



CONSERVATION EDUCATORS REPORT

Issue

A final report of the 2024 Summer Conservation Education Program's activities and successes is presented to Council.

Motion Proposed by Administration

That the presentation regarding the 2024 Summer Conservation Education Program be accepted as presented.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

The annual Summer Conservation Education Program is provided to increase awareness, understanding and participation in achieving environmental stewardship targets in the Environmental Master Plan and the Climate Action Plan. This community based social marketing program is an initiative to create behaviour change through in-person education initiatives that promote long-term environmentally responsible lifestyle changes among Okotoks residents.

The 2024 program employed four (4) non-permanent staff, from May through August, with the purpose of promoting the Town's sustainability initiatives. The main program includes school and community group eco-education programs, monthly workshops, Town day-camps, weekly programming at the library, outdoor public information booths, irrigation assessments, and door to door visits to new utility account addresses, businesses, and to high water users. Educators also ran Environment Week and Pollinator Week information campaigns and events. This year the team interacted with 62 of the top 100 higher water-using businesses to educate about the Water Meter Portal and help them to sign up. A total of 15 business accounts signed up to the portal this summer.

The educational focus each summer includes the outdoor watering schedule, the water meter portal, waste diversion and the waste app, water conservation, and education about pollinators and the local ecosystem. The educators were also able to assist with analysis and administrative tasks including program and grant research, processing the water rebate program applications, and overseeing the DIY home energy audit kit program. The Conservation Educators made special efforts to chat with residents about the new outdoor watering schedule and water stages.

The Conservation Education team delivered eco-education programs to 460 youth and children through 22 programs with schools and at the library, and 8 weekly programs at Town day camps reaching just over 480 kids.

The Conservation Educators host an information table at each Town event during the summer and relay information about conservation tools, the outdoor watering schedule, and ways to enhance the local environment. This year they spoke to over 1683 people at events. In addition to the booths at events, the team coordinated volunteers to help at the Town's three waste stations. 132 kg of waste was diverted from the landfill this summer!

The Town's special event bike valet service, coordinated by the Conservation Educator team, was a hit again this summer. 104 bikes were checked into the valet throughout the summer. The service continues to be a success and will continue next summer.

As part of Pollinator Week an online event on iNaturalist was launched for Okotoks as a method of engaging residents with their local pollinators. 11 bumblebee nest boxes were installed in the forest near the Operations Centre. The boxes support citizen science initiatives by the Alberta Native Bee Council. The Environment team will assess the boxes in October to see if any bumblebees took up residence during the summer. Unfortunately, no bumblebees took up residence in 2023.

The 2024 Environment Week consisted of many events to engage the public about living more sustainably. The Conservation Educators hosted a Clothing Swap where people brought in unwanted clothing and swapped it for something else. All remaining materials were dropped off at the Eco-center for repurposing. To promote reducing carbon footprints, two events were held with schools. Bike to School Day was a contest for a Jr High school kids where the class with the greatest number of kids who biked to school won a pizza party. Vehicle Emissions Day was held at the Composite High School and included informing students about the impact of car exhaust on air quality and GHG's. The Conservation Educator team also hosted a Water Day where residents could participate in a river valley walk with Kathy Coutts and learn about the rich history of the Sheep River. Lastly, the Repair Café and a shredding event were both a hit with over 266 people in combined attendance.

Nature Fridays is a program day at the Environmental Education Centre where environment-related events and activities are scheduled each Friday of the year. From May through August, a total of 257 people (average of 68 per month) attended the weekly events hosted by the Conservation Education team. In the last twelve months, a total of 878 people attended Nature Fridays events.

A total of 606 households with new utility accounts, 200 high water using households, and 24 households non-compliant to the watering schedule were visited through door-knocking efforts. Over 40% of residents answered their doors and engaged in conversation with the team.

As part of the main goals of the program, the Educators inform residents about the programs and tools available from the Town to help conserve and protect the environment. The Irrigation Assessment program started up in late May, continuing over the summer months. 21 yards and irrigation systems were assessed for water conserving set up and adherence to the watering schedule. Since May, 66 households have signed up to the Water Meter Portal, making up 36% of the yearly sign-up totals, and a total of 195 people downloaded the Okotoks Waste App.

In August, the educators successfully coordinated the first Medication Drop-off and Disposal Day in collaboration with two local pharmacies. The initiative aimed to address the crucial issue of pharmaceutical waste disposal, and how to properly dispose of medications. Community members were encouraged to bring unused or expired medications to the designated drop-off locations. While there, they had the opportunity to learn why it is essential to avoid disposing of medications as household waste or down the drain. The event was met with a positive response from the community, the success of this drop-off day led to 3.75 kg of pharmaceuticals being diverted from our water supply and landfills.

Strategic Plan Goals

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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Responsibly Managed Growth | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Demonstrated Environmental Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Strong Local Economy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Enhanced Culture & Community Health |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Organizational Excellence | | |

Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

Programming offered by the Conservation Education program is geared to all ages and abilities. Programs can be booked for free and are not constrained to the Environmental Education Centre.

Environmental Impacts

The Conservation Education program informs Okotoks residents about the programs and tools that the Town offers to protect, conserve, and regenerate the environment both locally and globally. The program provides learning and action opportunities for all ages with the goal of improved local ecosystems and water conservation, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and movement towards a circular economy.

Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements

n/a

Community Engagement Strategy

The Conservation Education Program is announced annually to the public in early May and delivered May through August to engage the public with opportunities to participate in environmental initiatives and educational events. The Program continues on a limited basis by a partially grant funded, non-permanent staff member in non-peak months who responds to increasing requests for eco-education programs and information by schools, businesses and individuals.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

The annual conservation educators report is a synopsis of activities performed by staff to advance the Town's environmental strategic goals. The tremendous energy, creativity and enthusiasm is infectious both internally and externally and they make an impact on the community. My thanks for their contributions in advancing our community and organizational goals.

Attachment(s)

n/a

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