



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 13, 2022

Report Number: SRPI.22.033

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: SRPI.22.033 – 2021 Greening the Hill Progress Report and Draft Environment Strategy Update

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to provide Council with the 2021 *Greening the Hill* Report, an annual progress update on the implementation of Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, and to introduce the Draft Environment Strategy Update.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Council receive staff report SRPI.22.033 and the attached Environment Strategy 2021 Progress Tracker, Environment Strategy 2021 Accomplishments leaflet, and Draft Environment Strategy Update for information.
- b) That the attached draft Environment Strategy Update be made publicly available on the City's website for a review and comment period before finalization of the updated Environment Strategy.

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Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

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.

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Background:

1.0 Introduction

Richmond Hill and its community have a strong legacy of environmental stewardship, protection and action. The City's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future*, has advanced this legacy through policy direction and actions to reduce our community's impacts and make improvements for a more sustainable future. Based on extensive community and stakeholder consultation, Richmond Hill's first Environment Strategy was approved by Council in 2014 (Council extract C#14-14) and includes short, medium and long-term actions to be implemented over a 15+ year time horizon.

With help from the community and partners, much has been accomplished through the Environment Strategy since 2014. This report outlines progress on key environmental actions implemented throughout 2021, while charting a course for future improvement through release of the Draft Environment Strategy Update. In keeping with the commitments of the original Environment Strategy, this Update aims to capture new and emerging issues such as climate change, simplify and streamline content, and prioritize our actions out to 2031.

2.0 Environment Strategy progress in 2021

2021 marked the seventh full year of implementation of the Environment Strategy. Despite the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, City staff remained adaptable in the face of change and continued to deliver high quality environmental projects, programming and services. The sections that follow summarize highlights from Environment Strategy implementation in 2021. A detailed progress chart (Attachment 1) outlines milestone achievements and the status of actions underway or completed in 2021. For a visual snapshot of key achievements, see the Environment Strategy 2021 Accomplishments leaflet (Attachment 2).

2.1 Air Quality achievements

Supported by the Environment Strategy, the City continues to advance projects that improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by encouraging sustainable transportation, improving energy efficiency, and mitigating the impacts of climate change both corporately and in our community.

2.1.1 Energy efficiency and climate action

In 2021, Council approved the City's first Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP) – *Richmond Hill's Path to a Low Carbon Future*. Developed in consultation with residents, businesses and community partners, the CEEP charts a course for Richmond Hill to reach net-zero emissions by 2050 through a wide range of actions and initiatives. A conversation toolkit called *A Guide to Talking to People in Your Life about Climate Change* was also released alongside the CEEP. This made-in-Richmond Hill toolkit, co-

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created by and for members of the community, provides information, tips, and Richmond Hill-specific data to spark climate conversations and inspire local action.

Corporately, the City continued to implement energy conservation projects through its Corporate Energy Plan, including installation of a low-emissivity ceiling at Tom Graham Arena, conversion of interior and exterior lighting to LED at Ed Sackfield Arena, and HVAC upgrades at Elgin Barrow Arena and Elgin West Community Center. In addition, the City received \$75,000 in retrofit incentive funding from the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) for achieving energy savings from the installation of a smart lighting control system for our streetlights. Additionally, Richmond Hill was recognized by the ClimateWise Business Network for its efforts to improve energy efficiency at City Hall, receiving the “Lowest Energy Use Intensity Leader” award through their Mayors’ Energy Challenge Program. The City also received the “Mayors’ Energy Challenge Advocate” award for encouraging local businesses to participate in the ClimateWise Energy and Water Benchmarking Reporting program.

2.1.2 Sustainable transportation

In 2021, the City continued to support and advance active and sustainable transportation projects. Advocacy for the Yonge North Subway Extension (YNSE) continued, and in 2021, the Federal Government announced financial support to fully fund the project with the Provincial Government. To further encourage sustainable commuting, the City continued to promote electric vehicle use. In 2021, Richmond Hill received funding for the installation of a new Level 2 charge station at the Operations Centre, and explored opportunities to develop a Level 3 (DC Fast) Charge Station network throughout the City.

In partnership with York Region, upgrades to the City’s cycling infrastructure also continued in 2021, with major advancements in the remaining segments of Richmond Hill’s portion of the Lake-to-Lake Walking Route and Cycling Trail. Design work is underway or completed for several cycling facilities, including those on Bayview Avenue, 19th Avenue, Leslie Street, and Bethesda Side Road.

2.2 Water Resources achievements

The Environment Strategy aims to preserve our lakes, rivers and streams, prevent flooding and erosion, and conserve water through policy, infrastructure and operational tools that allow us to responsibly manage our water resources.

2.2.1 Stormwater management and valleyland restoration

Through investments in Richmond Hill’s stormwater management facilities and restoration of our valleylands, the City continues to manage stormwater, improve resiliency and protect infrastructure. Progress on key stormwater management and valleyland enhancement projects in 2021 includes:

- Wellsprings pond and Headwater pond – sediment removal projects complete
- Don Head East pond – Environmental Assessment (EA) complete

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- Doncrest East pond – feasibility study complete
- Cedar Springs pond – feasibility study complete
- Twickenham pond rehabilitation and valleyland restoration – detailed design underway
- Mill Pond – EA underway
- Unity Park – feasibility study underway

Together, these projects benefit the local environment and increase resiliency by providing flood protection, reducing erosion, and improving water quality. To minimize costs, the City has applied for funding from the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund for the Mill Pond and East Don Head East projects. Additional funding opportunities are expected in 2022 and the City is preparing to submit another stormwater management project for consideration.

2.2.2 Corporate water conservation

In 2021, Richmond Hill replaced and upgraded the water level control system at the Elgin West Community Centre. These upgrades, funded in part through the York Region Water for Tomorrow program, will result in cost savings of more than \$100,000 annually and water savings of over 21 million litres per year!

2.3 Land Resources achievements

The Environment Strategy aims to build healthy and resilient communities and preserve our land resources through actions that support sustainable development, enhance our natural areas, increase biodiversity, manage invasive species, support local food production, and reduce and divert our solid waste.

2.3.1 Natural environment and invasive species management

In 2021, the City enhanced the natural environment through continued delivery of the Community Stewardship Program (CSP) and Healthy Yards Program. Through the CSP, 9,300 trees and shrubs were planted by nearly 500 volunteers at more than 60 COVID-safe partner-led events. The City also worked with partners to deliver a series of virtual workshops and webinars with more than 1,350 participants. Through the Healthy Yards program, 1215 trees and shrubs, more than 3500 wildflowers, nearly 300 rain barrels and 290 backyard composters were sold.

The City also continued enhancing our tree canopy through woodlot restoration at Beaver Woodland and the David Dunlap Observatory (DDO) lands. In 2021, the City completed removal and replacement of hazard Ash trees, along with invasive species management and tree plantings to increase canopy at the DDO. A woodlot restoration plan for Saigeon Trail, which has been heavily impacted by the effects of EAB, was also developed in 2021; implementation of the plan is expected to begin in fall 2022.

In 2021, the City responded to the threat of LDD moth caterpillars. In partnership with York Region, the City removed more than 65,000 LDD moth egg masses from street and park trees, treated select high value trees with insecticide, monitored and watered

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affected trees during the hotter summer months, and conducted street sweeping in neighbourhoods with heavy to severe LDD caterpillar infestation. These efforts will continue in 2022, and will include providing free burlap band kits for residents in early spring.

2.3.2 Managing and diverting waste

In recent years, blue box contamination levels have risen due to an increase in complex, multi-material products and packaging; misleading claims on packaging have also caused confusion about their recyclability. In addition, COVID-19 has led to high amounts of personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, masks, and wipes, being incorrectly disposed of in the recycling stream. To reduce blue box contamination, Richmond Hill in partnership with York Region undertook a resident education and enforcement program, which included communications through the Waste Management Calendar, the City's website, social media, the waste mobile app, outreach events, road signs and media releases. The City also conducted curbside inspections of waste setouts and used educational stickers and door hangers to inform residents about what waste goes where. These efforts contributed to a reduction in blue box contamination, from 21.7% in 2019 to 13.8% in 2020 – an almost 8% reduction!

2.4 Communicating the Strategy to the public

An important part of implementing the Environment Strategy is engaging the community and inspiring environmental action. To communicate the Environment Strategy and support implementation, public outreach and engagement took place through various mediums in 2021, including:

- Greening the Hill social media (Facebook and Twitter) to promote the City's environmental achievements, current programs, and opportunities to participate;
- Participation at virtual community environmental events, including hosting a virtual Earth Day event in April and launching the #BiggestMapleRH challenge as part of the City's Canada Day celebrations;
- Development of environmental education materials and outreach activities for staff and the community, including an animated video promoting the Environment Strategy and opportunities to participate in its update; and
- Environmental liaison meetings, speaking engagements and collaboration with community groups, local schools and youth to listen to concerns and promote participation in City initiatives.

2.5 Next steps for implementation

As noted in this staff report, an update to the Environment Strategy is underway. During this transition period, staff will continue implementing priority actions under the current Strategy and will shift to the updated Environment Strategy once it is finalized and approved by Council. Notable projects anticipated for 2022 include:

- Environment Strategy Update

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- Parks Plan Update
- Completion of phase 2 restoration tree plantings at David Dunlap Observatory Park
- Headwater Pond and Silverland Pond sediment removal and restoration projects
- Energy efficiency upgrades at the Central Library

3.0 Updating the Environment Strategy – adjusting for the future

A lot has changed since Richmond Hill's first Environment Strategy was adopted in 2014. Climate change has emerged as one of the most critical global issues of our time, there has been increased pressure to accommodate growth through more sustainable development, and a global pandemic forced many of us to work from home with renewed appreciation for outdoor greenspaces and other amenities that enhance our health and quality of life. As part of Council's original commitment to update the Environment Strategy midway, this update was prepared to build upon past successes, reflect on what we heard and learned since 2014, and reprioritize and focus on the next two phases of work to 2031.

While our Vision and Mission will continue, the updated Strategy brings a stronger lens to how we can all work together to protect our environment as the City grows and as climate change impacts intensify. It was an opportunity to revisit our goals and objectives, make adjustments and capture emerging environmental issues and trends. Taken together, the actions outlined in this Update show us how to make Richmond Hill a more sustainable and resilient community by Greening our Consumption, Greening our Natural Spaces and Greening our Growth – it is a call to action.

3.1 What we did – the process

The Update began with background research and analysis to identify gaps and benchmarking of other environmental programs and trends. Workshops with staff from all City departments were undertaken to understand lessons learned from implementation, current and future needs, and new ideas. To gather input from the public, a community-wide survey was released in early summer 2021 to get their feedback on proposed themes, areas that were most important to them, and how they would prefer to get involved in environmental initiatives in the future. Building on the survey's results, four virtual workshops were held with the community and stakeholders in the fall of 2021. Those unable to attend the workshops were encouraged to view a video of the workshop presentation and provide their input and feedback through the City's website. Public and stakeholder engagement resulted in valuable, high quality input, which has helped inform the directions and actions contained within the draft Environment Strategy Update.

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3.2 What we heard and learned

Key feedback from the public and stakeholder engagement process was summarized in a “What we Heard” report, made available on the City’s website. Major themes on what we learned from the consultation are outlined below.

Engaging the community, encouraging stewardship and fostering partnerships

- We heard loud and clear that residents want to be personally involved in the City’s efforts for Greening the Hill. Each theme within the updated Environment Strategy contains action(s) to foster continued engagement with residents, community groups and businesses to share knowledge and forge partnerships that are essential to implementation. We have also embedded ideas, tips and advice throughout the Strategy to inspire residents to try new approaches and get involved in different ways.

Balancing growth with green

- We also heard that protecting our natural areas and water resources while minimizing environmental impacts from development are of paramount importance to the community. Actions within the Sustainable Land Development theme, and elsewhere within the Environment Strategy Update, were enhanced to encourage sustainable building and transportation improvements and engage residents on how they can help within their communities.

Allowing flexibility to encourage innovation

- Preparing for technology shifts and fostering innovation was identified as a key element of municipal leadership, especially in relation to energy, transportation and low impact development (LID). To plan for these shifts, each theme in the Environment Strategy Update contains one or more actions related to pilot and/or demonstration projects to help encourage outside-the-box thinking and innovative environmental solutions.

Articulating the urgency of climate change

- A recognized gap from the original Environment Strategy was the absence of strong action on climate change. From the community, we heard clearly that the City must articulate the urgency of the climate crisis, conserve energy and reduce GHG emissions. While the City’s Community Energy and Emissions Plan and Corporate Climate Change Framework (along with other corporate plans and initiatives) provide detailed solutions, the Environment Strategy Update embeds climate considerations and key high-level actions throughout.

3.3 Our path forward – a call to action for a sustainable future

The draft Environment Strategy Update continues the original Strategy’s vision and mission, with minor updates to improve clarity.

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- **Vision** – Richmond Hill: a community that protects, enhances and restores its natural environment.
- **Mission** – To achieve our vision by engaging and inspiring residents, leading by example and encouraging sustainable growth.

Since 2014, the Environment Strategy has focused on *what* we want to protect, enhance and restore – our air, land and water. To more effectively achieve our vision and mission, this Update shifts the focus to *how* we can protect, enhance, and restore our environment through the areas where we have the most impact. It is a call to action built on three interconnected guiding or “greening” principles aimed at: Greening our Consumption, Greening our Natural Spaces, and Greening our Growth.

3.4 Greening principles in action

The draft Environment Strategy Update applies the greening principles through 10 interrelated and complementary themes. Each theme contains a central goal, three primary objectives, and a suite of actions to help move us towards our vision and mission. Below are the 10 themes for environmental action and their corresponding high-level goal.

<p>Energy</p> <p>To improve energy efficiency, reduce GHG emissions and mitigate climate change</p>	<p>Transportation</p> <p>To establish a lower-carbon transportation network with options that are more accessible, reliable and equitable</p>	<p>Water Resource Management</p> <p>To conserve and protect our water resources by managing water quality, water quantity and stormwater infrastructure</p>	<p>Water Conservation</p> <p>To use water wisely and promote the wise use of water</p>	<p>Sustainable Land Development</p> <p>To foster sustainable development and redevelopment</p>
<p>Natural Heritage and Urban Forest</p> <p>To establish, protect and improve the extent and quality of natural heritage and the urban forest</p>	<p>Invasive Species</p> <p>To prevent and actively manage the impacts of invasive species</p>	<p>Wildlife</p> <p>To protect, preserve and sustainably manage a healthy diversity of native wildlife</p>	<p>Local Food and Pollinators</p> <p>To improve access to local food and support pollinators and their habitat</p>	<p>Waste</p> <p>To reduce the waste burden by encouraging reuse and facilitating waste diversion</p>

The primary objectives and delivery of the actions are scoped based on the City’s ‘spheres of municipal responsibility and influence’, namely our regulatory powers and policies (e.g. corporate plans, strategies), our municipal services and operations (e.g. community centres, parks), and community programming (e.g. education and outreach, tree planting events).

The original Environment Strategy was based on a 15+ year time horizon which saw more than 50 of the 95 actions initiated, completed or established as “ongoing” through Phase 1. The timeframe for implementing actions in the updated Environment Strategy is based on the two remaining phases: Phase 2 actions will be implemented between 2022 and 2026, and Phase 3 actions between 2027 and 2031. Actions that are implemented continually or on an annual basis are referred to as “ongoing”.

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It should also be noted that climate change considerations and actions are embedded throughout the Environment Strategy Update, rather than in one dedicated theme or section. Climate change is an all-encompassing issue that touches every facet of the environment in some way. Therefore, almost all actions within the updated Strategy have a direct or indirect climate change adaptation or mitigation benefit.

3.5 Next steps

Following receipt of the draft Environment Strategy Update by Council, the draft will be made available to the public for additional input and feedback. Comments received will be incorporated as appropriate, and the final Environment Strategy Update will be brought forward to Council for approval in July 2022.

Once approved, the Strategy Update's actions will be incorporated by staff into long-term work plans and budget cycles. This will include setting priorities and timeframes and identifying markers of project success. Where possible, we will seek opportunities for funding and partnerships with community groups, local businesses, and partner organizations to help achieve our vision.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

There are no financial implications resulting from this staff report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

Continued implementation and the 2022 Update of the Environment Strategy strongly aligns with Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022.

The Environment Strategy complements and supports the City's long-term planning for sustainable development aimed at Balancing Growth and Green. Recognizing our changing urban context, the Strategy Update sets a course to green our consumption, natural spaces and growth, while helping to lay the foundation for the City's climate change initiatives.

The Environment Strategy also contributes to a Strong Sense of Belonging by creating opportunities for people to experience and immerse themselves within the City's natural environment and take part in stewardship programs.

The Environment Strategy promotes the improvement of connections for Getting Around the City through our built and natural environment (e.g. trails, bike lanes, natural corridors and greenspaces) and encourages sustainable transportation solutions (e.g. carpooling and active transportation, high order transit advocacy such as the YNSE).

Environment Strategy initiatives also demonstrate Fiscal Responsibility by promoting initiatives that reduce waste and encourage efficiency (e.g. energy and water efficiency improvements, and waste diversion) and supporting actions to improve resiliency and avoid risks and costs associated with the impacts of climate change.

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Climate Change Considerations:

The Environment Strategy – its update and ongoing implementation – directly enables and supports the City’s climate change mitigation and adaption efforts. A key driver of the Strategy Update was to strengthen its connections to the City’s climate initiatives and actions. The resulting Draft Environment Strategy Update weaves climate change considerations throughout, and contains a number of actions aimed at reducing corporate and community GHG emissions, as well as measures to improve climate resiliency.

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. Combined with its attachments, this staff report illustrates how Environment Strategy implementation progressed in 2021 and outlines a proposed path towards a more sustainable future through release of the draft Environment Strategy Update. Together, we can foster a sustainable and resilient community that values the environment and makes active decisions to protect it in our daily lives.

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.

- Attachment 1 – Environment Strategy 2021 Progress Tracker
- Attachment 2 – Environment Strategy 2021 Accomplishments Leaflet
- Attachment 3 – Draft Environment Strategy Update

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.22.033 - 2021 Greening the Hill Progress Report and Draft Environment Strategy Update.docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.22.033 - Attachment 1 - Env. Strategy 2021 Progress Tracker.pdf - SRPI.22.033 - Attachment 2 - Env. Strategy 2021 Accomplishments.pdf - SRPI.22.033 - Attachment 3 - Draft Environment Strategy Update.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 22, 2022

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

Patrick Lee - Mar 22, 2022 - 1:44 PM

Kelvin Kwan - Mar 22, 2022 - 2:43 PM

Darlene Joslin - Mar 22, 2022 - 6:13 PM