



## **Staff Report for Council**

**Date of Meeting:** June 10, 2020

**Report Number:** SRPRS.20.063

**Department:** Planning and Regulatory Services

**Division:** Policy Planning

**Subject:** **SRPRS.20.063 - 2019 Greening the Hill  
Environment Strategy Update**

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### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this staff report (SRPRS.20.063) is to provide Council with the 2019 Greening the Hill Report, an annual progress update on implementation of Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy.

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

- a) That Council receive staff report SRPRS.20.063 for information.

### **Contact Person:**

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### **Report Approval:**

**Submitted by:** Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Regulatory Services

**Approved by:** Mary-Anne Dempster, Interim City Manager

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

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### Background:

#### 1. Introduction

The City of Richmond Hill and its community are strongly committed to protecting their local environment. The front-line role of municipalities remains essential to environmental stewardship by providing corporate leadership, public policy, community programming, and education and outreach. Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future*, outlines how the City will continue to protect, restore and enhance our natural environment over the short, medium, and long term.

This staff report provides an annual update to Council on the progress of Phase 1 Environment Strategy initiatives implemented throughout 2019.

#### 2. Environment Strategy Overview

##### 2.1 Greening the Hill – A Strategy for Environmental Action

Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future*, is a corporate document that outlines both policy direction and specific actions designed to reduce our community's impacts on the environment and make improvements for a more resilient and sustainable community. Based on extensive community and stakeholder consultation, the Environment Strategy was approved by Council on April 28, 2014 and is being implemented over a 15+ year time period. To correspond with the City's Official Plan, the Environment Strategy has a planning horizon to the year 2031, and was divided into three phases containing short, medium, and long-term goals, objectives, and strategic actions.

The Environment Strategy considers how air quality, water resources, and land resources can best be managed using the City's regulatory powers, municipal services and operations, and community programming. The Strategy's scope covers goals, objectives, and actions related to the following topics:

- Air Quality:
  - Sustainable energy
  - Sustainable transportation
- Water Resources:
  - Watershed management
  - Surface/stormwater quality and quantity
  - Groundwater protection, recharge and discharge
  - Water conservation
- Land Resources:
  - Sustainable land development
  - Natural environment management

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- Invasive species management
- Wildlife management
- Sustainable urban agriculture and local food production
- Solid waste management

### **2.2 Implementing Richmond Hill's Strategy – Our Actions and Leadership**

The Environment Strategy includes a detailed Implementation Plan that outlines actions and defines roles and responsibilities across all City departments. Initiatives outlined in the Plan are reviewed by the cross-departmental Environment Strategy Steering Committee, comprised of directors and managers who select priorities on a yearly basis, share information and updates, and collaborate on strategic actions.

Achieving the goals of the Environment Strategy relies on City departments working in partnership with one another, and with residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the community. An Environmental Communications Strategy was developed to ensure key information and messages are continuously shared with the community, and to help foster local partnerships.

### **3. 2019 Highlights – What Richmond Hill Has Done to Become a More Sustainable Community**

2019 marked the fifth full year of implementation of Phase 1 of the Environment Strategy. Highlights of Environment Strategy progress in 2019 are described below, and showcased in the Environment Strategy 2018/19 Accomplishments leaflet (Attachment 1). A detailed progress chart (Attachment 2) for all Phase 1 actions identifies milestone achievements in the past year and the status of actions underway or completed in 2019.

#### **3.1 Air Quality Initiatives**

The Environment Strategy aims to improve air quality by reducing pollutants released into the air – particularly greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fuel combustion. Conserving energy and transitioning to cleaner and renewable sources of energy improves long-term cost savings and reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that contribute to climate change. The City continues to work on projects that improve efficiency in our facilities and will identify actions to mitigate GHG emissions within our community.

##### *a. Climate Change and Community Energy Planning*

Development of the City's Corporate Climate Change Framework and Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) began in 2019. Together, these documents will guide Richmond Hill's corporate and community approaches to mitigating and becoming more resilient to the effects of climate change. At the corporate level, the City will take a coordinated approach to improving resiliency by applying a climate change lens and adapting our programs and practices through a Corporate Climate Change Framework. Completion of the Framework is expected in 2020.

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At the community level, the CEEP will examine community energy consumption patterns in order to identify actions to reduce GHG emissions, promote related economic opportunities and benefits, and increase resiliency to climate change. Data collection, mapping, and a community GHG inventory were completed as part of CEEP development in 2019. Engagement and collaboration with community stakeholders is well underway through the City's Resilient Richmond Hill campaign to increase awareness about climate change and encourage community participation and input into the CEEP. A series of consultation activities and tools were successfully launched at a kick-off event drawing 250 attendees to the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts for a special environmental film screening, filmmaker Q&A, and information/feedback booths hosted by the City and stakeholder groups. Completion of the CEEP is expected in 2021.

### *b. Corporate Energy Planning*

In 2019, the City's Corporate Energy Plan was updated and presented to Council (staff report SREIS.19.006). The Corporate Energy Plan will inform corporate energy management and conservation efforts over the next five years (2019-2023), and focuses on reducing energy consumption, costs, and associated GHG emissions. If all energy conservation opportunities identified in the Plan are implemented, they will result in approximately \$700,000 in annual estimated cost avoidance and 860 tonnes per year in GHG emission reductions - the equivalent of removing more than 260 cars from Ontario roads annually.

Projects initiated in 2019 include the recommissioning of five arenas and one community centre and completion of several interior lighting retrofits to light-emitting diode (LED) fixtures. To increase awareness of energy consumption and to drive energy conservation, wireless energy sub meters were installed on the refrigeration systems at our five arenas, and monthly energy consumption reports are being provided to facility managers and operators. In addition, Richmond Hill was once again recognized for its energy conservation efforts; in 2019, the City received the Living City Energy Efficiency Leadership Award (Gold) from the Mayors' Megawatt Challenge Program for surpassing the energy efficiency target for its Municipal offices. The successful execution of energy saving projects by City staff have continued to keep Richmond Hill's offices at the forefront of energy leadership among many municipalities.

### **3.2 Water Resources Initiatives**

Preserving lakes, rivers, and streams, protecting aquatic plants and animals, and preventing flooding in Richmond Hill all depend on our responsible management of local water resources. Human activities and climate change affect the health of water systems. Environment Strategy actions aim to develop a suite of policy, infrastructure, and operational tools that reduce current impacts and future risks.

#### *a. Stormwater Management and Valleyland Restoration*

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Excessive stormwater runoff (from heavy rainfall or snowmelt combined with an increase in hard surfaces) causes flooding, erosion, and damage to public and private infrastructure. Through investments in Richmond Hill's stormwater management facilities and restoration of our valleylands, the City continued its efforts to improve resiliency and protect infrastructure in 2019. Key stormwater management and valleyland enhancement projects initiated or completed include:

- Elgin Mills Greenway Restoration (project completed);
- South Richvale Valleyland Restoration (Phase 1 feasibility study, design, and construction completed);
- Beaver Creek Stormwater Management Pond Rehabilitation (construction ongoing);
- Twickenham Stormwater Management Pond Rehabilitation and Elgin Mills Valleyland Restoration (Environmental Assessment initiated); and
- Doncrest Valleyland (near Bayview Avenue and Highway 7) Restoration (feasibility study initiated).

Together, these projects benefit the local environment and increase resiliency by providing flood protection, reducing erosion, and improving water quality.

### *b. Stormwater Network Model Project*

In 2019, work began on the development of a Citywide Stormwater Network Model. Through this project, the City will gain a stronger understanding of the connections, capacity, and constraints of Richmond Hill's overall stormwater system, which will help determine opportunities to improve stormwater management, especially as the City responds to increased development pressures and changing climate conditions. Once complete, the model will benefit the City by supporting growth planning, capital project delivery, and the operation and maintenance of stormwater assets to help protect our community by preventing and reducing flooding.

### **3.3 Land Resources Initiatives**

Building healthy and resilient communities means managing growth and development while respecting our natural resources. With increasing development pressure, it is important that our municipal practices consider the conservation, stewardship, and restoration of natural areas and minimize pollution from waste. Environment Strategy actions in this area focus on sustainable land development, natural environment management, urban agriculture, and solid waste management.

#### *a. Protecting and Restoring Our Urban Forest*

Efforts to enhance Richmond Hill's urban forest continued in 2019 with both maintenance and restoration work. Examples of these activities include the Council approved 10-year block pruning cycle, the replacement of trees within the public realm, and the restoration of woodlands including Beaver Woodland and David Dunlap Observatory (DDO) Park. This approach to managing and enhancing the City's urban

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forest helps promote a tree canopy that is more diversified, sustainable, and resilient to the ongoing challenges created by urban intensification, climate change, and the impacts of invasive species such as the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

### *b. Continuing to Grow the Scope of Healthy Yards*

Implementation of Richmond Hill's popular Healthy Yards program continued in 2019, with 3,032 wildflowers, 1,255 trees and shrubs, 287 rain barrels, and 228 backyard composters sold at the event. York Region provided partnership funding. The David Suzuki Foundation also partnered with the City to promote its 'Butterfly Way' project, a citizen-led movement aiming to grow 'highways' of habitat for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies, across Canada. More than 200 households in Richmond Hill took part in this initiative by planting pollinator patches in their yards. Also new for 2019 was the addition of electronic waste collection as part of the Healthy Yards event. In total, more than 14,350 pounds of electronic waste was collected and properly disposed of.

### *c. Wildlife Management and Education*

A wildlife education program was established in 2019 to inform residents about how to adapt to and manage interactions with wildlife in the community. Based on research and consultation with agencies and staff, a communications plan and outreach materials were developed to ensure residents have the information they need to co-exist safely with local wildlife. In addition to public education, staff collaborated to develop a Wildlife Conflict Response Procedure that defines roles and responsibilities and guides the City's response to individual wildlife (e.g. coyotes, beavers, Canada geese) conflict situations on public property.

### *d. Streamlining Data Collection*

In 2019, Richmond Hill completed the second and final phase of its Tree Asset Database project. The first phase of the project consolidated information and data related to street trees and park trees in Richmond Hill. The second phase focused on consolidating information and streamlining data collection for trees planted through the Healthy Yards and Community Stewardship Programs. These improvements allow restoration trees and sites planted by the City and external partners to be centrally tracked, monitored, and maintained throughout their lifespan.

### *e. Waste Management Improvements*

Richmond Hill continues to make it easier for residents to put waste in its proper place. In 2019, the City approved Waste Development Standards and updated its Waste By-Law to ensure residents in new condominiums and apartments have convenient and equal access to waste diversion programs. To further encourage the proper separation of waste (compost, recycling, and garbage), the City provided outreach and education to residents and staff at more than 100 multi-residential properties. Richmond Hill also began work on a Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy that will outline options and approaches for reducing single-use items (e.g. plastic cutlery, straws, stir sticks, shopping bags, plastic-lined take-out containers and drink cups, etc.) that generate

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waste and litter and can contaminate recycling in the City. This work will continue in 2020, as will preparations for a Province-wide transition of the Blue Box recycling program to full producer responsibility.

### **3.4 Communicating the Strategy to the Public**

The City's Environment Strategy calls for an Environmental Communications Plan, which was established to provide information to the community and involve partners in reaching our environmental goals. It also supports the creation of an Environmental Scorecard to share progress and inform future decision-making, as referenced in Section 3.5 below.

To communicate the Strategy and its achievements, public outreach and engagement has taken place through various mediums, including:

- The City's popular 'Greening the Hill' booth which provides an opportunity to connect with residents directly at community and environmental events, such as Healthy Yards, Eco Fairs, and environmental film screenings;
- 'Greening the Hill' social media accounts, which promote and provide information to residents, businesses, and community groups on environmental initiatives taking place in the City;
- Environmental educational materials and outreach activities for staff and the community, such as waste diversion/sorting activities at a number of schools and a daycare; and
- Environmental liaison meetings and speaking engagements with community groups (e.g. Blue Dot, climate change groups, etc.).

### **3.5 Reviewing the Environment Strategy – A Vision for the Future**

In addition to the vision, goals, and actions outlined in the Environment Strategy's implementation framework, *Greening the Hill* contains two additional commitments:

1. To develop and publish an Environmental Scorecard that will share progress towards the City's environmental goals with the community; and
2. To review and update the Environment Strategy at the end of each implementation phase.

The first commitment, the City's future Environmental Scorecard, will provide a snapshot of indicators and trends related to Richmond Hill's environment. In 2016, a Scorecard framework was established and environmental indicators/metrics to be reported were selected. Data collection for the 2015-2019 Scorecard has been ongoing for the past four years and will continue through 2020. A cross-departmental working group was established to inform development of the Scorecard, and design work is underway, with finalization and publication expected in late 2020.

The second commitment, an update to the Environment Strategy, will be initiated in late 2020. This update will build upon the trends observed through development of the

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Scorecard and will provide an opportunity to review and reprioritize strategic goals, objectives, and actions. Where appropriate, the update is also intended to consolidate actions and incorporate new trends and emerging issues. Through focused internal and community consultation, the updated Environment Strategy will provide a clear and concise path forward for the City to continue becoming a more environmentally sustainable community.

### 4. Next Steps

The Environment Strategy outlines a series of actions envisioned for a 15+ year timeframe. 2019 marked the fifth full year of the Environment Strategy's Phase 1 implementation. To date, 19 discrete actions have been completed, 12 projects are underway, and work related to 28 ongoing actions continues – these actions have now become embedded in ongoing processes or programs that form part of annual work plans.

In 2020, implementation of the Environment Strategy will continue with direction from the Inter-departmental Steering Committee. As referenced in Section 3.5, an update to the Environment Strategy will be initiated in late 2020. This update will provide an opportunity to capture new and current environmental initiatives and trends and to consolidate and re-prioritize actions, where appropriate. In the interim, implementation of remaining Phase 1 and ongoing actions will continue and select medium or long-term actions may be initiated by the Steering Committee.

Notable projects anticipated for 2020 include:

- Creation of a Climate Change Community Outreach Toolkit
- Initiation of an Anti-Idling By-law
- Initiation of an Energy Efficiency Standard for new City buildings
- South Richvale Valleyland restoration
- Twickenham Stormwater Management Pond Rehabilitation and Elgin Mills Valleyland Restoration
- Initiation of a comprehensive update to the City's *Products, Standards & Design Criteria Manual*
- Completion of the Sustainability Metrics Update for new/redevelopment applications
- David Dunlap Observatory woodlot creation and restoration (long-term project)
- Completion of the Urban Forest Management Plan
- Initiation of the Parks Plan update
- Initiation of development of a Single-Use Items Reduction Strategy
- Environmental Scorecard design and finalization

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

There are no financial implications resulting from this staff report.

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

The Environment Strategy aligns with the City's Strategic Plan by providing:

*Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill:* Environment Strategy initiatives support the improvement of connections in our built and natural environment (e.g. trails, bike lanes, natural corridors and greenspaces) and provides opportunities for people (within the corporation and within the community) to get involved and participate in making improvements for the environment.

*Better Choice in Richmond Hill:* Environment Strategy initiatives promote better options to move around, live, work, and do business by implementing actions that support a more sustainable urban environment (e.g. infrastructure and facilities to support cycling, walking, carpooling, and electric vehicles; low impact development techniques; sustainable design standards; pilot studies/demonstration projects).

*A More Vibrant Richmond Hill:* Environment Strategy initiatives contribute to a sense of identity and place by creating opportunities for people to experience the City's natural environment (e.g. actions related to restoring, protecting or enhancing the City's natural heritage, and stewardship programs for people to get involved). They also help the City look to the future by initiating environmental improvements through corporate leadership, collaboration, innovation, and the exchange of ideas.

*Wise Management of Resources:* Environment Strategy initiatives result in less waste (e.g. energy and water efficiency improvements, and waste diversion) and help to protect and enhance our environment (e.g. actions to improve the health of our natural heritage and water resource systems).

### **Conclusion:**

Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future* identifies actions to manage environmental impacts, enhance local ecosystems, and create a more sustainable community over a 15+ year timeframe. This staff report provides an update on how Phase 1 actions progressed during 2019. The progress achieved in the past year, and throughout Phase 1, demonstrates the Strategy's focus on areas where the City can make the most difference: regulatory powers, municipal operations and services, and community programming. Progress in all of these areas positively reflects the City's commitment to making Richmond Hill a more sustainable, environmentally responsible, and resilient community.

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### **Attachments:**

- Attachment 1 – Environment Strategy 2018/2019 Accomplishments
- Attachment 2 – Environment Strategy Phase 1 Progress Tracker (2019)

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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPRS.20.063 - 2019 Greening the Hill Environment Strategy Update.docx
Attachments:	- SRPRS.20.063 - Attachment 1 - Environment Strategy 2018-2019 Accomplishments.pdf - SRPRS.20.063 - Attachment 2 - Environment Strategy Phase 1 Progress Tracker (2019).pdf
Final Approval Date:	May 20, 2020

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

**Patrick Lee - May 20, 2020 - 10:09 AM**

**Kelvin Kwan - May 20, 2020 - 1:27 PM**

**MaryAnne Dempster - May 20, 2020 - 2:19 PM**