



Staff Report for Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: July 6, 2022

Report Number: SRPI.22.068

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: SRPI.22.068 – Greening the Hill Environment
Strategy Update

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to introduce the final *Greening the Hill* Environment Strategy Update (Attachment 1).

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Council receive staff report SRPI.22.068 for information.
- b) That Council approve the final Environment Strategy Update attached to report SRPI.22.068.

Contact Person:

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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. Approved by Council in 2014 (Council extract C#14-14), the City's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future*, has advanced this legacy through policy direction and actions that reduce our community's impacts and make improvements for a more sustainable future. As we approach the mid-point in the original Environment Strategy's 15+ year time horizon, an update has been undertaken to continue fostering a greener and more resilient Richmond Hill. This report provides an overview of the Environment Strategy Update process, including public feedback and key changes, as well as our proposed implementation path.

1.1 The Environment Strategy Update is a call to action for a sustainable 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 renewed our appreciation for outdoor greenspaces and other amenities that enhance our health and quality of life. As part of Council's 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.

1.2 Three-phase process for updating the Environment Strategy

The Environment Strategy Update was developed through a three-phase process over the last 14 months:

- **Phase 1: Background Research and Analysis**– reviewed relevant municipal plans and studies, benchmarking environmental programs and trends.
- **Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement** – conducted a community-wide survey, staff, public and stakeholder workshops, and an online presentation and feedback form to understand current and future needs, opportunities for community action and collaboration, and new ideas. A “What we Heard” report, posted on the City's website, captures this feedback.
- **Phase 3: Strategy Development** – developed content, updated goals, objectives and actions based on feedback; reported to Council with the resulting

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draft Environment Strategy Update (SRPI.22.033) which was released for public comment; incorporated draft feedback into the final Environment Strategy Update.

Upon Council approval of the Environment Strategy Update, a visually appealing and public-friendly version will be prepared, including images and infographics to illustrate key concepts. The finished product will be made available to the public, stakeholders, partners and staff in digital and, where appropriate for promotional and technical reference purposes, sustainably printed hard copy format.

1.3 Community feedback on the draft update

Following a three-week public comment period from mid-April to early May 2022, the draft Environment Strategy Update remained on the City's website to allow for additional feedback until June 1, 2022. During this time, the City's Greening the Hill webpage received nearly 1,200 visits, and feedback was provided by a variety of residents, partner organizations and staff.

Comments were generally supportive of the City's greening efforts and showed alignment with other local plans and strategies. Additional suggestions were provided to help strengthen the Strategy's proposed actions. This feedback is summarized below and has been addressed within the final Environment Strategy Update.

Managing and reducing the impacts of invasive species

- We heard from stakeholders about the importance of taking an “early detection and rapid response” approach to invasive species management, including detecting “sleeper species” and making best use of tools and technologies that allow the City and residents to monitor invasive species threats and trends. These concepts and their importance have been captured in the Strategy's Invasive Species theme, and actions related to detecting and responding to emerging invasives and leveraging tools and citizen science have been included.

Reducing litter and advancing the circular economy

- We also heard about the need to reduce community litter in public spaces, encourage reuse at public events, and advance the “circular economy” (where more products and materials are reused, repaired, refurbished, remanufactured, repurposed, or recycled) so that less waste is generated in the first place. The Waste theme addresses these comments through its goal and objectives aimed at reducing waste and promoting the circular economy. Recommended actions include educating the community on litter reduction and waste diversion in public spaces and at events, reducing reliance on single-use plastics, and supporting community reuse opportunities.

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Supporting local transportation solutions

- Additional comments emphasized the need to support local and active transportation solutions, such as encouraging and advocating for local transit and making it easier for micromobility users to get around the city. These priorities are reflected in Transportation theme actions such as transit advocacy for bus rapid transit (BRT) and encouraging micromobility.

1.4 Organization and structure of the final Environment Strategy Update

Based on feedback from our residents and stakeholders, the final Environment Strategy Update continues the original Strategy’s vision and mission, with minor updates to improve clarity.

- **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, the Strategy Update shifts the focus to *how* we can protect, enhance, and restore these elements through the areas where we have the most impact. The shift from *what* to *how* is a call to action built on three interconnected guiding or “greening” principles: Greening our Consumption, Greening our Natural Spaces, and Greening our Growth.

These principles are applied throughout the Strategy Update within 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. The 10 themes and their corresponding high-level goal are illustrated below.

<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, diverting waste and promoting the circular economy</p>

The objectives and actions contained within each theme have been scoped based on the City’s spheres of municipal responsibility and influence, namely our regulatory

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powers and policies (e.g. corporate plans and strategies), our municipal services and operations (e.g. community centres and 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”.

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. Therefore, most actions within the updated Strategy, regardless of theme, provide a direct or indirect climate change adaptation or mitigation benefit.

3.5 Our path to implementing the updated Environment Strategy

Once the update is approved, attention will turn to delivering the Strategy’s actions. To advance implementation and track progress towards achieving its vision and mission, the Environment Strategy Update contains the following commitments:

- Publish an Environmental Scorecard at five-year intervals;
- Provide progress updates and report milestone achievements to Council and the community on an annual basis;
- Develop a tool to track/map sustainability improvements throughout the City;
- Implement and routinely update the City’s Environmental Communications Plan to deliver outreach and education for each of the 10 themes;
- Hold regular meetings with the cross-departmental Environment Strategy Steering Committee to prioritize, discuss progress and work together to implement the Strategy’s actions; and
- Seek opportunities for funding and partnerships with community groups, local businesses and partner organizations, where possible.

One of the key commitments noted above is to continue tracking and reporting environmental progress and trends in the form of an Environmental Scorecard every five years. The City’s first Scorecard, released in 2021 and referenced throughout the Strategy Update, provides a high-level snapshot of environmental progress from the first five years of Environment Strategy implementation (2015-2019). The indicators were selected on the basis that they be meaningful to the community, easy to understand and relevant to Richmond Hill’s urbanizing context. Careful consideration was also given to ensure indicators reflect outcomes that are within the City’s control and influence, and to leverage data collection and monitoring already taking place, given limited resources.

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Following Council approval, staff will work collaboratively to set priorities, identify markers of project success, and incorporate actions into long-term work plans and budget cycles. Implementation progress will be reported annually, beginning in 2023. As we reach the end of this Environment Strategy's time horizon (2014 to 2031), a new Environment Strategy will be developed to guide environmental action beyond 2031.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

There are no financial implications resulting from this staff report.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

The Environment Strategy Update strongly aligns with Council's 2020-2022 Strategic Priorities. First and foremost, it 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 also 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, 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.

Climate Change Considerations:

The Environment Strategy update 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 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:

This report outlines a proposed path towards a more sustainable future through release of the Environment Strategy Update. The updated goals, objectives and actions contained in this update will help guide Richmond Hill's efforts to manage its environmental impacts, enhance local ecosystems, and create a more sustainable community over the next nine years. Together, we can cultivate a greener and more

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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 Update

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SPRI.22.068 - Environment Strategy Update.docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.22.068 - Attachment 1 - Environment Strategy Update (AODA).pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jun 14, 2022

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

Patrick Lee - Jun 14, 2022 - 3:24 PM

Kelvin Kwan - Jun 14, 2022 - 3:53 PM

Darlene Joslin - Jun 14, 2022 - 4:13 PM