

Town to pilot project allowing seniors club to use rooms for free at Community Centre]

Southfields Village Seniors Club needs a warm place to socialize in the winter months

By Zachary Roman

The Southfields Village Seniors Club will be able to continue to gather in the winter months.

The Southfields Village Seniors Club (SVSC) is an affiliate group of the Town and when the weather's warm they spend many days socializing outside at the parks in the Southfields Village and Anthem neighbourhoods.

The Town considers the club to be great stewards of their local parks, as they clean up garbage, report maintenance issues, and are a deterrent to illegal activity. The club is also known for hosting an annual seniors' picnic.

When the weather turns cold, it's challenging for the SVSC to gather outside but the club is too large to meet at any one member's house. Additionally, it would be too expensive for the club to rent a room to meet in daily, which is why the club requested free room use from the Town.

The Town of Caledon is set to implement a pilot project where the SVSC can use any one of the three meeting rooms at the Southfields Community Centre for free from January 1 to April 30.

The club will be able to use the rooms between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays, provided the room they use isn't already booked.

During the pilot project, Town of Caledon staff will track the SVSC's frequency and hours of use of rooms at the Southfields Community Centre. Staff will also track participation rates and use all of the data they collect to determine if the pilot project should be rolled out all across Caledon.

The pilot was brought to Caledon Council at its December 6 General Committee meeting, where a report on it was submitted by Caledon's Director of Community Services Heather Savage.

At the meeting, Savage also delivered a presentation on the pilot project and other community services items.

In Savage's report, she notes that the pilot project is in line with a 2015 Town of Caledon recreation plan that encourages the Town to maintain flexibility and create and deliver programs that meet the unique needs of each community in Caledon.

There would be no financial impact on the Town for the SVSC to use the rooms at the Southfields Community Centre, since club members would only be using a room if it was not rented out already.

Ward 4 Councillor Nick deBoer asked Savage at the meeting for a little more clarification on the pilot, specifically if there was any structured programming in place. Savage explained there is no structured programming in place; just use of a room for the SVSC to gather like they would in a park.

deBoer then asked why the program needed to be formalized since he said it's not too different to people just gathering in a community centre lobby, which does not require insurance.

While in the pilot there would be no charge for use of the rooms, the SVSC would still need its own insurance coverage. Savage explained the SVSC would be renting the room for zero dollars and a contract would be created, hence the need for insurance.

Savage noted drop-in programs that did not require insurance were tried in the past but were not successful. deBoer said later in the meeting he thinks the program will be a success and can expand across Caledon, and encouraged Town staff to see if there's any way

they can make it so groups like the SVSC do not need insurance to meet as described in the pilot project.

Mayor Annette Groves thanked Savage for bringing the pilot project to Council and said it's so important to bring seniors together. She said during the pandemic, isolation impacted seniors' mental and physical health, and that the social part of the new pilot project is extremely important.

Council unanimously voted in favour of implementing the pilot project at its General Committee meeting, and the project is recommended for final approval at Council's December 13 meeting.