



## Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: February 23, 2022

Report Number: SRPI.22.021

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

**Subject: SRPI.22.021 - Parks Plan, Recreation Plan, and Culture Plan Review – Key Findings and Directions**

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### Purpose:

This report presents key findings and directions for the review of the Parks Plan (2013), the Recreation Plan (2013) and the Culture Plan (2011).

### Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPI.22.021 be received and that Council endorse the Key Directions Report for the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan, and Culture Plan Review (Appendix A) and receive the Background and Preliminary Needs Assessment Report (Appendix B) for information;
- b) That all comments on the key directions outlined in Staff Report SRPI.22.021 and Appendix A be referred to staff for consideration as part of the development of the updated Parks Plan, and the new combined Recreation and Culture Plan;
- c) That staff report back to Council before the 2022 summer recess with an updated Parks Plan, which provides necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law and to inform the Community Benefits Charge Strategy and By-law, both of which must be enacted by September 18, 2022 per the legislative timeline outlined in the *Planning Act* and its associated Regulations.

### Contact Person:

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### Report Approval:

**Submitted by:** Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

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**Approved by:** Darlene Joslin, 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.

### **Background:**

Over the past three decades, Richmond Hill has been successful in providing parks, trails and recreation and culture facilities and programs well suited to the suburban neighbourhoods that have dominated the City's landscape. As the City continues to urbanize, much of its future growth will take the form of higher density development, making it timely to review the three Plans developed to inform Richmond Hill's vision for parks, recreation, and culture. These three Plans include:

- The Parks Plan, approved by Council in 2013;
- The Recreation Plan, approved by Council in 2013; and
- The Culture Plan, approved by Council in 2011.

On June 19, 2019, the Capital Sustainability Committee directed that the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan, and Culture Plan be advanced with a review commencing together to use an integrated lifecycle approach. This approach will ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Plans account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

Although the Plans will contain some specific projects and approximate timing, the Plans focus is directional and intended to provide flexibility to deliver specific projects when there is both demonstrated demand and financial conditions available to make them a reality. As always, any specific projects in the Plans will be vetted through the broader Capital Budget process in order to sustainably prioritize the City's capital spending. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Plans will contain a high level, order of magnitude costing in order for staff and Council to understand future funding needs.

The main purpose of the review of the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan is to focus the Plans' visions towards delivering a financially sustainable system of parks, recreation, and cultural programs and facilities across the City. The Plans will have a renewed focus on serving the City's growth areas and address a more integrated lifecycle approach (i.e. planning for the need, along with how the City funds the design/construction of the asset, and the operation/maintenance of the asset), while creating a vibrant public realm. The Plans are intended to guide the development of the City's parks, recreation and cultural services for the next 10 years.

Reviewing these three Plans together serves the dual purpose of providing background for two legislated reviews, namely the Parkland Dedication By-law and the Community Benefit Charge Strategy and By-law. Both of these By-laws are required to be approved

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by Council no later than September 18, 2022 per the changes to the *Planning Act* enacted through Bill 108 – *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*, and as substantially amended through Bill 138, the *Plan to Build Ontario Together Act, 2019* and Bill 197, the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*. Both By-laws are subject to a right of appeal under the *Planning Act*.

The review of the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan provides the necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law and to inform the Community Benefits Charge Strategy and By-law. Together, the updated Plans and By-laws (together with the Development Charges By-law) serve as tools that ensure that the City is collecting an appropriate and reasonable amount of revenue to fund its future parkland needs, and its future park, recreation and cultural facility needs.

### Project Process and Timeline

This project follows the same four stage process used in other long-range planning projects. The four stages are:

- Stage 1: Background Research (Spring 2021 to Summer 2021)
- Stage 2: Community engagement and preparation of Key Directions Report (Summer 2021 to Winter 2022)
- Stage 3: Preparation of Draft Parks Plan, Draft Recreation and Culture Plan, and Draft Phased Costing Strategy along with web-based consultation on the Draft Plans (targeting Spring 2022)
- Stage 4: Preparation of Final Parks Plan, Final Recreation and Culture Plan, and Final Phased Costing Strategy (targeting Summer 2022)

### Background Research – Community Profile

While Richmond Hill experienced substantial growth during the 1990s and early 2000s, recent population growth has slowed, but will likely resume shortly given the announcements related to the Yonge subway extension to Richmond Hill Centre. Population projections developed for the City through the Official Plan Update process estimate that Richmond Hill currently has a population of 214,000 (rounded) for 2021 and is expected to reach a population of 253,000 (rounded) by the end of the planning period (2031).

The following key shifts have been identified:

- The geographic distribution of growth will shift over the next 10 years to be primarily through intensification and infill, generally along the City's centres and corridors (i.e. generally along Yonge Street and portions of Highway 7, particularly at their intersection in the Richmond Hill Centre where the Yonge subway is planned to be extended in 2030);

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- The aging population will drive increased demands for services geared towards adults age 55+; and
- The large commuter population (presuming it resumes post-pandemic) will continue to place pressure on prime-time and self-scheduled programs, events and other activities.

### Community Consultation:

A community survey was undertaken over a three-week period between mid-June and early July 2021 to collect input on a variety of topics related to parks, recreation, and culture including local participation preferences and barriers, usage frequency and satisfaction levels. The survey was hosted online through a third-party website (Survey Monkey) and hardcopies were made available as an alternative format. The survey was promoted through a variety of means including the City's website, social media, QR code signs in various parks, on LED signs in front of various community centres, an e-blast, and word-of-mouth.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the way in which people participate in parks, recreation, and culture activities, survey respondents were asked to report their participation levels from 2019 (pre-COVID) to provide an accurate picture of what activities residents typically engage in. How the COVID-19 pandemic impacted respondents' participation in parks, recreation, and culture opportunities was also explored through this survey.

A total of 1,169 surveys were completed and analyzed (almost 3 times higher than the response rate to the survey completed for the previous Plans). Due to the self-administered format of the survey, the results are not considered statistically representative of Richmond Hill's entire population. Key findings from the survey include:

- **Participation in Parks and Recreation Opportunities** - Enjoying parks and open spaces was identified as the most popular activity that respondents actively participated in prior to the pandemic at sixty two percent. Other top parks and recreation activities that were identified included walking or hiking for leisure (47%), recreational swimming (37%), cycling or mountain biking (35%), and aerobics, yoga, fitness, or weight-training (32%). A commonality among the top five activities is that they are all unstructured and self-scheduled activities, which is consistent with broad participation trends as well as the results from the survey for the previous Plans. These types of activities continue to rank high as they can be undertaken through all ages and stages of life.
- **Barriers to Participation in Parks and Recreation Opportunities** - Respondents identified that the lack of desired facilities or programs was the most common participation barrier (34%) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common barrier noted in the survey for the previous Plans was lack of personal time/too busy.

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Other barriers in the most recent survey included a lack of personal time/too busy (30%) and programs not offered at a convenient time (29%).

- **Satisfaction with Parks and Recreation Opportunities** - Respondents were generally satisfied with opportunities for each age group as satisfaction levels ranged between 60% and 70%. Compared to the previous Plans survey, satisfaction levels increased across all age groups.
- **Development of Future Parks and Open Spaces** – Forty-nine percent of respondents identified that parks and urban open spaces are as important along the City’s growing centres and corridors (e.g., Yonge Street and Highway 7), where there are high-rise residential buildings, as they are in the surrounding neighbourhood. Forty-four percent of respondents felt that parks and urban open spaces are more important along these centres and corridors than in the surrounding neighbourhood. Only six percent of respondents felt that parks and urban open spaces were less important along these centres and corridors than in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- **Participation in Arts and Cultural Opportunities** - Using a library was the most popular arts and culture activity (64%) among respondents prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Attending a festival or event (53%), attending a play or live performance (47%), visiting a museum (33%) and visiting an art gallery (30%) were also among the top five most popular activities. Compared to the survey results from the previous Cultural Plan, respondents favoured the same opportunities, although participation rates were higher.
- **Barriers to Participation in Arts and Cultural Opportunities** - Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of personal time/too busy was the most common participation barrier for arts and cultural opportunities (32%). Other common participation barriers that respondents faced included the lack of desired facilities or programs (27%) and the program not being offered at a convenient time (25%). It is noted that twenty-six percent of respondents identified that they did not face any barriers to participating in arts and cultural opportunities.
- **Satisfaction with Arts and Cultural Opportunities** - Arts and cultural opportunities for teens (ages 13 to 17) had the lowest satisfaction level (53%), while 66% of respondents were most satisfied with opportunities for young children (ages 0 to 5). These findings demonstrate that there are opportunities to improve satisfaction levels among certain age groups.
- **Participation in Future Festivals, Events and Cultural Programs** - Approximately half of the respondents (51%) reported a preference for concerts or other music programs held at multiple parks. Other ideas suggested by respondents included offering smaller, neighbourhood-focused events.
- **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Participation in Parks, Recreation and Culture** - The use of indoor recreation facilities had the greatest impact as 61% of respondents reported that their use of these facilities decreased during the

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pandemic. Half of respondents also indicated that their participation in programming also decreased. These trends were largely due to the facility closures and program cancellations that occurred during the pandemic. By contrast, almost half (49%) of respondents reported an increase in using parks, trails, and open spaces.

### **Key Themes and Preliminary Findings:**

Based upon the research and consultation completed to date, including the review of background reports, relevant legislation, population data, trends, key informant interviews, stakeholder input meetings (including with BILD and TRCA), and the community survey, key themes and preliminary findings have emerged that serve as a point of departure for updating the Parks Plan and developing a new combined Recreation and Culture Plan. The below themes and preliminary findings (along with the rationale outlined in the reports attached as Appendix A and Appendix B) will be utilized to inform the update of the Parks Plan and the development of a new combined Recreation and Culture Plan.

### **Key Themes and Preliminary Findings for Parkland**

#### **Parkland to address Future Population Growth**

As the focus of Richmond Hill's growth continues to shift from greenfield development towards intensification within the City's centres and corridors, the Parks Plan's park hierarchy (i.e the types of parks and their distribution) and parkland service level (1.37hectares/1,000 people) continue to be appropriate and should be maintained. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Expand the Parks Plan to incorporate a planned Urban Open Space System for Richmond Hill's centres and corridors. This system should include a series of Linear Parks, Urban Squares, streetscape enhancements and other creative strategies to link residents between the intensification areas and existing larger parks in the neighbourhoods and to create a clear and transparent expectation for the planned parkland system within these intensification areas;
- Evaluate opportunities to establish master parks agreements for development within centres and corridors, similar to the approach used for the North Leslie Secondary Plan Area, to ensure parkland obligations are shared equitably amongst landowners.

#### **Responding to Parkland and Outdoor Recreation Facility Needs**

Since the 2013 Parks Plan was completed, people have changed how they live, work and play. Coupled with a growing emphasis on residential intensification, the rising cost of land, and other factors that have resulted in the development of smaller parks, certain outdoor recreation facility service targets must be revised and others have been reconfirmed to keep pace with these changes and address community demands. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

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- Adopting a new service target for rectangular fields and baseball diamonds to recognize that lit artificial turf fields and lit natural fields/diamonds offer increased capacities compared to unlit fields/diamonds;
- Establishing new service targets for certain outdoor recreation facilities to respond to community demands and trends: i.e. for pickleball courts; undertaking an investigation to review outdoor skating rink options; and off-leash dog areas;
- Design and/or revitalize Destination and Community Parks to facilitate year-round use, as well as extended use during the day and evenings with consideration given to comfort amenities (i.e. year-round washrooms, park lighting, shade structures);
- Ensure that parks incorporate passive outdoor space that encourage unstructured play and social gatherings, particularly in parks located adjacent to centres and corridors;
- Apply a climate change lens to the development and redevelopment of parks (i.e. include open space naturalization areas, plant native species, enhance tree canopies, establish pollinator gardens or rain gardens, restore habitat including invasive species management to enhance biodiversity).

### Strengthening Parkland Tools

Richmond Hill has several tools available at its disposal to ensure that the funding, acquisition, planning, design, development, operations and maintenance of parkland is undertaken effectively and efficiently (accounting for an integrated lifecycle approach) to meet community needs over the planning period. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Undertake a review of the Development Charges By-law and Parkland Dedication By-law to ensure they align with the parkland and facility needs identified in the updated Parks Plan;
- Incorporate park and trail assets into the City's EAM and Asset Management Planning approach to identify the repair and replacement of these assets following a lifecycle service-based risk approach for informing Capital Budgets;
- Consider using the Community Benefits Charges By-law to fund a portion of park revitalization and park repair and replacement costs that support population growth to ensure greater long-term financial sustainability of the City's Reserves;
- Where appropriate, utilize creative solutions to meet parkland needs within centres and corridors, such as partnerships, grants, master parkland agreements, or alternative parkland delivery methods such as privately operated public spaces.

### Key Themes and Preliminary Findings for Recreation

#### Developing New Indoor Recreation Facilities

Over the next 10 years, over half of the City's projected population growth is expected to occur within the centres and corridors (over 20,000 residents) with the balance of growth in the remaining subdivision areas (North Leslie, West Gormley). To ensure recreation facilities and community spaces remain adequately positioned to respond to

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the needs of the City's growth areas, the following example key findings should be considered:

- Planning for a multi-purpose North Leslie Community Centre towards the end of the planning period (i.e. around 2031);
- Confirm the location for an indoor artificial turf field and advancing an implementation strategy;
- Undertake an indoor tennis study to confirm the need for this facility in the West Gormley Community Park.

### **Optimizing the Use of Existing Recreation Facilities**

Given the high value residents place on existing recreation and community facilities, it is prudent to assess these facilities to ensure underutilized spaces are identified and adapted to address emerging opportunities, demands and gaps in services to optimize the use of existing spaces. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Re-purpose the undersized fitness centre at the Bayview Hill Community Centre & Pool to address other in-demand needs such as dedicated youth space or adult 55+ space;
- Discontinue use of the Eyer Wideman Youth Centre for drop-in, programs and events and evaluate alternative uses for this space;
- Continue to use the bocce courts in the Richmond Green Ag. 2 building for year round bocce use as an alternative to constructing a new indoor bocce facility.

### **Enhancing the Delivery of Recreation Services and Programs**

Richmond Hill's recreation service delivery system is in a mature state. Continued efforts will need to be undertaken to improve physical activity levels of all residents including marginalized and underrepresented populations in the development and the delivery of recreation services. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Reviewing the City's approach to providing recreation programs and opportunities with the goal of maximizing participation and facility utilization;
- Establish performance metrics and set targets to measure outputs, efficiencies and satisfaction levels in the delivery of services provided by the Recreation and Culture Division.

## **Key Themes and Preliminary Findings for Culture**

### **Leadership & Networking Equates to Sustainability & Inclusivity in the Cultural Sector**

The 2011 Cultural Plan introduced opportunities to better connect cultural organizations and industries to address the needs of the City's broader cultural sector, including building connections between artists, arts and cultural groups and creative businesses. Ensuring that culture remains a key element of the City's growth and development by continuing to leverage the Cultural Leadership Council and identifying ways to involve



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the group in municipal decision-making will be key. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Involving other municipal staff and divisions in Cultural Leadership Council meetings;
- Use the Cultural Leadership Council as an expert roundtable of cultural growth in the City;
- Continue to deliver cultural programming and services through the Recreation and Culture Division in partnership with other Departments and stakeholders.

### **Fostering Growth in the Arts and Cultural Community**

In 2019, culture contributed \$27.5 billion to Ontario's gross domestic product (GDP). Richmond Hill accounted for 1.49% of provincial culture GDP with contribution of \$428.5 million. The City should continue to support arts and culture given it is widely accepted as a key economic driver for communities and these organizations are a vital part of the social fabric of communities promoting inclusion, tolerance and as a source of civic pride. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Review the impact of the Community and Cultural Grant Program for the three year period it was active. Identify opportunities to improve/reintroduce the program in 2022;
- Engage the arts and culture community to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify how the City can better support these organizations through the recovery process;
- Explore alternative funding models to support arts and cultural community organizations.

### **The Changing Nature of Arts and Cultural Programming and Events**

Technological changes and the COVID-19 pandemic are impacting the delivery of local programs, festivals and events with many now providing registration, delivery, and ticketing online. In Richmond Hill, organizers have followed these trends with several community groups offering online experiences. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Update the Festival and Events Strategy to provide a refreshed vision for the arts and culture sector taking into account the effectiveness of on-line events/activities;
- Increase the number of regularly held special events to revive the community and neighbourhood spirit;
- Increase awareness of and support low-cost access to exhibitions, performances and events, particularly targeting families, ethno-cultural and indigenous communities.

### **Optimizing Places and Spaces for Arts and Culture**

An emerging trend in cultural planning is the repurposing of community facilities to better integrate arts, culture, and heritage. There is a need to review the inventory of

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existing cultural facilities and the nature of these facilities to determine if the assets are being used to full potential. Examples of key findings to be considered include:

- Implement the findings of the Centre for Performing Arts Review and Implementation Plan;
- Undertake a feasibility study to create an arts and cultural district to facilitate the attraction of creative individuals and organizations in a central location (i.e. Library, Centre for the Performing Arts);
- Investigate potential opportunities to expand for-profit arts and cultural opportunities such as film and production, potentially through the promotion of the David Dunlap Observatory and other notable sites;
- Evaluate the use of the current Public Art Policy and examine the creation of a Public Art Master Plan.

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

The Key Directions for the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan, and Culture Plan Review outlined in Staff Report SRPI.22.021, including Appendix A, will be used to inform the City's Capital Forecast and the annual Capital Budget process. There are no immediate staffing or financial implications associated with this report.

### **Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:**

#### Balancing Growth and Green

The Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan are identified as major projects intended to recognize the critical balance between economic development and environmental stewardship. Stewardship of green spaces such as parks and trails and longer-term sustainability planning and climate action initiatives associated with parks, and recreation and culture programs and facilities aid the City in balancing growth and green.

#### Fiscal Responsibility

The review of the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan, and Culture Plan is being undertaken using an integrated lifecycle planning approach to ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Plans account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

#### Sense of Belonging

The Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan aid in establishing a sense of belonging by providing equitable access to park, recreation and culture opportunities, and by directing that these facilities be located within close proximity to residential units

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or in prominent locations in the community to ensure parks, recreation and cultural experiences build a sense of place within the community.

### Getting Around the City

The Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan direct for these lands, programs, and facilities to be connected to a variety of modes of transportation with an aim to prioritize the ability for residents to get to these facilities by active transportation networks (i.e. by walking or cycling).

### **Climate Change Considerations:**

The way we plan and design parks, recreation and cultural programs and facilities impacts the City's larger greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how vulnerable the City is to the impacts of climate change. The key themes and findings recommend that a climate change lens be applied to the development and redevelopment of parks, recreation and cultural facilities. For example, in parks this might mean including open space naturalization areas, planting more native species, enhancing tree canopies, establishing pollinator gardens or rain gardens, or restoring habitat including invasive species management to enhance biodiversity. Applying a climate change lens consistently could help the City to better leverage the development and redevelopment process for these facilities to combat climate change and reduce its impacts.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps:**

Based upon the research completed to date, including the review of background reports, relevant legislation, population data, trends, key informant interviews, and the community survey which received 1,169 responses, key themes and preliminary findings have emerged that serve as a point of departure for updating the Parks Plan and developing a new combined Recreation and Culture Plan.

It is recommended that Council endorse the Key Directions Report for the Parks Plan and Recreation and Culture Plan (Appendix A), receive the Background and Preliminary Needs Assessment Report (Appendix B) for information, and that all comments be referred back to staff for consideration as part of the preparation of the draft Plans.

The review of the Parks Plan, Recreation Plan and Culture Plan provides the necessary background information to bring forward an updated Parkland Dedication By-law and to inform the Community Benefits Charge Strategy and By-law by the legislated deadline of September 18, 2022. Together, the updated Plans and By-laws (together with the Development Charges By-law) work as tools that ensure that the City is collecting an appropriate and reasonable amount of revenue to fund its future parkland needs, and its future park, recreation and cultural facility needs in order to continue to serve residents over the long-term.

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### **Attachments:**

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- Appendix A – Key Directions Report
- Appendix B – Background and Preliminary Needs Assessment Report

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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.22.021 - Parks Plan and Recreation and Culture Plan Review – Key Findings and Directions .docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.22.021 Appendix A – Key Directions Report.pdf - SRPI.22.021 Appendix B - Background and Preliminary Needs Assessment Report.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jan 31, 2022

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

**Patrick Lee - Jan 31, 2022 - 4:30 PM**

**Kelvin Kwan - Jan 31, 2022 - 4:32 PM**

**Darlene Joslin - Jan 31, 2022 - 4:57 PM**