

## Local youth leaders aim to engage community with Teen Beach Party

Despite the unseasonably cool weather, beach season is just around the corner, and local youth are looking to make the most of it.

Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee (YEC) is hard at work putting the finishing touches on one of its most anticipated annual events, the Teen Beach Party, set to take over the Aurora Family Leisure Complex on June 25.

National Youth Week 2026 might be in the books, but the Town's YEC is not resting on their laurels. It's full speed ahead on this annual end-of-school celebration and planning for the future.

Aurora's YEC is a group of 13 local youth from across the community who meet biweekly to look at issues facing residents between the ages of 12 and 17 through initiatives and events that "enrich the lives and experiences of young people in the community."

The YEC has its roots in a Youth Advisory Committee that served Aurora between 1995 and 2007. After an absence of nearly seven years, area teens came together to fill the gap and presented their idea of a revival in 2014.

"They made a strong case for bringing back a dedicated youth committee and they ultimately succeeded," said YEC member Serena Yogaraj. "As a result, the Youth Engagement Committee was born. Since then, the YEC has helped launch new events, supported The Loft, and ensured youth voices are an important part of local conversations."

Yogaraj was one of six YEC members to present to Council at this month's Committee of the Whole meeting.

Speaking to the current term of the YEC, member Rhea Manek said they have had "some amazing successes" over the last few months.

"At the beginning of the year, we hosted the Youth Volunteer Fair at the Aurora Public Library with over 100 attendees," she said. "Besides that, we hosted the Haunted Forest, a holiday movie karaoke night and some youth week events such as cake decorating and a live music night. One of our favourite moments though was redecorating The Loft to be a more fun, colourful space with art, music, and games. It's become the perfect spot for us to host events."

The upcoming Teen Beach Party is just one event YEC member Lia Mueller says will help the group "grow and thrive."

"In previous years, this event has brought youth together from across Aurora for an evening filled with energy, connection, and community spirit," she said. "Through activities such as beach volleyball, dunk tanks, watermelon eating contests, and many other interactive summer games, the Teen Beach Party has become a space for young people to come together, have fun, and create lasting memories. More importantly, events like these reflect the YEC's ongoing commitment to creating inclusive, welcoming, and safe spaces for all youth in Aurora.

"We strive to ensure that every young person feels seen, supported, and encouraged to participate. By continuing to offer events like the Teen Beach Party, we hope to strengthen community connections, encourage youth involvement, and provide opportunities for young people to build confidence, friendships, and a true sense of belonging within our Town."

As they look to the future, the YEC hopes to expand its tent, said Grace Vrabel, who added, they want to bring together similar youth councils from across York Region to share ideas and explore how their events can be "more successful and inclusive."

"Serving on the Youth Engagement Committee as co-president this year, alongside so many dedicated changemakers, I have been able to grow as a leader and learn to advocate empathetically for the youth of our Town," said Iman Chaudary. "This year, I joined YEC, just like many of the others on the Council, seeking to make a concrete difference within my Town and to give back to a community that had already given me so much. This year, we all did just that. Every YEC meeting championed within us something

larger. It presented within each and every one of us a purpose. Through YEC?I have learned to give my voice power and to reshape it into actions. From advocating for youth leadership to pushing the boundaries of equity and inclusion, YEC has truly had the chance to build a stronger community within the Town of Aurora, founded on the principles of youth empowerment.

?Our message to every young person in Aurora is incredibly clear. You are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but you are the changemakers of today. Our Town has grown tremendously because of every one of you, and so the Youth Engagement Committee is your chance to broaden your impact.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter