

Environment Hamilton wants to take you for a ride

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Environment Hamilton is offering residents a free pass to experience the city's sights and sounds wherever public transit takes them.

Brenda Johnson, project co-ordinator for Environment Hamilton, is proposing that if a family has purchased a Hamilton Street Railway day pass for \$8, they would be entitled to discounts at city-operated facilities, restaurants and retail outlets across city where HSR goes.

Environment Hamilton has already established partnerships with several businesses, associated through Tourism Hamilton, which has jumped on the program. Establishments that have so far agreed to provide a discount include the Football Hall of Fame, the Hamilton Conservative Authority, the Hamilton Waterfront Trust, the YMCA and the YWCA.

Other discounts that will be offered starting next year will be \$10 off a Hamilton Art Gallery family pass, a discount on a family pass to the Marine Discovery Museum and HMCS Haida and support from the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce to develop a marketing plan.

Tourism Hamilton, said Ms. Johnson, is interested in selling the bus passes at the Hamilton International Airport to encourage travellers to take advantage of local facilities. Ms. Johnson said Environment Hamilton will be approaching restaurants within the city to also offer discounts to the bus pass holders.

Members of the emergency and community services committee agreed enthusiastically the city needed to join Environment Hamilton's initiative. "This is an incredibly creative and innovative program," said Ward 1 Councillor Brian McHattie.

Hamilton will be offering a "buy one, get one free" admission price for bus pass holders to recreation centres for public swimming and skating, and entrances to the city's heritage sites.

Environment Hamilton will be distributing about 25,000 brochures in Hamilton's north end neighbourhood, informing residents of the program. The bus pass program will be available through regular HSR outlets, and at north-end facilities such as the Eva Rothwell Resource Centre and the Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club.

Environment Hamilton hit on the idea of the bus pass to encourage people to use public transit, said Ms. Johnson. But the idea is also an opportunity to help children and families living near the poverty line to enjoy the city's various amenities.

Statistics show that one in four children lives in poverty in Hamilton and that 50 per cent of their family's income is used for housing costs. About 96,000 people live below the poverty line in the city, the highest urban poverty rate in the province. "I'd like to think (poverty reduction) is a council priority," added Mr. McHattie.

Politicians will vote on the recommendation at their Dec. 12 council meeting.

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