



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 19, 2023

Report Number: SRPI.23.024

Department: Planning and Infrastructure

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPI.23.024 – 2022 Environment Strategy
Progress Update**

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to provide Council with the 2022 Greening the Hill, Environment Strategy implementation annual update.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Council receive staff report SRPI.23.024, including the attached 2022 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker and 2022 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet for information.

Contact Person:

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Report Approval:

Submitted by: Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Infrastructure

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, 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

In July 2022, an update to Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future* was approved by Council (SRPI.22.068). The updated Environment Strategy builds upon Richmond Hill's enduring legacy of environmental leadership and stewardship, and prioritizes opportunities for further corporate and community environmental improvements. The Environment Strategy issues a call to action for a more sustainable future, built on the three principles of Greening our Consumption, Greening our Natural Spaces, and Greening our Growth. It contains ninety actions organized within 10 themes to be implemented by 2031. The final version of the updated Environment Strategy and the Public Guide is available on the City's [website](#).

This staff report outlines Environment Strategy (Strategy) implementation progress throughout 2022, as directed by Council. While the updated Strategy was approved less than a year ago, many actions have already been initiated, are ongoing, or are complete. These accomplishments illustrate the City's continued commitment to environmental action and are the result of cross-departmental, inter-municipal, and community collaboration.

2.0 Environment Strategy progress in 2022

The following sections summarize 2022 accomplishments from each of the Strategy's 10 themes, implemented by various departments throughout the corporation. To view each of the Strategy's 90 actions, their status, and implementation progress in 2022, see Attachment 1, the 2022 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker. For a visual snapshot of notable achievements, see the Environment Strategy 2022 Highlight Sheet (Attachment 2).

2.1 Energy

Corporately, implementation of and legislative reporting for the City's Corporate Energy Plan continued in 2022 with recommissioning studies for five City arenas, and the installation of low-emissivity ceilings and over-the-ice LED lighting at Tom Graham and Ed Sackfield Arena. The City's Operations Centre was also recognized at the Windfall Centre's 2022 Sustainability Awards for reducing energy use intensity by 6% and GHG emissions intensity by 11% from 2020 to 2021. Savings can be attributed to proactive equipment maintenance, energy efficiency upgrades, and staff leadership. The City is also improving efficiency by initiating replacement of its Fuel System at the Operations Centre, including fuel pumps, vehicle sensors, and the Fuel Management System. Once installed, these sensors will generate valuable data on fuel use, engine use, and mileage to measure fuel efficiency and inform future opportunities for fuel and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reductions.

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To tackle climate change at the community level, the City continued to promote its Climate Change Conversation Toolkit (Toolkit) to inspire local climate action in 2022, including initiation of the City's Climate Champions program to promote use of the Toolkit. Through updates to the Official Plan, the City is continuing to establish directions in support of its ongoing climate change and sustainable development work.

2.2 Transportation

The City continued to support and advance active and sustainable transportation projects in 2022, including design for major projects such as the Lake-to-Lake Cycling Route and Walk Trail, David Dunlap Observatory Rail Crossing, and Hwy 404 flyover. Through its 2022 Sidewalk Program, the City enhanced pedestrian connections and improved walkability of public right-of-ways by monitoring, identifying needs and installing sidewalk linkages throughout Richmond Hill. Through the Transportation Master Plan update (currently under development), the City will propose additional improvements to its active transportation network, including facilities on local roads and within the park system. The City is also taking strides to green our fleet. In 2022, budget was approved for four electric fleet vehicles and four charging stations for these vehicles, to be purchased in 2023. Additional opportunities for fleet electrification and charging infrastructure will continue to be explored.

2.3 Water resource management

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. Key stormwater management and valleyland enhancement projects completed in 2022 include:

- Twickenham stormwater pond (16-4) – construction;
- Beaver Creek Pond A (27-2) – design;
- Valleyland restoration and rehabilitation of stormwater ponds 16-2 and 16-3 (Elgin Mills & Bathurst area) – design;
- Beaufort Hills Pond (2-4) – feasibility study; and
- Mill Street and Altamira Road Drainage Investigation.

The City also substantially completed development of a Stormwater Network Model in 2022, and updated and incorporated stormwater management facility asset data into the City's Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) system. These improvements will help staff better understand and plan for future stormwater infrastructure needs, repairs and enhancements.

The City is working to incorporate and showcase smaller scale stormwater management approaches through the Minthorn Park revitalization project, which will include a rain garden demonstration site. Design for the project advanced in 2022, and with grant funding from ICLEI Canada, the City hosted a "Rain Gardens and Climate Change" workshop. The purpose was to discuss different ways residents can adapt their gardens to make them more resilient to climate change, and the feedback helped identify future community engagement opportunities, programming ideas and educational resources to

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consider to further encourage climate resiliency at the lot level. With the funding, the City also developed two interpretive signs that will be placed at the rain garden demonstration site to help increase awareness of climate change adaptation measures and inspire residents to take action on their own properties. A case study, which highlights Richmond Hill's commitment to community climate resiliency through collaboration, was also prepared and is available on the City's website.

2.4 Water conservation

As part of the City's water conservation efforts, the pool filtration system was replaced at Bayview Hill Community Centre in 2022, which will result in reduced water consumption and operational costs. To promote community water conservation, the City partnered with York Region to include an educational insert alongside water bills that encourages early leak detection as a means to save residents water and money.

2.5 Sustainable land development

To continue encouraging sustainability in both public and private developments, the City completed an update to its Sustainability Metrics Program in 2022. The update reflects legislative changes, updated building code requirements, municipal priorities, and industry trends, and aims to drive innovation and raise the bar for sustainable development in Richmond Hill. The City is currently undertaking a Community Improvement Plan Study for Affordable Housing and Sustainable Design, which will explore opportunities to incentivize and promote uptake of metrics related to energy conservation and GHG reductions in buildings.

Also updated in 2022 was the City's Parks Plan. The updated Plan will help improve the sustainability and resiliency of our parks and open spaces in a number of ways. For example, the Parks Plan now includes policy direction to plan for climate resiliency in parks by applying a "climate change lens" to the overall planning, design, maintenance and operations of the City's park system. The Plan also provides direction to plan for a connected Urban Open Space System, which will direct future urban open space improvements through a visualization of how the municipal park system within and adjacent to our growing centres and corridors can move towards a unified and interconnected network. The updated Plan also includes policies to direct the City's approach to providing community allotment and collective gardens in Richmond Hill.

2.6 Urban forest and natural heritage

Efforts to enhance Richmond Hill's urban forest and natural heritage continued in 2022 with delivery of the Healthy Yards Program, Community Stewardship Program (CSP), and ecological restoration initiatives. Through the Healthy Yards program, 1,390 trees and shrubs, 3,680 wildflowers, 300 rain barrels and 300 backyard composters were sold. The City also hosted three webinars to educate residents about incorporating native plants on their property. Through the CSP, 9,855 trees and shrubs were planted and 6.2 hectares were restored by nearly 1,350 volunteers in 2022. Additional woodlot restoration occurred at Beaver Woodland, Elgin Mills Greenway, Phyllis Rawlinson Park and David Dunlap Observatory Park. The City also continued working with Toronto and

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Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) to restore four hectares of meadow within the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve.

To inform future natural heritage and urban forest improvements, the City completed an Urban Forest Study in 2022, which will help the City understand the distribution and condition of its urban forest and inform potential future tree canopy cover targets for different land uses in Richmond Hill. Additionally, the City incorporated natural assets (trees and natural areas) into its EAM inventory, which can help the City better understand and report on the condition, value, and age of these assets in the future.

2.7 Invasive species

The City's invasive species management efforts continued in 2022, with replacement and treatment of street ash trees, along with woodlot management and restoration at Beaver Woodland and Saigeon Trail due to the ongoing impacts of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). To address and mitigate the impacts of spongy moth, the City vacuumed nearly 6,650 trees, removed over 135,350 spongy moth egg masses, treated more than 90 oak trees, and distributed 5,660 burlap kits to residents. The City also hosted seven community invasive species management events where 118 bags of invasive plants were removed by volunteers. Additionally, the City treated and removed two patches of phragmites at Phyllis Rawlinson Park.

To manage future invasive species impacts, the City continued its EAB and spongy moth education campaigns through web and social media content, developed two spongy moth educational videos, and provided in-person education via the Greening the Hill booth at public events. Internally, the staff also established and launched an Invasive Species Interim Response Procedure to guide the City's response to priority invasive species on public property that negatively impact residents' health and safety, capital infrastructure, or ecological restoration investments.

2.8 Wildlife

In 2022, Richmond Hill partnered with Ontario Streams and TRCA to complete 14 in-stream habitat improvements and install four bird habitat structures at Lake Wilcox Channel. The City also piloted a unique approach to facilitate wildlife connections in the Lake Wilcox area, by creating asphalt ramps along the curbs of Newman Avenue, to serve as a temporary turtle crossing area. In addition, wildlife education continued through a series of wildlife and bird-related webinars (attended by nearly 300 participants), as well as improved wildlife educational activities for the Greening the Hill public event booth.

2.9 Local food and pollinators

In 2022, as part of the Community Garden Program, the City established a pilot/test garden space in the community allotment garden for garden groups to practice and learn garden management and maintenance techniques. The pilot plot fosters community garden coordination and capacity building by providing the opportunity for garden groups to develop skills with guidance. Additional opportunities to encourage

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local food production were advanced through Council approval of Amendment 18.3 to the Richmond Hill Official Plan, which incorporated policies to permit urban agriculture in private developments via community gardens, rooftop greenhouses, and vertical agriculture.

Pollinator protection continued in 2022 through the City's participation in the Pollinator Partnership (Bee City designation) and the Mayor's Monarch Pledge. Community education focused on native plants and pollinators took place through the Healthy Yards program, Earth Day Speaker Series, and the Richmond Hill Blooms Program. Additionally, as part of the Minthorn Park Revitalization project, the City developed signage to be installed within the Park that highlights the benefits of pollinator plants in rain gardens.

2.10 Waste

The City's efforts to reduce waste, and single use plastics (SUP) in particular, continued in 2022. Corporately, the City established and began implementing a Corporate Single Use Plastics Reduction Policy as well as an educational guide for staff and vendors at City facilities and events. Public education on SUP impacts and alternatives also continued via the City's website, social media, and waste calendar. The City continued to collaborate with York Region to encourage waste reduction, community reuse, and the circular economy through participation in "Repair Cafés" at the Central Library and community Curbside Giveaway events.

Waste diversion efforts also continued in 2022, through education and outreach to residents in multi-residential buildings, including two events aimed at improving organics and recycling diversion. The City also worked with multi-residential buildings to facilitate collection and diversion of batteries, electronics and textile waste. Corporately, the City diverted 85% of waste from garbage at City Hall – our highest diversion rate to date – and recycled over 4,500 pounds of batteries collected at City facilities.

Finally, after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, Richmond Hill's Clean Up, Green Up weeks returned in 2022. In total, more than 200 groups, comprised of over 9,000 volunteers worked together to clean up 70 parks and trails and 105 streets. To build on this momentum and address the issue of litter in public spaces, the City launched an anti-littering campaign with a dedicated web page, social media and waste calendar ads, and signage throughout the community.

3.0 Communicating the Environment Strategy to the public

Community engagement and education has been crucial to the development and implementation of Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy. The City will continue to educate, engage and build relationships with residents, businesses and community groups to inspire further environmental action. In 2023, the City will update its Environmental Communications Plans to reflect the updated Strategy's actions and chart a course for future environmental educational programming and initiatives. In the interim, the City continued, and will continue to communicate the Strategy and support

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implementation by providing environmental education and outreach to the community, including the following activities in 2022:

- Greening the Hill social media (Facebook and Twitter) to promote the City’s environmental achievements, current programs, and opportunities to participate;
- Participation at community environmental events, including hosting a virtual “Spring Greening” speaker series in April and May 2022;
- Development of environmental education materials, communications pieces, and outreach activities for staff and the community; and
- Environmental liaison meetings, speaking engagements and collaboration with community groups, local schools and youth to listen to concerns and promote participation in City environmental initiatives.

4.0 Next steps

Throughout 2023, staff will continue to deliver on the commitments of the updated Strategy. This includes continued staff collaboration through the internal Environment Strategy Steering Committee, as well as ongoing annual progress tracking and data collection for the City’s Environmental Scorecard (released every 5 years; next Scorecard to capture 2020-2024 environmental trends). Staff will also finalize the internal implementation action plan that sets priorities, timeframes and markers of project success so that staff can incorporate the Strategy’s actions into long-term work plans and budget cycles. Finally, as mentioned above, our Environmental Communications Plans will be updated to continue educating and engaging with residents, 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 of the Environment Strategy strongly aligns with Council’s Strategic Priorities. The Strategy complements and supports the City’s long-term planning for sustainable development aimed at Balancing Growth and Green. It 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 Strategy helps cultivate 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. transit and active transportation).

Environment Strategy actions demonstrate Fiscal Responsibility by promoting initiatives that reduce waste and encourage efficiency (e.g. energy and water efficiency)

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improvements and waste diversion) and supporting work to improve resiliency and avoid risks and costs associated with the impacts of climate change.

Climate Change Considerations:

Implementation of the Strategy, along with annual progress tracking and reporting, directly enables and supports the City's climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. In updating the Strategy, climate change considerations were intentionally woven into each of its 10 themes. The Strategy contains numerous actions aimed at reducing corporate and community GHG emissions (e.g. actions within the Energy, Transportation, Water Conservation, Sustainable Land Development and Waste themes), as well as measures to improve climate resiliency (e.g. actions within the Water Resource Management, Natural Heritage and Urban Forest, Wildlife, Invasive Species and Local Food and Pollinators themes).

Conclusion:

Richmond Hill's updated Environment Strategy, *Greening the Hill: Our Community, Our Future* provides a roadmap to continue the City's legacy of environmental stewardship and improvement. This staff report and its attachments outline how Strategy implementation progressed in 2022. The accomplishments highlighted further illustrate Richmond Hill's continued commitment to become a more sustainable and resilient community – one 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 – 2022 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker
- Attachment 2 – 2022 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPI.23.024 - 2022 Environment Strategy Progress Update.docx
Attachments:	- SRPI.23.024-Att2-2022 Env Strategy Highlight Sheet - AODA.pdf - SRPI.23.024-Att1-2022 Env Strategy Tracker - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 24, 2023

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

Maria Flores - Mar 23, 2023 - 2:34 PM

Kelvin Kwan - Mar 23, 2023 - 2:35 PM

Darlene Joslin - Mar 24, 2023 - 8:34 AM