

Lifeguard shortage could impact community services]

By Zachary Roman

The Town of Caledon is set to implement a pilot project that aims to address a shortage of lifeguards and swim instructors.

At Caledon Council's December 6 General Committee meeting, Caledon's Supervisor of Community Programs and Services, Kathleen Prochilo, brought forward a report suggesting the Town implement an Aquatic Leadership Pilot Project.

In the report, Prochilo said there's a national aquatic staff shortage that's impacting the ability of municipalities to provide the aquatic programs and services people are used to. She said current staffing levels in Caledon could result in aquatic facility closures as soon as Winter 2023.

The staffing shortage has escalated to the point of requiring creative recruitment strategies, reductions in operating hours, last-minute program cancellations due to staff availability, inability to expand programs, and facility closures in some municipalities. Shortages have been further exacerbated by the pandemic, reads the report.

Potential for the staff shortage to result in facility closures is an imminent concern in Caledon, the frequency and duration of the closures is unknown at this time and will be directly linked to staff availability. Closures could include full days, rotating cancellations, or a complete shutdown of the pool.

In 2021, a report was brought to Council in an attempt to address the aquatic staff issue, which has been ongoing since then. While some success with marketing campaigns and incentives has been found, Prochilo said many challenges remain when it comes to attracting and retaining aquatic staff.

One major issue is the cost to become a certified lifeguard or swim instructor: \$750 plus materials.

That's why Prochilo suggests in the report that Caledon implement no-cost aquatic leadership courses for prospective swim instructors and lifeguards, beginning in 2023. Staff would reassess the situation before the Town's 2024 budget.

No cost courses offered by the Town would include Bronze Medallion and Emergency First Aid with CPR B; Bronze Cross and Standard First Aid with CPR C; Lifesaving Society Swim and Lifesaving Instructor; and Lifesaving Society National Lifeguard (Pool Option).

Prochilo's report notes other municipalities, such as Brampton, have tried this approach.

While offering no-cost courses would cause a loss in registration revenue, Town staff hope the long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term loss.

By offering the Leadership Program, it will result in longer-term benefits of recruiting more participants in leadership courses, then leading to the subsequent hiring of staff and offering more programming opportunities, which can in turn increase the revenue, reads the report. Each successful candidate graduating from the Leadership Program, who becomes an instructor for the Town's aquatics programs, can create estimated revenue of approximately \$12,000 per year.

Council has approved staff's recommendation to implement the Aquatic Leadership Pilot Program on consent, and the Pilot Program is recommended to be approved again at Council's December 13 meeting.