



## **Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting**

**Date of Meeting:** April 9, 2018

**Report Number:** SREIS.18.001

**Department:** Environment and Infrastructure Services

**Division:** Asset Management Planning and Environment Services

**Subject:** 2017 Community Stewardship Program and  
Natural Environment Achievements Update

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### **Purpose:**

To provide Council with an update regarding the 2017 Community Stewardship Program and Natural Environment Achievements.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- a) That SREIS.18.001 be received; and,
- b) That the Director of Asset Management Planning & Environment Services be delegated the authority to authorize the entry into and termination, administer and execute Community Garden Agreements and renewals thereof.

### **Contact Person:**

Terry Ricketts, Director of Asset Management Planning & Environment Services,  
Extension 6504

Ann Marie Farrugia, Manager of Natural Environment, Extension 5509

Contributor: Antonio Munafo, Natural Environment Coordinator

### **Report Approval:**

**Submitted by:** Italo Brutto, Commissioner of Environment and Infrastructure Services

**Approved by:** Neil Garbe, Chief Administrative Officer

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), Town Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and Chief Administrative Officer. Details of the reports approval are attached.

## **Background:**

The Natural Environment Section of the Asset Management Planning and Environment Services Division delivers programs and initiatives to protect and maintain healthy and diverse woodlands and natural areas. These include among others, the Community Stewardship Program, Healthy Yards Program, Emerald Ash Borer Management Strategy, Long-term Woodlot Restoration, David Dunlop Observatory Park Woodlot Restoration, Urban Forest Management Plan, Community Garden Program, LEAF's (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) Backyard Tree Planting Program as well as various outreach and education initiatives. The attached fact sheet (Appendix A) summarizes the collective Natural Environment achievements for 2017.

## **Community Stewardship Program**

The Town's Community Stewardship Program works with agencies and community volunteers to improve the local environment through activities such as tree planting, natural area stewardship and stream restoration. In 2017, with the help of partner agencies along with 1,950 community volunteers and 29 schools, community groups and local businesses, the program delivered approximately:

- 31 volunteer stewardship events,
- 37 restoration projects,
- 10,900 trees and shrubs planted,
- 11 acres of land and 3 km of stream restored,
- 146 bags of litter and 155 bags of invasive plant species removed.

This work helps to create a vibrant community by establishing a healthier urban forest and natural corridors throughout the Town's greenway system. It also contributes to improving our overall quality of life by creating and protecting places where Richmond Hill residents can enjoy the outdoors.

Partner agencies provide significant financial and in-kind support for these activities, all of which take place on Town land. Since the late 1990's, organizations and agencies such as the Regional Municipality of York (York Region), Evergreen, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Ontario Streams, LEAF, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) have made an on-going commitment to work with Richmond Hill. In 2017, Richmond Hill's partnership with the TRCA was expanded to include a new community outreach component that engages local residents in tree planting and stewardship to help enhance the local greenway system.

*In 2017, projects accomplished through the Community Stewardship Program were valued at \$392,800, with a Town contribution of \$161,700, equivalent to 41% of the overall cost.*

The balance of these projects was met through funding contributions by our partners usually through dedicated budgets secured through fundraising efforts, as well as in-

kind contributions from both agency staff and community volunteers. Funding details can be found in Appendix B.

In 2017 in-kind contributions were provided by various agencies, schools, Town residents, corporate volunteers, and community groups, including:

- 407 ETR
- Bayview Hill Elementary School
- BGIS
- Buddha's Light International Association
- Buttonville Public School
- Chinese Family Services of Ontario
- Community Living York South
- Deb & Friends (a resident community group)
- Doncrest Public School
- École secondaire Norval-Morrisseau
- Girl Guides of Canada
- Halsall Associates Limited
- Hibar Systems Limited
- Jean Vanier Catholic High School
- Kettle Lakes Public School
- Nellie McClung Public School
- O.M. MacKillop Public School
- Priya and Friends (a resident community group)
- Project 5K
- Quadient
- Randal Public School
- Redstone Community Group
- Redstone Public School
- SICK Canada
- Sri Lankan Ex Tamil Police Officers' Club Canada
- TD Canada Trust – Markham and Richmond Hill Branches
- Toronto Montessori School: Bayview Campus & Elgin Mills Campus
- UBS

Several Town policies, including the Environment Strategy (2014), direct staff to establish, protect and maintain healthy and diverse local ecosystems. The Community Stewardship Program helps the Town reach its environmental goals through partnerships and leveraged funding.

## **Public Education and Engagement**

Several education and engagement events such as the Healthy Yards Programs and Earth Day were delivered by staff throughout the year to provide information and engage the local community in stewardship. As part of the annual Earth Day celebrations, local schools and residents took part in a tree planting event on Friday, April 21 which was themed to commemorate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of confederation. In recognition, the Mayor and Council planted a large maple tree in the presence of all Earth Day guests and participants.

In 2017 staff participated at events such as Mill Pond Splash, National Public Works Week, and Councillor barbeques. Residents were connected with local environmental programs which provided advice on how to create healthy yards as well as information about biodiversity, urban wildlife and invasive species. Staff participated in 12 outreach events in 2017 and delivered 15 workshops and presentations. These activities

educated residents about the value of our natural areas, and provide tools and information to help residents improve the health of their own properties and neighbourhoods, further connecting and enhancing our greenway system.

## **Healthy Yards Program**

The Healthy Yards Program offers residents the opportunity to purchase trees, shrubs, and perennial flowers at a subsidized rate, as well as rain barrels at a wholesale cost. Residents can pre-order a small plant kit for approximately \$11 (two trees/shrubs), a large plant kit for approximately \$29 (five trees/shrubs), a perennial flower kit for \$25 (tray of 16 flowers), a backyard composter for \$20 or a rain barrel for \$45 (2017 prices). All pre-ordered items are available for pickup at the Healthy Yards Event held in conjunction with the National Public Works Open House in May at the Richmond Hill Operations Centre. The purpose of the program is to encourage residents to create healthy yards that improve local plant diversity and ecosystems (reducing the impacts of invasive pests and disease). These actions also contribute significantly to expanding Richmond Hill's urban forest on private property, improving the Town's overall tree canopy cover providing a multitude of environmental services. Such services include cleaning our air, providing habitat for wildlife, slowing stormwater, improving water quality and capturing carbon from the atmosphere mitigating the impacts of climate change. The Healthy Yards program was first piloted in 2005 and formally approved as part of the baseline budget in 2006 as a complementary program to the Community Stewardship Program.

In 2017, approximately 1,000 residents attended the Healthy Yards event, purchasing 1,734 trees and shrubs, 5,782 perennial flowers, 195 backyard composters, and 269 rain barrels. As part of the Richmond Hill's Canada 150 celebrations, 150 maple trees were distributed to Richmond Hill residents to plant on their own properties. Also, York Region supported the Healthy Yards Program by contributing \$6,000, through the Regional Greening Strategy and Water for Tomorrow programs, to help subsidize the cost of plants. Additionally, York Region's Greener Gardens Backyard Composting Program again subsidized the cost of backyard composters which help reduce household waste (and municipal cost) while improving the nutrient value of garden soil.

This year's Healthy Yards Program participant survey, which received a total 143 responses, provided valuable feedback that is being used to make improvements to the program and also demonstrates the continued popularity of the program.

*"It was extremely well organized, it's my second year going and I plan on going next year."*

*"[It] was my first time at a healthy yards event and I was impressed."*

*"It's a wonderful program. Thank you Richmond Hill."*

## **National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge**

Like many communities across North America, Richmond Hill is continuing its effort to help save the monarch butterfly through the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge. The monarch is an iconic species whose populations have declined by 90% in the last 20 years, suffering from the same loss of habitat and severe weather impacts that have affected many other pollinators. In 2017, Richmond Hill continued to support the pledge by completing several actions that help to protect the monarch including, holding our annual Healthy Yards native plant sale, the proclamation of Pollinator Week (internationally celebrated in June every year), delivering monarch habitat creation and seed saving workshops, developing monarch butterfly educational displays at community centers, facilitating the collection of pollinator plant seeds for Central Library's local seed library as well continuing to promote the planting of pollinator plants in public park and open space capital projects. The effort we have made to complete eight or more actions has resulted in Richmond Hill receiving special recognition as a member of the Mayors' Monarch Pledge Leadership Circle. This designation demonstrates the Town's commitment to protecting and restoring the natural environment through wise management of land resources so that these magnificent butterflies will once again become a common species across our landscape.

## **Emerald Ash Borer Management Strategy and Long-term Woodlot Restoration**

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was first discovered in Richmond Hill in 2011 and can kill an ash tree within 2 to 4 years once infected. In 2011, Council approved the Emerald Ash Borer Management Strategy (SREIS. 11.024) which provides staff direction to manage the impacts of this highly invasive species by removing and replacing ash trees on streets and in parks, treating significant Town-owned ash trees with pesticide, implementing a long-term woodlot restoration program, and undertaking community awareness.

The Long-Term Woodlot Restoration Program was initiated as an outcome of the Emerald Ash Borer Management Strategy to manage the social, aesthetic, and ecological impacts of EAB. Further, the strategy aims to restore the ecological health of our greenway system by reestablishing quality woodlands that are resilient to future stresses and threats. Beaver Woodland was the first woodlot to undergo restoration as it was identified as one of several high priority restoration sites. In 2016, a restoration plan was developed which identifies several key phases to restore the woodlot over a five year timeframe. The restoration efforts include the removal of dead trees (completed winter 2016/17), invasive species management, restoration planting and monitoring. The TRCA was hired to implement the invasive species management and restoration planting components of the project. Two highly invasive species (common buckthorn and garlic mustard) were identified and targeted for treatment in 2017. In 2018 work will continue with ongoing monitoring, adaptive management of invasive species and intensive restoration plantings.

## **David Dunlop Observatory Park Woodland Restoration**

On April 12, 2012, Council approved an OMB mediated settlement for the development application associated with the David Dunlop Observatory site. As part of this settlement it was decided that the Town would receive compensation in the amount of \$1,643,500 from the developer to use towards the creation and qualitative enhancement of 34 hectares of woodlands on the property. Council approved the DDO Park Master Plan (SRPRS.16.064) which provides among other things a framework and direction for developing a multi-phased strategy to restore, manage and improve woodlands and other natural features on this property. Phase 1 of this restoration work began at the end of 2017 in the south east corner of the park property identified in the master plan as a wildlife corridor and wetland sanctuary.

Work within the Phase 1 area started with hazardous tree removal and invasive species management. Dog strangling vine, and common buckthorn were spot treated with herbicide as both these species can have a significant impact on the growth of newly planted trees. Work planned for 2018 includes ongoing monitoring, follow-up invasive species management and extensive restoration plantings, followed by adaptive management, infill planting and stewardship in the following years.

## **Urban Forest Management Plan**

Richmond Hill has long recognized the importance of the urban forest and the benefits it provides to our community. Over the past decade it has improved tree-related policies, created tree by-laws and guidelines to better support the protection and enhancement of its urban forest. The Town's Official Plan identifies increasing tree canopy cover, growing the Town's urban forest and enhancing linkages to the Greenway System. In 2014, Richmond Hill adopted its first Environment Strategy, which mandated the development of an Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) and in 2016 Richmond Hill approved its first Asset Management Plan which recognizes and identifies trees and forest as environmental assets that have a replacement value of over \$87M.

In November 2017, a consultant was retained to develop an UFMP that will provide the Town with a clear vision and actions for how to manage and maintain Richmond Hill's urban forest and tree assets over the long term. Ultimately the UFMP will help to improve and enhance the Town's tree canopy cover so that it will continue to provide the many social, environmental and economic benefits and services that our community receives from this important environmental resource.

## **Community Garden Program**

The Town's Environment Strategy provides direction to foster accessibility to local food in Richmond Hill. Access to local food provides healthier alternatives for residents and reduces the environmental impacts of long distance transportation of food. In July of 2017, Council approved a Community Garden Policy (SREIS.17.012) for Richmond Hill. The policy provides a framework to guide where and how new gardens are developed and establishes the level of service that will be provided to gardens on public land as well as a limited level of support to gardens on private lands. In the fall of 2017, the

Town received multiple applications from community groups to start Collective Gardens on Town-owned property. Staff are in the process of reviewing the applications and investigating sites and will initiate follow up meetings with the groups in an effort to establish one to two new gardens in time for the 2018 garden season.

Currently, Richmond Hill supports one (1) Allotment Garden, and four (4) Collective Gardens. The Phyllis Rawlinson Allotment Garden provides residents with an opportunity to rent seasonal or annual garden plots. Town staff continue to make improvements to the garden each year based on participant survey feedback, such as updating the water system, improving the quality of the soil, and providing educational information to gardeners. The Community Allotment Garden is very popular with all plots fully leased in 2017 (64 gardeners). In addition, there are four (4) Collective Gardens in Richmond Hill planted with ornamental plants and flowers maintained by the Richmond Hill Garden and Horticultural Society (RHGHS).

### **LEAF's Backyard Tree Planting Program**

Since 2009, LEAF's Backyard Tree Planting Program has been available to York Region residents. The program offers subsidized tree services on private property including onsite consultation with an arborist and full tree planting services. In 2017, 25 Richmond Hill residents participated in the program, planting 102 trees and shrubs. Information about the program is also provided to residents through the Town's Tree Preservation By-law permit process. The program helps strengthen the natural heritage system by enhancing and restoring our urban forest cover and native vegetation on private property.

### **Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:**

There are no new financial, staffing, or other implications associated with the 2017 Community Stewardship Program & Natural Environment Achievements Update report.

### **Relationship to the Strategic Plan:**

The programs and initiatives described in this report help to achieve:

- Strategic Plan Goal 1, building stronger connections in Richmond Hill, by providing opportunities for residents, community groups and local businesses to work together towards common goals, and by establishing stronger connections throughout the Town's natural corridors and greenway system.
- Strategic Plan Goal 3, a more vibrant Richmond Hill, by restoring our greenway and allowing residents to experience the Town's natural environment year round, creating a sense of identity and place.
- Strategic Plan Goal 4, wise management of resources by serving as a role model for municipal management across Ontario.

## **Conclusion:**

The successes and improvements made to our community, greenway system and urban forest as described in this report are a reflection of the commitment Richmond Hill has placed within our corporate policies to enhance, protect and restore our natural environment. In 2017, the Town's programs and projects included, among others,

- Community Stewardship Program,
- Healthy Yards Program,
- Emerald Ash Borer Management Strategy,
- Long-term Woodlot Restoration (Beaver Woodland),
- David Dunlop Observatory Park Woodlot Restoration,
- Urban Forest Management Plan,
- Community Garden Program; and,
- LEAF's Backyard Tree Planting Program

These programs and projects were complimented by various outreach and education initiatives and were valued at \$392,800, with a Town contribution of \$161,700, equivalent to 41% of the overall cost.

Richmond Hill's partners, small businesses and community members continue to demonstrate a sense of ownership and pride in their stewardship efforts which in turn has contributed to making our community a healthier and more vibrant place to live. The Town's 2017 Natural Environment achievements would not have been possible without the assistance and funding support of our valued community and program partners.

Appendix A highlights some of these accomplishments in a fact sheet that celebrates Richmond Hill's efforts and the commitment our partners have made to improve our natural environment in 2017.

## **Attachments:**

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendices, maps and photographs. If you require an alternative format please call contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A - 2017 Natural Environment Achievements Fact Sheet
- Appendix B - Summary of Funding Contribution to the 2017 Community Stewardship Program



## Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SREIS.18.001.docx
Attachments:	- SREIS.18.001 - Appendix A - 2017 Natural Environment Achievements Fact Sheet.pdf - SREIS.18.001 - Appendix B - Summary of Funding Contribution to the 2017 Community Stewardship Program.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 19, 2018

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

**Terry Ricketts - Mar 8, 2018 - 6:11 PM**

**Italo Brutto - Mar 12, 2018 - 12:56 PM**

**Neil Garbe - Mar 19, 2018 - 10:22 AM**