



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Heather Kaufmann, Community Development Supervisor –
Community Partnerships and Sport Development

Erin Burger, Community Development Supervisor – Special
Events and Neighbourhood Engagement

DATE: June 11, 2025

REPORT NO.: CSE-2025-027

SUBJECT: Transition to an Annual Volunteer Recognition Event

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Report No. CSE-2025-027, dated June 11, 2025 regarding the Transition to an Annual Community Volunteer Recognition Event, be received;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the transition from a four-year, large-scale Town-wide Community Volunteer Recognition Event to an Annual Volunteer Recognition Event, beginning in 2026 as outlined in Report No. CSE-2025-027;

AND FURTHER THAT an annual operating budget of \$5,000 be included for consideration in the 2026 operating budget to support the implementation of the updated recognition model as outlined in Report No. CSE-2025-027.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- Town staff recommend transitioning from a large-scale event every four years to an annual Community Volunteer Recognition Event starting in 2026.
- The annual model ensures more frequent and meaningful recognition of community volunteers across diverse sectors, rather than waiting for up to four years between acknowledgements.

- The proposed event would be hosted at a Town facility (e.g., John Elliott Theatre) and include a guest speaker, light reception, networking and volunteer spotlights.
- The event would be held each year in April during National Volunteer Week, complimenting existing Town-hosted recognition for Hillsvie and youth program volunteers.
- The annual event would cost approximately \$5,000 per year, a more sustainable and budget-friendly alternative to the \$16,000 cost of the previous four-year model.
- Funding will be submitted through the 2026 Budget process and integrated into the Special Events Operating Budget, removing reliance on the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve.
- A presentation on the proposed change was made to the Healthy Environment and Community Committee on May 22, 2025. The proposed model is now being brought forward to Council for approval.
- The new model supports volunteer retention, strengthens civic pride, and enhances the Town's relationship with community organizations through inclusive and ongoing recognition.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Since 2001, the Town of Halton Hills has hosted a Mayor-led Town-wide Community Volunteer Recognition Event once every four years, aligned with each Council term, to celebrate and honour the significant contributions of community volunteers. This tradition reflects the Town's commitment to fostering civic engagement, promoting volunteerism, and expressing gratitude for the invaluable service of individuals who dedicate their time and talents to making Halton Hills a vibrant, inclusive and supportive community.

In addition to the Town-wide Community Volunteer Recognition Event, the Town of Halton Hills has traditionally hosted volunteer appreciation activities for Town-affiliated volunteers, such as those supporting the Hillsvie Active Living Centres and youth programs - particularly during National Volunteer Week. These events focus on recognizing individuals directly involved in municipal programs and services.

In contrast, the Town-wide Community Volunteer Recognition Event serves a broader purpose. It acknowledges and celebrates the contributions of volunteers from community-based organizations. This event is designed to highlight the impact of volunteerism beyond the Town's internal programs, strengthening community pride and partnerships across the municipality.

Hosting a Community Volunteer Recognition Event provides a range of important benefits that support the Town's strategic goals and community-building efforts. First and foremost, it acknowledges the significant impact of volunteer contributions, publicly recognizing the time, energy and dedication of individuals who enhance the quality of life in Halton Hills. These events also play a key role in fostering volunteer retention and

recruitment by demonstrating that the Town values and appreciates community involvement. In doing so, they help attract and sustain local talent across various sectors. Furthermore, recognition events strengthen relationships with community organizations and stakeholders, reinforcing the Town's commitment to collaboration and mutual support. Lastly, by showcasing volunteer stories and achievements, these events promote civic pride and inspire broader participation, reinforcing a shared sense of purpose and community spirit.

A presentation outlining the history of the Community Volunteer Recognition Event was delivered to the Healthy Environment and Community Committee on May 22, 2025, and is attached as Appendix A. The Committee provided positive feedback and supported the recommendation to bring forward the annual model for Council's consideration.

1.0 History of the Event & Model

The recognition event has historically served as a large-scale, inclusive celebration, welcoming volunteers from a wide range of community sectors including recreation, arts and culture, environment, sport, service clubs, neighbourhood groups, and social service agencies. Invitations have typically been extended through Town departments and community partner networks to ensure broad participation across all demographics and volunteer roles.

The event has typically featured the following components:

- A formal large-scale gathering hosted at a Town facility.
- Structured recognition activities such as volunteer acknowledgements, certificates, or awards presentations.
- Light refreshments and entertainment, offering a social and celebratory atmosphere; and
- A keynote speaker or guest presenter to inspire attendees and highlight the impact of volunteerism.

All previous Community Volunteer Recognition Events have been funded through the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund, with supplementary contributions from local sponsorships and in-kind community support, at an approximate cost of \$16,000 per event - although the amount has not increased to reflect inflationary pressures.

While this traditional format is widely recognized and valued by both volunteers and community organizations, several limitations have become increasingly evident in recent years, including:

- Infrequent recognition: Hosting the event only once every four years results in missed opportunities to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of volunteers in a timely manner. Volunteers who serve early in the Council term may not feel adequately appreciated if recognition is delayed for several years.

- High upfront costs and resource demands: Large-scale events require substantial planning, staff coordination, facility booking, identifying sponsors, procurement, and promotion - all of which place significant pressure on staff capacity and municipal resources. The budget for the event was not part of the base operating budget and was funded from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve.
- Unpredictable attendance: Despite the high financial and staff investment, turnout is not guaranteed. Competing commitments, limited transportation options, or disengagement over time can all contribute to lower-than-expected participation.
- Disconnect for past volunteers: Those who were active earlier in the four-year cycle may no longer be involved in their roles or may feel distanced from the Town's current engagement efforts by the time the recognition event occurs.

In response to these challenges, Town staff explored alternate recognition models that maintain the spirit of community appreciation while addressing cost, consistency and inclusivity.

2.0 Proposed Change – Annual Recognition Model

In developing the proposed recognition model, Town staff reviewed multiple options to evaluate their feasibility, impact and alignment with the Town's strategic goals. The status quo model, which involves hosting a large-scale volunteer recognition event once every four years, was not recommended due to its high upfront cost (funded by the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve), intensive staff resource requirements, and the long gaps between recognition opportunities - which may reduce volunteer engagement and sense of appreciation over time.

A virtual recognition model, involving e-mailed certificates and coupons from local businesses, was also considered as a low-cost alternative. While efficient and inclusive, this approach was not pursued as the primary method due to its lack of personal interaction, lower emotional impact, and limited ability to foster community connection.

An annual in-person event was determined to strike the best balance by offering consistent and meaningful recognition, maintaining fiscal responsibility, and strengthening relationships with community volunteers in a sustainable and accessible format.

Based on this, it is recommended that the Town transition from a quadrennial large-scale Community Volunteer Recognition Event to a smaller-scale annual recognition model, starting in 2026. This new approach is intended to enhance volunteer engagement, improve consistency in recognition, and align more effectively with the Town's available resources and operational priorities.

Under the proposed model, the Town would host an Annual Community Volunteer Recognition Event, likely at a municipally operated venue such as the John Elliott Theatre, which would include:

- A formal presentation and guest speaker to inspire and celebrate volunteerism.
- A light reception and networking component to foster connections among volunteers and community leaders.
- Recognition of a diverse range of community volunteers from across sectors such as sport, culture, environment, health and social services.

To reinforce the Town's appreciation for volunteerism and ensure alignment with broader public awareness efforts, the event would be scheduled annually during National Volunteer Week, historically held in April. This timing allows the Town to participate in a nationally recognized celebration of volunteerism while providing a dedicated opportunity to honour volunteers from community-based organizations.

It is important to note that this event would be distinct from existing volunteer recognition activities hosted by the Town for its internal volunteers, including those serving at the Hillview Active Living Centres, youth programs, and other municipal initiatives. These internal recognitions would continue as separate and targeted events during the same week, allowing for tailored approaches that meet the unique needs and identities of each volunteer group.

This annual model offers several benefits:

- Frequent and timely recognition ensures that community volunteers are acknowledged on a consistent basis rather than waiting multiple years between events.
- A more controlled and predictable event setting simplifies logistics and enables staff to deliver a meaningful experience within available resources.
- Stronger storytelling opportunities, including themed recognition or volunteer spotlights, help to illustrate the value of volunteerism in community development.
- Improved cost efficiency and budget stability, as expenses will be incorporated into the Special Events Operating Budget, eliminating reliance on the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve every four years.
- Enhanced morale and retention, as more frequent recognition supports ongoing volunteer engagement and community pride.

This proposed change reflects best practices in volunteer management and aligns with the Town's broader objectives of fostering civic participation, celebrating community contributions, and maintaining a sustainable and inclusive recognition strategy.

3.0 Budget Considerations

To successfully implement the proposed Annual Community Volunteer Recognition Event beginning in 2026, an operating budget of \$5,000 per year is required. This funding will support core components of the event, including:

- Venue rental and technical support (e.g., John Elliott Theatre)

- Guest speaker, performer or presentation fees
- Light refreshments and catering
- Promotional materials and printed collateral
- Recognition tokens or certificates
- Event coordination and logistics

This budget allocation reflects a cost-effective alternative to the previous quadrennial model, which required approximately \$16,000 every four years and was funded through the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve Fund. Staff note that the \$16,000 budget had not increased in many years to account for inflation. Further, the slight increase in total budget over 4 years will eliminate the reliance on sponsorship and fully fund the event. By incorporating the annual cost into the Special Events Operating Budget, the Town can ensure ongoing financial sustainability, predictability, and alignment with regular budget planning cycles.

The proposed \$5,000 annual amount will be submitted for consideration through the 2026 Budget process. This investment in volunteer recognition supports broader community development objectives, contributes to positive volunteer retention, and reinforces the Town's commitment to celebrating civic engagement.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report identifies a safe and welcoming community as one of the Town's Strategic Priorities.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Formal public engagement was not undertaken for this report, as it is administrative in nature and relates to the internal planning and delivery of a municipal recognition event.

However, it should be noted that Town staff have engaged in ongoing, informal discussions with community organizations through various meetings and touchpoints. These interactions have provided valuable, indirect feedback regarding volunteer recognition preferences and the importance of meaningful and consistent acknowledgement. Insights gathered through these conversations have informed the recommended approach and reinforced the need for a more frequent, engaging and inclusive recognition model.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

Staff from Community Development were consulted as part of this report as they are the primary staff members working directly with community-based organizations in Halton Hills.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report has the potential to require funding in a future budget year and therefore needs to be referred to budget committee for tracking purposes.

The estimated annual cost of the proposed Annual Community Volunteer Recognition Event is \$5,000. Under the revised model, funding would be incorporated into the Operating Budget of Special Events instead of relying on a one-time allocation from the Tax Rate Stabilization Reserve every four years. This shift will promote greater fiscal sustainability, enable improved long-term planning, and reflect the Town's commitment to recognizing community volunteers in a consistent and responsible manner.

This budget request will be considered as part of the 2026 operating budget.

Reviewed and approved by,

Kevin Okimi, Director of Parks, Community Development & Environment

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer