

Region plans safety village for children

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
Staff Writer

A \$5-million children's safety village designed to teach kids the rules of the road will be built in the Aurora area in the next two to three years.

The Community Children's Safety Village, modelled after similar facilities in the GTA, will be the first of its kind in York Region. The Aurora-based community group Police and Community Together (PACT) is behind the project.

Aurora Councillor Steve Hinder, who heads the group, said it's time York Region had a children's safety village of its own. "Years ago, police officers used to visit the classrooms," he said. "But we just don't have the resources to do that any more."

The safety village, which will cover about five acres, will take the place of those safety courses. The village will include a classroom, but York Region students will be able to put what they learned into practice in the miniature village.

Children will be able to ride miniature electric cars and bicycles through the safety village to learn the rules of the road.

Hinder, who is a staff sergeant with Toronto Police, said teaching the rules at an early age will reap dividends down the road. "If we ever want to get rid of terminologies like road rage in our society, we'll have to change behaviours at an early age. We were able to make a big impact with drinking and driving."

Hinder said PACT, which has 12 board members, hopes to find a site in Aurora because it's central for York Region residents. "We want students from all over the region to be bused here," he said. "And at night it can be used by seniors, Boy Scouts and other groups."

The concept was raised in the early '90s but was put on hold when the only available land was in Georgina. "That was just too far away for people in the south end," he said.

Hinder said the project will be funded through corporations, which will display their logos on miniature buildings in the safety village. The corporations would pay an annual maintenance fee to help cover upkeep costs.

York Regional Police officers would work in the safety village, teaching classes and giving road tests.



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