGP and assess the existing warrants under the policy and perform an overall third-party review of the program's operations.
2. City staff conducted a Staff Engagement Survey.
3. City staff conducted a Market Survey of peer municipalities focused on compensation and administrative structure.

The SCGP review is built on the following framework:

- SAFETY:
 - Safety of children is a top priority; and,
 - Safety of staff and compliance to procedures.
- PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY:
 - Managing growth year after year.
- POLICY DEVELOPMENT:
 - Enabling continuous program improvements and alignment with current legislation and best practices.

Previous Reports/Authority

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of June 28, 2011 Meeting – Update to School Crossing Guard Policy and Procedure:

https://meetingarchives.vaughan.ca/extracts_2011/pdf/35ws0621ex-11.pdf

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of June 25, 2007 Meeting – School Crossing Guard Compensation

https://meetingarchives.vaughan.ca/extracts_2007/pdf/32ws0612ex-07.pdf

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of May 29, 2012 Meeting – Establishment of the School Crossing Guard Task Force

https://meetingarchives.vaughan.ca/council_2012/pdf/0529-12%20council%20minutes.pdf

Extract from Council Meeting Minutes of April 23, 2013 – Deferred School Crossing Guards Annual Review to Focus on Active Routes are the Way to Go Program

https://www.vaughan.ca/council/minutes_agendas/AgendaItems/CW0409_13_8.pdf

Provincial legislation, HTA Section 176 School Crossing Guards

[Ontario's Highway Traffic Act](#)

Analysis and Options

The SCGP was found to consistently perform key activities that are core to a successful program.

A comprehensive review was completed of the SCGP. This included a review of structure, staffing levels, SCG recruitment/ training/ compensation/ retention, stakeholder concerns, new location warrants, site inspections and reassessment.

Highlighted findings relate to an insufficient number of SCGs to protect identified crossing locations:

- SCG locations are frequently left without SCGs, due to a lack of standby guards. Parents and schools receive little advance notice. On average each SCG location was left unattended on more than 3 occasions during the 2017 and 2018 school years.
- Despite extensive recruiting activities, the City has been unable to recruit an enough SCGs resulting in warranted and/or new SCG locations not being assigned a guard.
- While other Ontario municipalities also report difficulty attracting SCGs, the vacancy rate of the municipalities surveyed is between 1.5% to 3% annually. In contrast, the daily absenteeism and vacancy rate at the City was 17% in 2019. The City of Vaughan was the only municipality surveyed to not have a standby roster of SCGs.

Identified potential drivers of the staff shortages were sub-standard compensation, a low supervision ratio, and a reluctance to remove SCGs from locations where they are not warranted. Employee recognition and events and the provision of added equipment could positively impact satisfaction. Municipalities surveyed indicated that a change to the compensation package had a direct positive impact on retention and recruitment percentages.

A SCGP Engagement Survey completed in 2020 found that 89% of the SCGs were pleased with their position, and that giving back to the community was their motivating factor in returning to the program.

A Risk Assessment of the SCGP was completed in June with support from Human Resources and Health and Safety. Recommendations implemented included:

- Extensive training on Health and Safety, Covid-19 precautions and PPE masks issued for SCGs.
- The placement of COVID 19 safety signage at school crosswalk locations.
- Collaborative communications and road safety messaging with stakeholders regarding safer school zone initiative in light of COVID 19.

- An updated robust recruitment plan was launched with the assistance of Corporate and Strategic Communications. As a result, the program started with thirteen (13) vacancies and now has one (1) vacancy for the start of the 2020/2021 school year.

The City of Vaughan SCGP was benchmarked against twelve other municipalities.

A benchmarking review was completed to understand how other municipalities operate their SCGP. Municipalities reviewed were Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Oakville, Guelph, Burlington, London, Ottawa, Markham, King, Richmond Hill and Niagara Falls.

The review found the following: (1) The City of Vaughan compensates School Crossing Guards (SCGs) at the lower end of the pay scale in comparison to other municipalities; (2) the supervisor to staff ratio is significantly higher than at other municipalities; and, (3) vacancies and shortages of standby SCGs have made it extremely difficult to maintain program deliverables.

The following are significant differences identified between the City's SCGP and those of other municipalities:

- The SCG hourly rate of pay was 17% less than comparable municipalities.
- The City did not have any standby SCGs on staff, whereas comparable municipalities maintained an average of 10% of their total complement of SCGs as standbys.
- The ratio of SCGs to supervision staff is much higher in Vaughan than other comparable municipalities (109:1 versus a range of 22:1 to 54:1).

As a result of the municipal scan (outlined in Attachment 1), Vaughan's SCGs compensation was reviewed and increased from the minimum wage to \$16.40 per hour in 2020 to more closely align with other municipalities, bringing Vaughan to the 50th percentile in wages.

In summary, several program challenges and opportunities were identified. These include:

- Constrained Administrative Capacity
 - The City has one supervisor administering the City's SCGP, addressing a wide range of administration duties and providing supervision to 114 SCG locations.
 - Limited capacity to respond to citizen enquiries, school administrations and SCGs; to perform field health and safety and program compliance inspections, recruitment, and administration of training sessions; and, to consistently update operating and training procedures and materials.

- Capacity to coordinate and liaison with OTC members for consistent program administration, operation and delivery is limited.
- Inconsistent Health and Safety field Inspections
 - Inconsistent completion of field inspections is a concern from a staff perspective considering that 85% of staff are over the age of 65 to start the 2020/2021 school year.
- Program Sustainability Risk
 - Consistent growth over the last 10 years with 2-3 SCG locations added per year drives recruiting pressures.
 - There is a strong interest in the SCGP from the public, and crossing studies are frequently requested, drawing further on supervisor capacity.
 - There are challenges filling SCG vacancies and a lack of standby coverage.
- Being able to build program support and resilience
 - The SCGP will benefit from engaging stakeholders to build greater awareness, to educate, to champion the program and to participate in the Active School Travel initiatives.
 - The SCGP will benefit from an increase in program capacity and flexibility to enable exploration of engagement strategies, and the implementation of new measures and initiatives to improve the overall performance and safety of the SCGP.

Stakeholders were engaged and were supportive of the new policy development and report recommendations.

Multiple internal stakeholders were engaged, and all were supportive of the new policy (Attachment 2), procedure (Attachment 3) and report recommendations. Comments and inputs received included:

- Legal and public reputational risk, as SCGs should be allocated based on a warrant process to limit program risk;
- Program growth be addressed with appropriate resourcing to sustain the program;
- Alignment with the new 2017 OTC SCG Guidelines to enable the ability to remove or allocate SCGs where required;
- Challenges with vacancies in past years has resulted in inadequate standby coverage and warranted locations left unguarded;
- There is notably high daily absenteeism (particularly during winter months);
- There is a need for inspections of staff, particularly considering staff demographics (85% over the age of 65);
- There is a significant administrative burden given a high staff to supervisor ratio;
- The program can benefit from substantial public awareness and communications initiatives;
- Measures to ensure program sustainability are required;

- Collaboration and partnerships with external stakeholders to build capacity to champion the SCGP are essential for the program to be successful; and
- There is a lack of development of a communication plan and matrix to address citizen concerns when removing or reallocating a SCG.

The SCG Program Review recommended a new operating policy and procedures, a refreshed recruitment plan, and health and safety provisions in alignment with best practices and the 2017 OTC SCG Guide.

To improve SCGP overall performance, maintain program sustainability, and reduce risk and liability, the following recommendations should be considered:

- That the SCG policy be updated to align to the 2017 OTC SCG Guide.
- Prioritization of essential warranted locations to improve operational efficiency and mitigate risk i.e. enable the ability to remove or reallocate SCGs.
- Resourcing the SCGP's administration through two (2) additional Program Coordinators to be able to meet program objectives, fulfill health and safety requirements, and minimize risk. Staff is recommending starting with the addition of one (1) Program Coordinator to enable manageable program expansion, and to allow for evaluation of the need for a second Program Coordinator.
- Engagement of stakeholders and building of capacity for education, outreach and communication.
- Support of safer school zone initiatives.
- Establish consistent administration, oversight and procedures to manage the SCGP, and maintain alignment with best practices across the Province.

Financial Impact

The total estimated cost for the SCGP Coordinator position is \$99,000. This will allow the SCGP to ensure the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the program through the addition of administrative capacity to meet program objectives, fulfill health and safety requirements, and to administer the SCGP under the new SCG Policy and Procedure.

The SCGP Coordinator has been submitted in the 2021-2022 Draft Budget.

Any additional funding requirements to administer the SCGP will continue to be submitted through the City's budget deliberation process.

Relationship to Vaughan Vision 2020/ Strategic Plan

The SCGP Review is one of the nine strategic priority areas of the 2018-2022 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Map. The SCGP supports an Active, Safe and

Diverse Communities through the delivery of services that represent the City's commitment to the wellbeing of citizens, enriching of their lives, and maintenance of their safety.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The SCGP impacts overall road safety around schools. There are several Regional stakeholders that assist with championing the program and will benefit from the recommendations made in this report:

- Both YRDSB and YCDSB assist in obtaining information pertaining to new schools and their catchment areas to aid in identifying the most appropriate locations for a guarded school crosswalk.
- YRP aids the City in addressing safety concerns in school zones brought to their attention.
- York Region Public Health promotes walking and cycling as healthy methods for children to travel to school.

Conclusion

The City has operated the SCGP for over 30 years ensuring children's safety is a top priority. SCGs play an important role in road safety and the promotion of active travel to school. An external Program review, benchmarking study, and staff engagement survey identified challenges related to recruitment, inspections, high absenteeism, and supervision capacity. To improve the SCGP's overall performance, maintain program sustainability, and reduce risk and liability, it is recommended that the (1) SCG policy be updated to align with the 2017 OTC SCG Guide to provide a clear framework, in alignment with best practices across the Province when determining a SCG location, and the recommended activities associated with that implementation; (2) consistent administration be established, inclusive of oversight and procedures needed to manage the SCGP; and (3) capacity be added to enable stakeholder education, outreach and communication. To ensure the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the program, it is further recommended that a Program Coordinator be added to the SCGP staffing complement to support the current supervisor to administer the SCGP under the updated Policy and procedure.

For more information, please contact Donald Eta, Director of Transportation and Fleet Management Services, Ext. 6141.

Attachments

1. City School Crossing Guard Market Survey
2. School Crossing Guard Program Policy 2020
3. School Crossing Guard Program Procedure 2020

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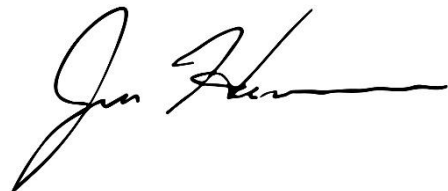
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Zoran Postic,
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Reviewed by

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Jim Harnum, City Manager