



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: September 20, 2023

Report Number: SRCM.23.12

Department: Office of the City Manager
Division: Strategy and Transformation

Subject: SRCM.23.12: City of Richmond Hill 2023-2027
Strategic Plan Community Engagement
Summary – Consultation Summary Report

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to present the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report, or the key findings and directions, as a result of community and staff engagement. Information in this report will serve as the basis for the development of Richmond Hill's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, anticipated to be presented to Council by the end of 2023.

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Council receive the Richmond Hill 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report attached as Appendix A;
- b) That all comments on the Richmond Hill 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report be referred back to staff for consideration in writing the draft Strategic Plan;
- c) That this report, including the Richmond Hill 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report, be posted on the City's website for comment from the community until October 12, 2023.

Contact Person:

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Report Approval:

Submitted by: Anthony Iannucci, Chief Transformation Officer

Approved by: Darlene Joslin, City Manager

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Background:

What is a Strategic Plan?

A strategic plan is a municipality's guiding document, outlining its top priorities, mission and shared vision for the future of the community. The development of a strategic plan during a new term of Council is considered a best practice in municipal governance. It provides a roadmap for Council, staff, and the community as to what Richmond Hill wants to be and how it will get there. It allows the political and administrative leadership of the organization to align priorities and workplanning, as well as measure progress towards the vision and goals.

Successful strategic plans require input from both internal and external stakeholders, such as the members of the community and staff. This may be conducted through an array of approaches, including community outreach, working/focus groups, town halls, surveys, and internal staff consultation. Feedback gathered from these exercises is compiled into a report summarizing the engagement process and the key findings and directions from it. This report, along with any additional feedback from Council and the public, is then used to draft a strategic plan.

Note that there is a difference between a strategic plan and a municipality's official plan. An official plan is a land-use planning policy document that outlines goals and objectives to manage growth, protect natural and cultural heritage, and other resources in Richmond Hill. In contrast, a strategic plan looks at the full breadth of the City's mandate and services to understand trends, opportunities, goals, and "to guide decision-making processes and prioritize public resource allocation" (as explained in Appendix A). A strategic plan sets the foundation for other plans, most notably, operational and budget planning as set out in Figure 1.

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Figure 1: Organizational Strategic Alignment and Integration



**items identified with an asterisk are deliverables of a strategic plan.*

Richmond Hill's Strategic Planning History and Context

The City's last Strategic Plan was approved in 2009, with Council establishing Strategic Priorities for the 2020-2022 term. Given that the current term of Council began in late 2022, the City sought to embark on a new plan, funding for which was approved in the 2023 capital budget.

Richmond Hill acquired the services of StrategyCorp, a leader in municipal strategic planning, to assist with the benchmarking/best practice review, community engagement, internal staff consultation, and authoring of the Consultation Summary Report, which is attached as Appendix A.

Previous strategic planning efforts have included minimal or no engagement of City staff to inform the Plan's development. Based on the emerging Organizational Management Framework being used by staff to align strategic priorities with activities and outcomes, the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan consultation effort deliberately included engagement with staff. This enables the identification of best practices and trends from the City's subject matter experts, as well as internal opportunities to facilitate strategic alignment that may not be visible to the public. The inclusion of staff feedback will help the City to align priorities and workplans expediently once the final Strategic Plan is approved.

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Communications and Engagement Approach

A benchmarking and best practice review was conducted by StrategyCorp to determine the best approach for how to engage with members of the community and staff. The review examined Richmond Hill's current community profile and organizational priorities, best practices for strategic plans done in comparative municipalities (including community engagement activities), and provided recommendations for how to plan for successful stakeholder engagement to create an effective, implementable strategic plan. Through this analysis, StrategyCorp developed a communications and engagement strategy in consultation with City staff. This strategy identified a series of engagement opportunities and events that fit the distinct context and culture of the Richmond Hill organization and community, while reflecting best practices in recent municipal strategic planning. Outlined in detail in Appendix A, the engagement activities were led by StrategyCorp, supported by City staff, and included:

- Interviews with Members of Council and the Executive Leadership Team;
- Pre-engagement with local community organizations and groups to get feedback on how we were planning engagement;
- Presentations to, and discussions with, Council's Advisory Committees;
- Community Survey;
- Staff survey and workshops;
- Public Open Houses (virtual and in-person);
- Community Pop-Ups at popular events and all branches of the Richmond Hill Public Library (RHPL);
- Focus groups with the business community and the RHPL leadership team.

The City launched a number of tactics to promote the engagement opportunities above with the goal of reaching the most members of the community possible. These included:

- Email Registry – residents can sign up at RichmondHill.ca/StrategicPlan for ongoing updates;
- E-Newsletters – information about the engagement process promoted in communications with residents and stakeholders who receive other information on City projects like the Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Economic Development, and Recreation opportunities;
- Digital advertising – online paid ads in English, Farsi, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, and Russian;
- Multilingual radio advertising in English and Cantonese;
- Print advertising – dedicated and shared ad space in the Richmond Hill Liberal and outdoor mini-billboards throughout the City;
- At City facilities – printed posters and digital screens LCD signs outside facilities;
- Inclusion in MyRH print newsletter;
- Social media and website – posts to Twitter and Facebook, including paid boosts on Facebook; dedicated webpage, Richmondhill.ca homepage banner, and event calendar listings; and

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- A [Public Service Announcement](#).

Internal staff engagement included emails from the City Manager inviting participation in a staff survey, as well as pop-ups at staff events. Targeted outreach to shift and outside workers was undertaken to enable participation.

Engaging with First Nations Treaty Rights Holders

As part of the City's commitment to advancing truth and reconciliation, City staff are working to engage with Treaty Rights holders from Treaty 13 (Toronto Purchase) and the Williams Treaties. As of the writing of this report, this has included the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Curve Lake First Nation. This outreach provided an opportunity to invite input on how the City approaches strategic planning as well as the vision, mission, values and goals we set out. Feedback received thus far has focused broadly on environmental concerns and ongoing relationship building with First Nations.

Upon Council receipt of this report, staff will reach out again to provide a copy to all Treaty Rights holders, including those we have already met, to offer opportunity for feedback. The responses will be considered as part of the next phase of work, the writing of the Strategic Plan.

What We Heard

The engagement and communication efforts described above led to a significant amount of community and staff feedback. StrategyCorp reports that over 1300 stakeholders were engaged in this process from among Council, staff, residents, community groups, businesses and other stakeholders.

Based on feedback received during the engagement activities, StrategyCorp has outlined major themes into three categories: What's Working Well, Opportunities for Improvement and Big Picture Concerns (for greater detail on each, see Appendix A).

Note that these are themes to be considered for the development of the Strategic Plan, not the priorities and goals that will be established through the writing of the Plan:

Themes: What's Working Well in Richmond Hill

- The natural environment as a core part of identity
- Connectivity to the Greater Toronto Area and York Region
- A diverse community, where innovative thinking flourishes
- Celebrated community programming and events
- "Small town" feel with big-city amenities
- Fiscally prudent Council and administration
- Engaged and proud employees
- Effective staff-Council relationship

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Themes: Opportunities for Improvement

- Achieving greater community consensus on growth
- Accessibility and mobility
- Improving traffic congestion and road safety for all users
- Developing vibrant, complete communities, including the historic downtown core
- Supporting older adults so that they can age in place
- Advancing Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous treaty rights holders and urban Indigenous groups
- Finding creative solutions to address the evolving, complex issues facing the City
- Enhancing collaboration and creating a shared vision across the administration
- Staff attraction, retention, and well-being, and business continuity planning
- Advancing continuous improvement initiatives and meeting customer expectations

Themes: Big Picture Concerns

- Erosion of social civility and trust in government
- Legislative changes from other levels of government
- Climate change impacts
- Uncertain economic landscape
- Housing affordability and attainability

It is important to note that this feedback represents participants' impressions of the City and its services. In many cases, the City is already responding to these directions. For example, the feedback about managing growth and complete communities is an important part of the City's ongoing Official Plan Update, which continues to be informed by extensive community consultation. It is encouraging to see this continuity in the nature of community feedback in this area, as it helps to validate the results of the Strategic Plan engagement effort.

StrategyCorp has also provided some specific recommendations based on their findings for consideration as the City develops our new Strategic Plan. These are articulated in detail in Appendix A and are summarized below in alphabetical order:

1. Advance Richmond Hill's ongoing commitment to financial sustainability;
2. Advance Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous treaty rights holders as well as urban Indigenous groups;
3. Build greater trust with the Richmond Hill community by increased involvement in the decision-making process through accessible channels;
4. Champion more initiatives that safeguard the City's natural assets (i.e. parks and trails);
5. Collaborate with government and non-government partners to explore solutions that promote affordable and attainable housing;

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6. Commit to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) both within the organization and the community;
7. Continue to offer and expand affordable and accessible recreational and cultural programming;
8. Embrace forward-thinking, anticipatory, and innovative approaches towards growth and development that preserves Richmond Hill's unique character;
9. Engage with senior levels of government to advocate for community concerns outside of Richmond Hill's jurisdiction (i.e. homelessness and mental health);
10. Focus on the attraction, retention and well-being of staff while fostering a healthy work environment; and
11. Protect community safety by developing strategies to enhance transportation infrastructure, multi-modal transportation, and increased mobility throughout the City;
12. Uphold Richmond Hill's commitment to combatting climate change.

The themes and recommendations are key inputs for the City's new Strategic Plan, as they represent where and how Richmond Hill sees itself today, and how we envision the future. In an environment of limited resources, not everything can be a priority. The results of this engagement provide valuable information as staff write the new Strategic Plan for Council's consideration that will focus our priorities and provide a framework for future decisions.

How will this information become a new Strategic Plan?

The completion of the community engagement phase of the Strategic Plan project allows staff to move to the writing of the Plan for Council's consideration. This writing phase will be done in-house, using the City's own staff resources and expertise in service delivery and change management. Feedback from the engagement phase is already being used to inform processes underway to prepare for alignment with the Plan once it is approved, such as the preparation of budgets and initial goal setting for 2024.

Next Steps

Staff are recommending that the appended report be posted on the City's website for public feedback for a period of two weeks after Council approval, until October 12. The Consultation Summary Report will also be shared with First Nations Treaty Rights holders for their input.

Staff will use the information contained in the Consultation Summary Report, and any additional feedback/comments received from the public, to author the draft 2023-2027 Richmond Hill Strategic Plan, which will be brought forward to Council for consideration by the end of 2023.

What happens once Council approves the Strategic Plan for 2023-2027?

As outlined in Figure 1 earlier in this report, once the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan is approved, the City's leadership will begin to re-align and re-prioritize work already being planned for 2024, to cascade the directions of the Strategic Plan into the City's

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workplanning. Using the City's Organizational Management Framework, annual workplan goals will be adjusted to reflect Strategic Plan priorities, and performance measures will be developed to track success against the vision and goals of the Strategic Plan. This in turn will allow the City Manager's Office to report out to Council and the community on progress towards the vision and goals of the Strategic Plan over the term of the Plan.

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan will be used as touchstone for the City's business and budget planning and will help to prioritize and align Richmond Hill's vision and goals. Council and staff will then be in a position to implement the goals through the work we do at the City, whether it be through policy development, program delivery or advocacy.

Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:

Although there are no financial implications to the recommendations in this report, priorities and actions established in the new Strategic Plan, once approved by Council, will be reflected in future operating and capital budgets.

Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan will guide Richmond Hill in establishing new priorities and objectives that align with the vision of the organization and community. The goals set out in the new 2023-2027 Plan will reflect what the City hopes to achieve in the next five years.

Climate Change Considerations:

"Addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change" is identified as a Big Picture Concern theme in the appended Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report. Thus, while there are no direct climate change implications, priorities and actions established through the recommendations in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan may identify climate change considerations.

Conclusion:

A Strategic Plan is a municipality's guiding document, outlining the City's top priorities, mission and shared vision for the future of the community. In order to ensure the public engagement on a new Strategic Plan was as comprehensive as possible, StrategyCorp engaged with Council, the community, stakeholders, and staff through a wide variety of opportunities, as detailed in Appendix A.

Through this work, StrategyCorp was able to identify issues that are important to members of the Richmond Hill community. This was done by highlighting several key themes which emerged throughout the consultation, including what is current working well in Richmond Hill (the City's core strengths and what members of the community cherish), as well as opportunities for improvement and big picture concerns as we move forward.

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Staff will use the information in this report to author the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, which is expected to be presented to Council by the end of 2023.

Attachments:

- Appendix A: City of Richmond Hill 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Consultation Summary Report from StrategyCorp

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRCM.23.12 Richmond Hill 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Community Engagement Summary – Consultation Summary Report.docx
Attachments:	- City of Richmond Hill - Consultation Summary Report - FINAL.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Sep 11, 2023

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

Anthony Iannucci - Sep 11, 2023 - 7:51 AM

Darlene Joslin - Sep 11, 2023 - 3:05 PM