

HYC History

The story of the Hampton Youth Commission begins in 1990 when a group of city leaders was convened by City Council to develop a plan of action to ensure that Hampton's youth would become productive members of the workforce and community. This new Coalition for Youth did not have any youth members or advisors, so they decided to include a Youth Task Force that eventually helped to set the youth agenda for the city and taught adults how to listen to the voice of young people.

The group created a series of 6 commitments – Appreciation of Diversity, Care and Nurturing, Safety, Health, Education, and Partnership in the Community – for the community to endorse. The last commitment became the foundation of the city's youth civic engagement. It states:

“All young people in Hampton are entitled to be seen, heard, and respected as citizens of the community. They deserve to be prepared, active participants in community service, government, public policy, or other decision-making which affects their lives and their well-being.”

The plan was adopted by City Council in 1992 and it created a community-wide initiative focused on youth as resources. It proposed to train youth and adults to work in partnership to identify and address community issues, to build caring communities within neighborhoods and schools, and to create opportunities for youth to serve the community.

Alternatives, Inc., the local non-profit youth development agency was asked to establish a comprehensive system of recruitment, training and support for involving youth in the civic life of the community. They created leadership groups in neighborhoods and schools, where thousands of youth each year can tackle issues and work toward local solutions with their adult partners. These leadership groups have become successful in attracting a true diversity of youth. Many young people from neighborhood and school leadership groups gain valuable experience and training and end up as youth commissioners.

It was at one of these early neighborhood meetings that the city's Director of Planning first encountered the power of youth involvement in a local planning process. Discovering that youth input definitely enhanced both the process and decisions, he decided to ensure that future city planning decisions impacting youth would involve youth. Early in 1997 he hired two high school students as city planners, and youth have had an influential role in city government since then.

Patrick and Sheena, the first Youth Planners for the City of Hampton, helped

develop the concept for the Hampton Youth Commission. They recognized that what makes adult groups successful is "position and money." So they encouraged the adults to create a governing body of youth with position and money.

Hampton already had a Mayor's Youth Council, so it was restructured as a commission with the authority to report directly to City Council and the ability to "weigh in" on decisions of other city commissions that may affect youth. The commission was also given responsibility for its own section of the city's Comprehensive Plan as an ongoing vehicle to have input into city planning. To ensure the ability to affect the allocation of resources, we asked City Council to set aside a portion of the General Fund for the youth commission to appropriate for youth needs.

So in January of 1998, the first youth commissioners were interviewed and selected. Guidelines were written by the youth planners to answer difficult questions such as officers, committees, term limits, policies, etc. Over the years, experience has dictated that some of those early decision have changed. But most of them proved to be a good foundation for what is now our very successful commission!