



CITY OF RICHMOND HILL

A green graphic element consisting of three curved lines of varying lengths, resembling a stylized leaf or a wave.

2023 - 2027
Strategic Plan

CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic Plans guide municipalities in setting priorities and planning for the future. As Richmond Hill navigates the post-pandemic environment, grapples with evolving social and economic challenges, and approaches the end of the first year of the 2022-2026 term of City Council, it is timely to embark on a new Strategic Plan.

In April 2023, the City formally launched the process to develop a new Term of Council Strategic Plan to guide the future of Richmond Hill and retained a third-party consultant, StrategyCorp, to support the research and stakeholder engagement phases of the project.

Beginning with a robust data review and benchmarking analysis, the City and StrategyCorp developed a detailed and wide-ranging Communications and Engagement Strategy designed to support an inclusive and broad process that would allow as many voices as possible to share their feedback on the City's priorities and future vision for the next several years. Approximately 1,300 stakeholders were engaged in this process, including Council and City staff, local business and community organizations, residents, and other community members.

Several key themes emerged throughout this engagement process, relating to Richmond Hill's current strengths that should be capitalized on moving forward, areas for further reflection and improvement, as well as broader 'macro-level' concerns that touch on areas that extend beyond the City's jurisdiction in terms of what it can directly deliver, regulate, or fund.

What's Working Well in Richmond Hill

The City's core strengths and what the administration and community cherish about living and/or working in Richmond Hill:

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

Opportunities for Improvement

Primary concerns and areas that should be considered as part of the creation of the Strategic Plan as expressed by Council, staff, and the community:

- ✓ Achieving greater community consensus on growth.
- ✓ Improving traffic congestion and road safety for all users.
- ✓ Developing vibrant, complete communities, including the historic downtown core.

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- ✓ Supporting older adults so that they can age in place.
 - ✓ Advancing Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous treaty rights holders and urban Indigenous groups.
 - ✓ Enhancing collaboration and creating a shared vision across the administration.
 - ✓ Finding creative solutions to address the evolving, complex issues facing the City.
 - ✓ Addressing concerns related to staff attraction, retention, and well-being.
 - ✓ Advancing continuous improvement initiatives and meeting customer expectations.

Big Picture Concerns

Major macro-level problems of great concern to many stakeholders that mirror the challenges experienced by many municipalities and residents across Ontario and Canada:

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

Building upon the insights and themes gathered throughout this engagement process, City Council and staff will collaborate with the community to refine and validate these inputs as they create the City's new Term of Council Strategic Plan. This ongoing process aims to ensure that the resulting document for the City is reflective of community needs and priorities and provides a clear roadmap for the City that articulates a collective vision for the future and the pathway to achieving it.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2023, the City of Richmond Hill began the process of developing its 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan. StrategyCorp, a third-party consulting firm, was retained by the City to provide services – including background research and stakeholder and community engagement – to support the creation of the new Term of Council Strategic Plan and ensure that it appropriately reflects stakeholders’ aspirations, priorities, and concerns.

This report provides a synthesis of the community and stakeholder engagement process and the key themes that emerged, which will help guide the City as it begins to draft the new Term of Council Strategic Plan in the coming months.

This document was produced by StrategyCorp and was reviewed by the City of Richmond Hill before finalization.

Context and Overview of Project

In Ontario, the development of a Strategic Plan is considered a best practice for municipal councils, administrations, and the community to undertake together. A Strategic Plan sets out a municipality’s top priorities and the broad directions that must be pursued to reach those aspirations.

In 2009, Richmond Hill developed its first-ever comprehensive Strategic Plan, “*A Plan for People; A Plan for Change*,” resulting in four key goals: Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill, Better Choice in Richmond Hill, A More Vibrant Richmond Hill, and Wise Management of Resources in Richmond Hill. The Plan also included a new vision for the City: “Richmond Hill, Where People Come Together To Build Our Community.” Over the next several years, Richmond Hill tracked its progress annually towards achieving the Strategic Plan’s vision and each of the four goals.

In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Richmond Hill undertook a condensed strategic planning process, [Council Strategic Priorities 2020 – 2022](#), to identify strategic priorities that would set the City on a solid path to COVID-recovery, minimizing its financial impact on residents while continuing to emphasize environmental initiatives, community building, and transportation.

As Richmond Hill emerged from the immediate emergency of the COVID-19 response and elected a new Council in October 2022, it was timely for the City to embark on a new Strategic Plan in early 2023. While many of the priorities from the 2009 and 2020-2022 Plans continue to resonate with stakeholders, it is also worth revisiting and gathering input on the City’s priorities in view of the changing context in Richmond Hill, including some elements of which are unique to the City while others are related to broader trends and issues. For these reasons, in April 2023, the City formally kicked-off a process to develop a new Term of Council Strategic Plan that will guide Council, staff, and the community over the next five years (2023 - 2027).

Since initiation of this project in spring 2023, important work has been carried out that will inform the development and writing of the Strategic Plan later this fall, including background research on best practices in municipal strategic planning and stakeholder engagement, along with extensive community consultation and engagement of other key stakeholders, including Council and staff.

The purpose of this report is to summarize and report on key findings and directions resulting from this work, including key issues and priorities that emerged through the engagement process conducted between May – July 2023. Key components of this report include:

- An overview of the strategic planning process, including major project milestones and the stakeholder and community groups who have provided input thus far;
- A detailed summary of the comprehensive Communications and Engagement Strategy that guided all engagement activities; and
- An analysis of key themes that emerged from the engagement process and how they should be addressed as the City moves into the next phase of work, the drafting of the Strategic Plan.

Why We Do Strategic Planning

Every municipality must plan and make choices regarding what services to offer, what to build, and where to invest. The Strategic Plan articulates the City’s path forward, setting out Richmond Hill’s vision for the future and forming a framework to guide decision-making processes and prioritize public resource allocation.

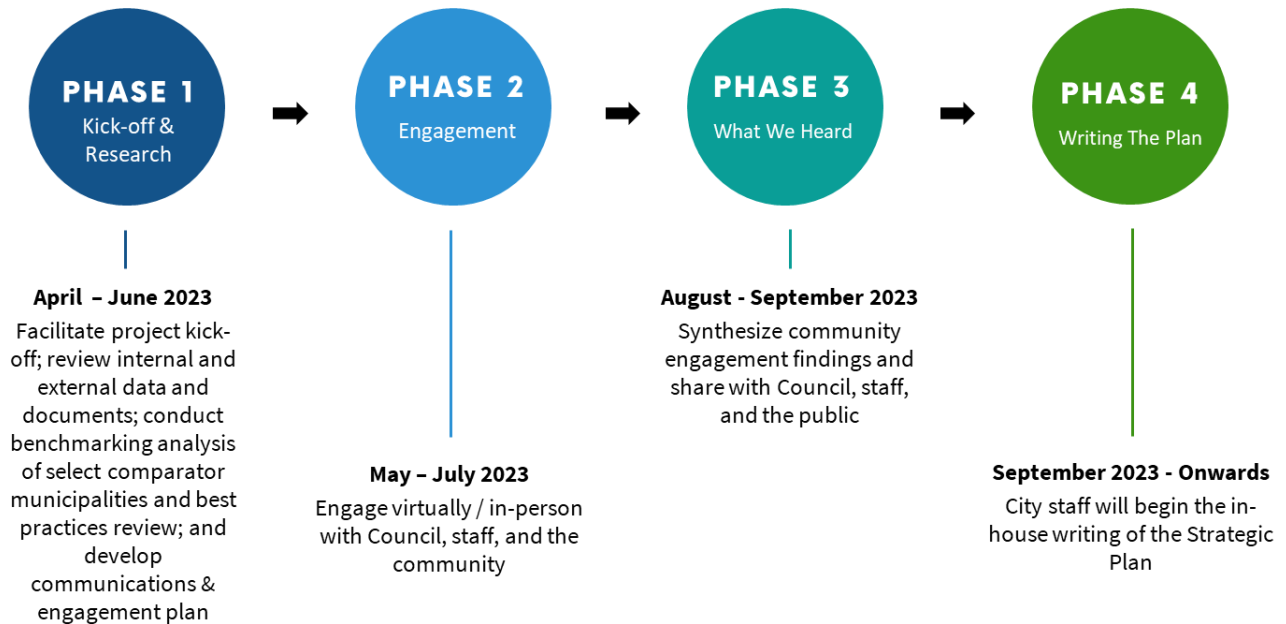
Like most municipalities in Ontario, Richmond Hill is growing and evolving, which presents not only new opportunities to seize but also new challenges to be addressed. As such, the City’s 2023 - 2027 Term of Council Strategic Plan will be a forward-looking document to guide Council and staff as they plan, make decisions, and invest in the future of the community. An effective Strategic Plan also aims to foster collaboration and build unity among stakeholders, including Council, staff, community members, businesses, and other community groups as they work together towards common goals.

It is also important that Richmond Hill’s Strategic Plan is a “living document” that is continuously reviewed – often through an annual reporting process – to ensure it is responsive to shifting circumstances, whether that be legislative changes or external events that impact the community. Ultimately, the plan should be precise in articulating the City’s overarching strategic direction and providing direction for staff business planning, yet also be flexible enough to enable the City to take advantage of opportunities, address emerging challenges or mitigate risks as they arise.

Ultimately, the Strategic Plan is grounded in Richmond Hill’s vision, mission, and values and guides Council and staff in their day-to-day activities as they focus on making progress on the priorities set out in the Plan. As such, it is designed purposely to be linked to the City’s annual business planning and budget processes, fostering a cohesive and purpose-driven approach to municipal governance.

Project Timeline

The development of the City's 2023 - 2027 Strategic Plan involves several phases of work:



DESIGNING AND CARRYING OUT THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Summary of Best Practices in Strategic and Engagement Tactics

At the outset of this project, a Benchmarking and Best Practices Review was undertaken to ensure that the City's strategic planning process reflects best practices in community engagement and performance measurement, whether in strategic planning or through similar efforts undertaken by comparator municipalities in Ontario. This review directly informed the development and execution of a robust Communications and Engagement Strategy, which focused on creating an internal and external stakeholder consultation process that promoted inclusion and accessibility, incorporated best practices in the municipal sector, and was grounded in the City's internal and external environmental context. More information on this effort is outlined below.

Key components of the Benchmarking and Best Practices Review included:

- An overview of Richmond Hill today, including demographic data analysis;
- A high-level overview of the emerging themes within the current context of Richmond Hill;
- An overview of comparator municipalities selected based on various criteria (e.g., lower-tier, Urban municipalities in the GTA with a similar population density and scope of municipal services); and
- Key recommendations to support successful stakeholder engagement and the creation of an effective and implementable Strategic Plan.

It is important to highlight that a nuanced approach to benchmarking was taken, considering Richmond Hill's unique attributes and demographics. Benchmarking is not a 'perfect science,' and what works in one municipality may not be applicable in another for a variety of reasons.

The following key findings and insights were identified as part of the Benchmarking and Best Practices Review and were incorporated into the development of the resulting Communications and Engagement Strategy for the City:

- **A Strategic Plan should be implementable and anchored within the organizational and community context** – This ensures that the plan does not become a document that “sits on the shelf” but acts as a clear guide for Council and staff, enabling the municipality to efficiently allocate its resources and make the best use of its budget and time. Moreover, tailoring the Plan to the specific needs and realities of Richmond Hill will ultimately lead to greater stakeholder buy-in, including both staff and the community.
- **A Strategic Plan should be accompanied by implementation plans and ongoing reporting that include community and corporate key performance indicators (KPIs)** – Community KPIs provide information about the well-being of the community (e.g., median household income, waste diversion rate, etc.) while corporate KPIs measure the performance of the administration over time (e.g., capital budget vs. actual spending ratio, employee retention rate, etc.). Both are useful in tracking, evaluating, and regularly reporting on progress against goals, which in turn builds accountability and awareness of whether the plan is delivering the expected outcomes.
- **A Strategic Plan should prioritize** – By prioritizing initiatives, the City can address pressing issues, seize opportunities, and align its actions with community needs and aspirations. This will ensure that the plan remains actionable, feasible, and relevant, leading to efficient decision-making, better resource management, and more successful outcomes. A common challenge for many municipalities is the sheer number of priorities. A Strategic Plan can be a vehicle to support municipal governments in “prioritizing the priorities” since it is not feasible, or even possible, to give equal weight to every priority due to limited resources and financial constraints.
- **Design an engagement process that eliminates barriers to engagement** – This includes physical, technological, and socio-economic barriers to enable participation by all groups. Working to design an engagement plan that fosters inclusivity and accessibility can expand the reach of engagement, incorporating voices often excluded or marginalized in typical consultation processes. Hearing from more diverse voices can ensure that the resulting priorities are not simply reflective of those with the ‘loudest voices’ but capture the concerns of a wider cross-section of the community.
- **Integrate Indigenous Peoples into the process early and often** – Incorporating Indigenous treaty rights holders, First Nations communities, and urban Indigenous groups into major government projects is a vital best practice that recognizes the profound significance of Indigenous perspectives, historical connections, and treaty rights. By upholding a commitment to meaningful engagement, governments can work towards advancing Truth and Reconciliation and building a more inclusive and harmonious future for all community members. However, it should be noted that that this specialized and important work falls outside the consultant’s scope for this particular project. Richmond Hill’s Council and administration are actively committed to carrying out this work separately, affirming their dedication to

reconciliation, relationship-building, and ensuring that the unique contributions of Indigenous Peoples are duly recognized and integrated into key City plans.

- **Go where the people are** – Leverage existing events and opportunities to bring the engagement to stakeholders, rather than trying to draw them out. This approach significantly reduces barriers to participation (e.g., work, childcare, transportation challenges, etc.) and participation efforts while enabling informal interactions on their own terms. It also paves the way for dynamic engagement, promoting inclusivity by inviting diverse and/or traditionally “unheard” voices into more interactive discussions rather than just transactional interactions.
- **Use a mix of engagement tools** – There is no one-size-fits-all approach to engagement. Combining a range of tools across different formats (i.e., virtual, in-person, hybrid) and tailoring the approach to align with the City’s demographics can be effective in reaching a broader population beyond those who usually participate in comparable processes.

For more information on the study, please refer to **the Benchmarking and Best Practices Review attached to this report.**

Who We Engaged

Over 1300 individuals from various stakeholder groups were engaged as part of the strategic planning process, including City Council, approximately 400+ staff and 900+ community members. Note that participation in the strategic planning process was voluntary, allowing City staff and community members/groups to engage based on their willingness and interest in the project.

A more detailed overview of the stakeholder and community engagement process and participants can be found in **Appendix 1.**

City Council

- Mayor and members of Council

Richmond Hill’s Executive Leadership Team

- City Manager and departmental Commissioners

City Staff from the following Departments

- Community Services
- Corporate and Financial Services
- Office of the City Manager
- Planning and Infrastructure

Committees of Council

- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Affordable Housing Strategy Implementation Committee
- Age Friendly Community Council
- Heritage Richmond Hill Committee
- Youth Action Committee

Staff representatives from the Richmond Hill Public Library

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- Several Senior Management staff members

Representatives from the following community organizations

- A Better Richmond Hill
- L'Arche Daybreak
- Richmond Hill Ganesha Temple

Business Community Representatives

- Richmond Hill Board of Trade
- Richmond Hill Business Improvement Area (BIA)

Richmond Hill Community-at-Large

- 531 community survey respondents
- 250+ community pop-up participants

Engagement Approach

Stakeholder engagement is a broad term used by the City in its Community Engagement Framework to describe how Richmond Hill involves residents, staff, and other community members in decisions that affect their lives. Recognizing that Council, senior leadership, frontline staff, residents, business and community groups, religious organizations, social services agencies, and others know their communities best, it is important to create a strategic planning process that enables and empowers them to share their unique perspectives on Richmond Hill today and in the future.

To engage as many voices as possible and ensure that their opinions were heard, valued, and incorporated, StrategyCorp, in consultation with the City, developed a multi-faceted Communication and Engagement Strategy. Outlined below are the communications and engagement tools and principles that were utilized to encourage participation from key internal and external stakeholders and gather the key inputs needed to develop the new Term of Council Strategic Plan.

Communications Tactics – Getting the Word Out

The City used a combination of traditional and more novel communications methods to raise awareness of the strategic planning process across all parts of Richmond Hill and encourage a broad range of individuals and communities to participate, including those community members who may often face barriers to engagement (e.g., older adults, persons with disabilities and/or special needs, and other equity-deserving groups). It should be noted that all communications efforts related to the Strategic Plan were carried out by City staff.

City Website

A dedicated webpage (RichmondHill.ca/StrategicPlan) was created to keep community members informed and engaged throughout the Strategic Plan development process. The dedicated webpage provides information on what a Strategic Plan is and how it can help deliver better outcomes for the community, how it differs from an Official Plan, as well as a list of the various opportunities for the public to engage with the process. In addition, community members were able to use the webpage to directly access the Community Survey as well as subscribe to the Richmond Hill Strategic Plan Registry, which provides community

members with regular project updates related to major project milestones and future consultation opportunities.

Digital Media

Several different digital communications tools were utilized to reach broad and diverse audiences, including community members of different age groups and locations across the City. These digital communications tactics enabled the City to share real-time information with community members, while promoting an eco-friendly approach to raising awareness about the strategic planning process. In addition to distributing a Public Service Announcement, the City used social media to reach Facebook and Twitter users across Richmond Hill. Information about the new Term of Council Strategic Plan and how to participate was also included within over 10 popular e-newsletters / e-blasts that are regularly sent to Richmond Hill community members (e.g., MyRH e-newsletter, Theatre e-blast, Recreation e-blast, etc.). To support inclusive engagement and connect with diverse linguistic communities in Richmond Hill, the City provided digital advertisements in Farsi, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, and Russian.

Print Media / Advertising

To accommodate individuals with limited digital access as well as enhance the visibility of the project through tangible materials in the community, the City leveraged several different means of print (e.g., postcards, posters, etc.) and traditional media communications tactics (e.g., printed newspaper/radio advertising, etc.). In particular, the City printed and distributed informational postcards and posters at various City facilities and all community pop-ups. To spread awareness to target audiences who rely on print media to stay updated about happenings in Richmond Hill, multiple print advertisements were placed in the Richmond Hill Liberal, including a stand-alone ad and inclusion in the bi-weekly MyRichmondHill ad. Furthermore, the City also displayed information about the Strategic Plan using outdoor mini-billboards and LCD digital signs across various locations and facilities.

Engagement Methods

To solicit feedback from City leadership, staff, and the broader community, a hybrid model of virtual and in-person engagement was implemented, which included conventional avenues of participation and digital tools alongside more creative engagement methods that were intentionally designed to bring the engagement to stakeholders, rather than trying to draw them out.

This hybrid approach aims to reduce barriers to participation by empowering stakeholders – including staff, Council, residents from all socio-economic groups, students, business owners, community groups, public institutions, Indigenous treaty rights holders, and racialized and other members of equity-deserving groups – to choose how and when they wish to engage in the process. A detailed list of all engagement activities is available in **Appendix 1**.

Each of the engagement methods listed below aligns with the City's *Four Principles of Engagement*, as outlined in Richmond Hill's *Community Engagement Framework*:

- Easy and Flexible
- Coordinated
- Accessible and Inclusive
- Meaningful

Interviews

The engagement process kicked off with one-on-one interviews with Council and members of the City's Executive Leadership Team in May and June 2023. These interviews aimed to uncover deep insights and unique perspectives related to the key strengths and weaknesses of both the organization and community of Richmond Hill as well as solicit initial input on potential opportunities and threats that should be considered as part of the new strategic planning cycle. These interviews also provided useful context for broader, future consultation with other staff and community members.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were hosted with representatives from the Richmond Hill business community and the Richmond Hill Public Library, as well as with the following Committees of Council:

- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Affordable Housing Strategy Implementation Committee
- Age Friendly Community Council
- Heritage Richmond Hill Committee
- Youth Action Committee

City and consultant representatives attended meetings for each of these groups and invited input and discussion from their members. Doing so enabled a more focused discussion of certain issues of importance in the community – housing affordability, accessibility across the City, youth recreation opportunities, aging in place, maintaining cultural heritage, and local business needs, among others – from a diverse group of stakeholders, including elected officials, residents, and individuals who serve Richmond Hill community members daily.

Staff Workshops

Staff input from across the Corporation of the City of Richmond Hill is key to the strategic planning process – it enables a solid understanding of the City's operating landscape and the opportunities, challenges, and priorities that should be considered as part of the new Term of Council Strategic Plan. It is also critical to engage staff in the process because they are responsible for driving implementation of the Strategic Plan once it is approved by City Council. Strategic planning workshops were facilitated with Manager- and Director-level staff from each of the four City Departments:

- Community Services
- Corporate and Financial Services
- Office of the City Manager
- Planning and Infrastructure

These workshops introduced staff to the strategic planning process and, using digital tools and guided questions, gathered input on the key elements of an effective Strategic Plan; discussed and/or validated the City's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; and garnered subject-matter expertise related to the specialized work of the various departments. These workshops also helped to build consensus and understanding among staff about the most pressing issues facing both the administration and the broader Richmond Hill community, as well as begin to map out – using key words – a future vision for the City.

Staff Survey

To collect feedback from a broader range of staff members (such as front-line staff and non-management staff) and offer an additional mode for participation in the process, a digital staff survey was conducted. The survey also provided an alternative for staff who were unable to attend scheduled events or who did not feel comfortable providing their input in a group or 1:1 setting. The staff survey – which was hosted on Survey Monkey from May 30 - July 7 and received 326 responses – encompassed ten (10) different strategic planning questions, inviting municipal staff to provide feedback on what they like most about working at the City; what concerns them as staff; and their perspective on the priorities that are the most important for the City to advance as it looks to the years ahead, among other things. Detailed findings from the staff survey can be found in **Appendix 3**. Note the staff survey was self-selecting, in which respondents chose whether to participate in the survey and was not a randomized sampling of the City’s employees.

Pre-Engagement with Local Anchor Institutions/Groups

Through the Richmond Hill Strategic Plan Registry, several community groups (e.g., faith-based organizations, community advocacy groups, social services providers, etc.) signed up to receive project updates. Prior to beginning community engagement, City staff sent a call-out to these groups to help refine and validate the City’s Communication and Engagement Strategy, establish new communications channels with key groups serving the community, and determine engagement preferences for different segments of Richmond Hill’s population. City staff received three responses, which led to three virtual pre-engagement interviews with different community organizations. These discussions helped reveal important engagement needs for different communities, including those of newcomers to Canada and individuals with intellectual disabilities. Recognizing the need to meaningfully incorporate these individuals into the community engagement process, the City created new opportunities for engagement, including the development and distribution of a modified community survey.

Community Survey

Similar to the staff survey, a digital survey was also made available to Richmond Hill community members, including those who live and/or work in or visit the City. The survey provided an additional mode of engagement for those who may be uncomfortable expressing their opinions in a public forum or are unable to do so due to geographical location or personal circumstances. It is also a highly convenient method of engagement, as individuals can complete the survey when it best suits them. The community survey was shared and promoted through various communications channels, helping to maximize the potential for widespread participation and generating a more extensive dataset of community feedback. Hosted on Survey Monkey, the survey was intentionally designed to be short and concise to minimize time investment on behalf of participants and mitigate against consultation fatigue. The seven (7) questions in the survey were designed to gather broad feedback from a wide range of community members about what they like the most about living in Richmond Hill; those priorities that matter most to them; and their future vision for the City, amongst other things. The survey received 531 unique responses and was open from June 12 - July 31. Detailed findings from the community survey can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Community Open Houses

Community Open Houses, whether virtual or in-person, create environments where the perspectives of all community members are heard and respected. To accommodate those who are more accustomed to this type of public consultation, both in-person and virtual Open Houses were organized to provide an overview of the strategic planning project with community members and give them an opportunity to provide their

input into the process. The virtual Open House – hosted on June 23, 2023, over Zoom during the lunch hour – was scheduled to accommodate individuals who may have difficulty attending an in-person meeting due to geographical, logistical, or health-related reasons. In addition, as many community members have adopted work-from-home arrangements in recent years, this option provided an opportunity for remote workers to participate virtually during their lunch break.

An in-person Open House was held on June 27, 2023, at Elgin Barrow Arena from 6:30-8:00 pm to accommodate traditional work schedules as well as parents/caregivers who may be able to attend without having to take time off work or make alternative childcare arrangements. This meeting also provided a formal opportunity for community members who prefer in-person interaction with the City or may not be able or want to be digitally connected to the City. Approximately 10 individuals attended the Open Houses.

Pop-Ups

Pop-up events are designed to engage the community and staff at various locations across the City, leveraging existing public spaces, parks, municipal facilities, and scheduled community events. Pop-up events offer a more informal and approachable setting for staff and community members to share their opinions and ideas on important initiatives within the City. By bringing the conversation directly to stakeholders in a fun and engaging way, pop-up events can allow for more meaningful and inclusive engagement that is on the participant’s own terms and require limited effort on their part. Eight (8) community pop-ups were held in different locations across Richmond Hill in July 2023:

- Canada Day Celebration (July 1, 2023) at Richmond Green Park
- Concert in the Park (July 13, 2023) at Mill Pond Park
- Hillcrest Mall (July 16, 2023)
- Richmond Green Public Library (July 19, 2023)
- Richvale Public Library (July 19, 2023)
- Ribfest (July 23, 2023) at Richmond Green Park
- Richmond Hill Central Library (July 25, 2023)
- Oak Ridges Public Library (July 25, 2023)

At these events, facilitators solicited input from over 250 community members across all demographic groups in addition to using these events as opportunities to drive participants towards other engagement opportunities, including the digital or hard copy version of the community survey. While each interaction looked different, community pop-up facilitators primarily provided additional information about the strategic planning process and engaged in 1-on-1 conversations with community members regarding issues that are important to them. Feedback was solicited by asking probing questions, using engagement board activities, and/or Dotmocracy voting (an activity where engagement participants place dots or stickers next to options or ideas they support). Feedback was captured in real-time by recording responses on sticky notes, which were then displayed on an engagement board to promote transparency and encourage other individuals to participate.

Staff pop-ups also took place at the Summer Staff BBQ (June 6th) and Richmond Hill Operations Centre (June 19th) and to gather feedback from staff across the Corporation and direct them towards completing the staff survey.

WHAT WE HEARD

Introduction

Throughout the stakeholder and community engagement process, consistent data collection methods were employed to ensure a fair process and equal opportunity for providing feedback. Data was tracked and analyzed in real-time as it was gathered, allowing for prompt reflection of any changes and early course correction to the engagement process if needed.

In analyzing stakeholder feedback, a comprehensive approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data analysis was adopted. Numerical data was gathered through surveys and questionnaires to identify trends and patterns within the feedback. Concurrently, qualitative insights were sought through interviews, focus groups, and pop-ups, among other engagement methods outlined above, to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations behind stakeholders’ perspectives.

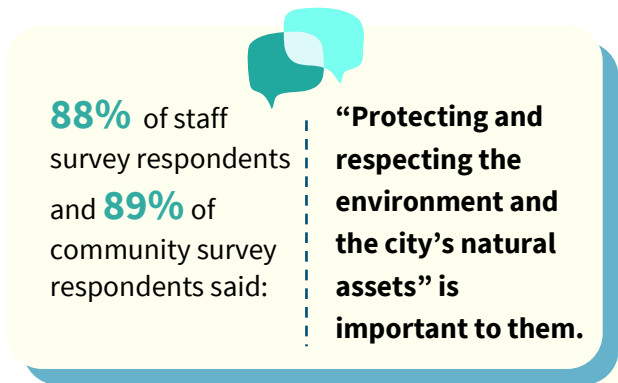
All qualitative and quantitative data was synthesized and aggregated into key themes and supporting insights, reflecting Richmond Hill’s current state and highlighting both future opportunities and threats to be managed as part of the City’s future planning. Where relevant, findings from both the staff and community have been provided to reinforce and support some of these identified trends.

What’s Working Well

Throughout the engagement process, City Council, staff, and the broader community were asked what they liked most about living and/or working in Richmond Hill. Collectively, they highlighted many strengths and achievements that make them proud to live and/or work in the City. Preserving and building on these positive aspects as the City plans for the future is crucial for maintaining Richmond Hill’s appeal and high quality of life. Listed below are the key positive attributes of the City that received widespread agreement across all stakeholder groups.

Richmond Hill’s natural environment is a core part of its identity.

Many community members and staff deeply value Richmond Hill’s natural environment, including its lakes, ponds, parks, and trails. These beloved spaces – including Lake Wilcox, Mill Pond Park, and Oak Ridges Moraine, to name a few – play a substantial role in influencing people’s decisions to reside, work, and visit Richmond Hill. There is a shared understanding among many individuals in Richmond Hill that preserving and safeguarding green and natural areas across the City will become increasingly important as the City continues to grow in the years ahead.



88% of staff survey respondents and **89%** of community survey respondents said: **“Protecting and respecting the environment and the city’s natural assets” is important to them.**



When asked what they like about Richmond Hill, **57%** of community survey respondents agreed:

“Richmond Hill is well connected to other urban areas like the city of Toronto and other parts of York Region.”

Richmond Hill connects residents to the Greater Toronto Area and York Region...and this connectivity is only going to improve in the future.

Residents in Richmond Hill greatly benefit from the City’s strategic geographic location. Living in close proximity to the City of Toronto and other areas in York Region provides access to a wide range of amenities and economic opportunities that contribute to personal and professional development for many community members.

Moreover, both the City’s administration and community – including the Richmond Hill business community – eagerly anticipate the Yonge North Subway Extension, viewing it as a significant development that will improve Richmond Hill’s direct connectivity to Toronto and contribute to the community’s ongoing growth, vibrancy, and sense of opportunity.

A diverse community, where innovative thinking flourishes.

Council, staff, and the community are proud of Richmond Hill’s reputation as a welcoming and forward-thinking City. Its rich cultural diversity brings together people from various backgrounds, contributing to a vibrant tapestry of traditions, ideas, and perspectives. Many staff were proud of the work they did to develop the City’s new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy and Action Plan, while the community looks forward to progress on achieving the 20+ action items outlined in the Plan over the next five years.



64% of staff survey respondents and **59%** of community survey respondents said:

“Fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce/Community” is important to them.

This diversity not only promotes a sense of inclusivity but also fuels creativity and innovation within the City. For many years, Richmond Hill has served as a hub for staff and community members to pursue initiatives that have enriched the community’s social fabric and/or fueled economic growth, leaving a positive impact beyond the City’s borders. Across various policy domains, such as fostering age-friendly communities, advancing Indigenous relations and reconciliation, and attracting new businesses through the Richmond Hill Office Development & Village Revitalization Community Improvement Plan, staff perceive themselves as municipal leaders and approach emerging challenges with enthusiasm, continuously seeking innovative solutions to benefit the City.

The City has a strong reputation for community programming and events.

Through consultation meetings, community pop-ups, and both surveys, we heard from stakeholders that Richmond Hill offers exceptional recreational programming and cultural and community events. Community members feel that there are many opportunities, especially for youth and older adults, to play recreational

sports and to be active in the community. They are also satisfied with how well City recreation facilities are maintained and operated.

When asked what they like about Richmond Hill, **40%** of community survey respondents agreed:

“Richmond Hill offers a variety of cultural and recreational activities and amenities.”

Community pop-ups revealed that events like Canada Day and Concerts in the Park are well attended by all ages and diverse communities. Community members also indicated that they enjoy having direct access to heritage sites and landmarks including the David Dunlap Observatory. Some expressed that it is important to preserve heritage sites and to create more opportunities for the community to engage with these sites.

Staff are also proud of the City’s recreational programs and community events. Many City staff feel confident that community programming is one of their strengths and that there is a strong plan in place to deliver on these programs. Staff expressed pride in the fact that these services are accessible and that specific efforts have been placed to provide recreational programs to those for whom these opportunities would otherwise be unaffordable.

Richmond Hill is a safe and urban City, with a “small town” feel.

Richmond Hill enjoys the best of both worlds, offering its residents a unique blend of urban and suburban living. The City provides convenient access to many urban amenities and perks, such as diverse cultural offerings, world-class recreation facilities, thriving commercial centres, and major transportation hubs both within and outside the City. Despite its urban offerings, the City has retained its small-town charm by committing to the protection and promotion of its historical landmarks and architectural heritage, as well as fostering a sense of community cohesion by creating spaces and opportunities for residents of all ages to connect, celebrate, and engage with one another. As the City grows, finding the balance between being a “big city” and maintaining the intimacy of a “small town” will continue to be a significant priority for residents.

The City also takes pride in being a safe and secure community. From well-maintained public spaces to its effective partnership with the York Regional Police, Richmond Hill residents are generally satisfied with the work that the administration and its regional partners undertake to ensure that residents feel protected and supported in their daily routines. Proactive public safety measures, such as Neighbourhood Watch programs, have also helped to empower residents to actively contribute to the safety of their community.

Richmond Hill is fiscally prudent and recognizes its responsibility to demonstrate value-for-money in service delivery.

The Corporation diligently manages financial resources to ensure City’s long-term financial health and sustainability. Staff employ financial policies including a robust asset management plan to ensure the long-term viability of essential services, infrastructure, and facilities. This approach supports investments in

infrastructure renewal and service improvements as the City grows. Financial sustainability is an ongoing objective and continuous process, as community needs evolve and the economic landscape changes. Recognizing that the community has a strong desire for Richmond Hill to keep taxes low and demonstrate value for money, Council maintained 0% tax rate increases in 2021 and 2022 and marginally increased the tax rate in 2023. However, in the face of high inflation and increasing operating and capital costs,

some City stakeholders are worried about navigating a volatile economic landscape while balancing budgets and maintaining affordability for residents. Furthermore, there are concerns that legislative changes and stagnant revenue growth will limit Richmond Hill's capacity to prioritize new parks, trails, and community amenities for its growing population, as well as maintain City assets in an optimal condition.

City staff take pride in the work they do.

The City has passionate and knowledgeable staff that take immense pride in their work. They have cultivated a positive work culture and attitude that values collaboration, respect, and open communication. With a shared commitment to continuous improvement, they approach tasks and projects with enthusiasm, fostering a supportive environment that encourages innovation and transformation. This also translates into always wanting to enhance residents' overall experience when they engage with the City and its programs and services.

Council and staff have a respectful and productive relationship.


In Richmond Hill, a strong foundation of respect and mutual appreciation exists between City Council and staff. Council recognizes the dedication and expertise of staff, valuing their commitment to serve the best interests of the community. Similarly, staff acknowledge the vital role of City Council in providing strategic direction to guide their day-to-day work and respect their role as decision-makers. Moreover, both Council and staff are committed to continuing to foster a productive working relationship, built on trust and respect, including through this strategic planning process. This collaborative effort centres on identifying and prioritizing common goals that align with the needs and aspirations of the community.

Opportunities for Improvement

The engagement process actively sought input not only on the City's successes and strengths within the administration and community but also encouraged stakeholders to voice the issues that concern them as they think about their priorities for the future of Richmond Hill. Analysis of this feedback revealed several distinct focus areas, including many that fall within the municipality's jurisdiction. As the City begins to draft the Strategic Plan, these themes may represent potential priorities for resource allocation and focused improvement efforts in the years ahead.

Creating broader consensus on the issue of growth.

There is a clear divergence of opinions on the topic of growth and intensification in Richmond Hill. Some community members – particularly long-time residents – express a desire to preserve the highly residential




89% of staff survey respondents and **77%** of community survey respondents said:

“Ensuring / demonstrating value-for-money in service delivery” is important to them.

character of Richmond Hill and oppose increased density and growth throughout the City. In contrast, other residents support high-density development and envision transforming Richmond Hill into a highly urbanized City. The differing viewpoints highlight the complexity of the issue and the need for thoughtful and inclusive dialogue to find a balanced approach that accommodates the aspirations and concerns of all stakeholders while ensuring the City's sustainable development and future prosperity.


Moving around the City isn't easy for everyone.

Navigating the City can be a challenge for many in the community. One notable concern is the lack of accessibility and mobility for older adults and individuals with disabilities, particularly those who live in more suburban neighborhoods and need to access amenities and services in the City's urban core. Several older adults and community members with disabilities expressed feelings of isolation and disconnection from other parts of Richmond Hill, often citing a lack of safe and reliable mobility options to help them move around the City, such as accessible sidewalks, regular transit, and paratransit.



When asked what they like about Richmond Hill, **only 23%** of community survey respondents indicated:

“It is easy to get around Richmond Hill.”




70% of respondents to the community survey said:

“Improving active transportation options in the City” is important to them.

Stakeholders also observed that the City is falling short in terms of being friendly for cyclists and those who seek active transportation options, suggesting the necessity for enhanced infrastructure (e.g., protected bike lanes) to promote healthier and sustainable modes of travel. However, community requests for improved cyclist-friendly infrastructure have sparked growing tensions with drivers, who fear potential disruptions to traffic flow

and the removal of parking spaces in commercial areas. The perceived competition for limited road space between cyclists and motorists has led to heightened frustration and disagreements, further highlighting the urgency of finding a balanced approach that accommodates the needs of all users.

Addressing traffic congestion and pedestrian safety concerns.



84% of community survey respondents said:

“Improving traffic congestion and safety” is important to them.

Related to the theme above, some community members were vocal about escalating traffic issues and congestion, especially along key regional corridors, that are causing frustration for those who live and work in the City. Given that Richmond Hill remains a car-dependent municipality, some are also concerned that the community's overreliance on driving within a growing municipality is leading to increased travel times and decreasing overall mobility within the City.

However, the adverse impacts of traffic congestion are not limited to vehicular traffic alone. Community consultation revealed that some pedestrians also feel unsafe navigating the City on foot, particularly when crossing major intersections or walking along main thoroughways where vehicles are moving at high speeds.

Building vibrant, complete communities.

Community members and staff alike acknowledge that amidst significant expected growth, the City has a unique opportunity to shape Richmond Hill's future by adopting a "big city mindset." To some, particularly the community, this means developing new mixed-use communities that cater to all age groups and provide living options for individuals across the entire housing continuum (e.g., transitional housing, supportive housing, purpose-built rentals, market ownership, etc.). To others, particularly staff, this means leveraging best practices in urban planning to rethink and revitalize public spaces and key nodes and corridors that belong to and are accessible by everyone.

At the same time, there is a strong desire from all stakeholders for growth to be achieved sustainably by incorporating environmental considerations into community design (e.g., green, and energy-efficient building standards), while also prioritizing the provision of adequate access to essential community services and amenities such as recreational programming, parks, and green spaces.

Revitalizing the historic downtown core.

Related to the theme of creating well-connected, attractive neighbourhoods in Richmond Hill, some members of the community are particularly concerned about the vibrancy of the Village Core. This group expressed a shared sentiment that the Village Core should be a focal point and a central attraction within the City, as it once was many years ago. There is a prevailing perception that Richmond Hill residents and visitors to the York Region are increasingly drawn to other historic city centres in the surrounding area – particularly Main Street Unionville – that offer a more appealing blend of historic architecture, boutique shopping, diverse culinary options, and a wide array of community events, concerts, and festivities. Others contend that the Village Core's current lack of appeal to residents and visitors can be attributed to a general unawareness of the different attractions and significant investments in the neighbourhood, including the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.


While most stakeholders agree that the Village Core could benefit from new, urban streetscape elements that would make it a more walkable and pedestrian-friendly neighbourhood, community members appear divided on the best approach to revitalizing the area. Some continue to advocate for more intense development to drive growth and modernization, while others are passionate about preserving the Core's low-rise, historic character. Further, this ongoing debate extends to the relocation of City Hall to the Village Core, with some staff and community members suggesting it as a potential catalyst for revitalization, while others are concerned about the significant cost of this project and uncertainty about the return on investment.



85% of staff survey respondents and **84%** of community survey respondents said:

“Proactively managing growth and density” is important to them.

Supporting older adults so that they can age in Richmond Hill.



77% of community survey respondents said:

“Supporting the health and wellbeing of older adults in the City” is important to them.

The community engagement process reinforced the fact that Richmond Hill is home to a vibrant, diverse, and engaged community of older adults, many of whom have called the City home for many years and have a strong desire to remain in Richmond Hill as they age. Older adults who engaged in the strategic planning process frequently voiced their appreciation for access to specialized community services and recreational programs and look forward to working alongside the City to address their most


pressing concerns in the coming years, as outlined in the [Richmond Hill Age-Friendly Community Strategy: What We Heard Report](#).

In addition to growing concerns and anxieties about accessibility challenges across the City, the primary issue voiced by older adults relates to access to affordable and appropriate supportive housing. In particular, it was raised that an increasing number of individuals are encountering specific challenges living in their current homes, which are often not designed or equipped to support aging in place effectively. The lack of supportive housing options within the City further compounds the issue, leaving many older adults with limited choices for suitable and accommodating living arrangements. A continued focus on addressing the unique housing concerns of older adults will be crucial to ensuring these long-term residents can remain in the community as their needs evolve and grow more complex and will also help maintain Richmond Hill’s reputation as a City for all ages.

Advancing Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Richmond Hill remains firmly committed to rebuilding constructive and cooperative relationships with the treaty rights holders who graciously host the City of Richmond Hill administration on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Mississauga and Chippewa Nations of the Williams Treaty and part of the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee and the Huron Wendat. City Council and staff, in addition to some community members, recognize the importance of continuing to build upon initiatives – including the co-development of Richmond Hill’s first official Land Acknowledgement Statement in March 2023 – that advance the process of reconciliation in Richmond Hill and help to implement some of the calls to action outlined in the [Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#).

Finding creative solutions to address the evolving, complex challenges facing the City.



49% of staff survey respondents and **58%** of community survey respondents said:

“Increasing advocacy on issues/areas outside of the municipality’s direct control” is important to them.

Like most municipalities in Ontario, City staff are grappling with pressing challenges – some of which are outside Richmond Hill’s sphere of control – that significantly impact overall community safety and well-being. These include but are not limited to the housing crisis and growing community concerns around mental health and addictions, homelessness, public safety, and access to healthcare services and professionals. As such, the City will need to adopt a proactive approach and intergovernmental advocacy strategy that involves

collaborating closely with all levels of government to address these critical challenges. In addition, the City should continue to foster strong partnerships with its community organizations and agencies, other public sector organizations, and the business sector. By adopting an innovative mindset and pooling resources, knowledge, and expertise, the City can play a vital role in helping to address these challenges and in turn, support the overall health and well-being of its local communities.

Enhancing collaboration and developing a shared vision across the organization.

To continue to work towards the City’s strategic priorities and strengthen workplace culture, there is a desire among staff to find new ways to ensure that there is active communication between different parts of the organization. This could avoid the duplication of work and ensure there is room for integration among service areas wherever possible. As well, it was expressed that more clarity around priorities is desired. There is a need for leadership – both Council and the Executive Leadership Team – to align on the organization’s key priorities to ensure that staff have the capacity to think and act strategically in view of ongoing financial and organizational constraints. This will help staff to understand the organization’s priorities and not ‘get distracted’ by competing priorities.


Both staff and Council expressed that not only is the creation of the Strategic Plan important but the communication of the Plan to the organization is just as vital. All stakeholders think it is essential that the big picture is communicated and widely understood across the corporation, and coming out of the strategic planning process, staff hope to have clearer understanding of the City’s key priorities to prioritize their work.

Investing in staff attraction, retention, and well-being and prioritizing business continuity planning.

Like many other industries and sectors, the City is facing challenges in attracting and retaining employees due to current labour market dynamics. As the pandemic has shifted the nature of work, with remote and flexible working environments becoming the new norm, employee well-being and work-life balance are pivotal factors in attracting and retaining talent. Municipal governments like Richmond Hill also encounter distinctive obstacles in staff recruitment and retention, including competition with other municipalities and the private sector, budgetary limitations, and the demand for specialized skillsets required across various service areas such as planning, engineering, and community services. As the City works towards becoming

an “Employer of Choice” for top talent seeking a fulfilling and balanced work experience, there is an opportunity to place employee well-being at the very core of the organization and prioritize a positive work culture, training and development opportunities, flexible working arrangements and other competitive advantages beyond compensation and benefits.


Furthermore, with a significant portion of the City's staff approaching retirement, the need for robust succession planning and seamless skills transition is critical to ensure the continuity and success of the organization.



91% of respondents to the staff survey said:

“Supporting employee retention and growth” is important to them.

Advancing continuous improvement initiatives and customer service.



63% of respondents to the community survey said:

“Improving how the City communicates with them” is important to them.



83% of staff survey respondents said:

“Exploring opportunities for continuous improvement to ensure that the administration is delivering services efficiently and effectively” is important to them.

As digital capabilities continue to grow and as the City moves out of pandemic response mode, there is an opportunity for the municipality to continue to find innovative ways to improve public communications and build on existing continuous improvement efforts. For staff, improving communications and community engagement has been identified as an area for improvement, particularly in incorporating more digital and diverse channels to reach broader audiences. In support of this, community members indicated that in today's digital age, it is essential to provide communications through varied and accessible channels. Given the City's diverse demographics, residents expect to receive information through various means, including the City website, social media channels, and traditional customer service phone lines. Other community members emphasized the importance of adopting communication tactics that are inclusive and age-friendly for everyone, including older adults, low-income households, and other groups who may not be digitally connected. Ultimately, improving communication tools can support continued education of residents about the programs and services provided by the City and the value it brings to residents' daily lives.


Big Picture Concerns

As the engagement process unfolded, it became apparent that the thoughts and concerns of Council, staff, and the community were also focused on major macro-level problems that mirror the challenges experienced by various municipalities and residents across Ontario and Canada. These significant threats are disconcerting for stakeholders as they possess the potential to undermine Richmond Hill's prosperity and overall high quality of life. Many also recognized that the City has limited control over these challenges in terms of what it can directly invest in, deliver, or regulate as a lower-tier municipality. Realizing the urgency

of these issues, the City’s administration and community seek to foster collaborative relationships with local businesses and social services partners, civic groups, and the provincial and federal governments to mitigate the negative effects of these broader threats and ensure a resilient and prosperous future for Richmond Hill and all who call it home.

Erosion of social civility and trust in government.

With rising populism, unstable economic conditions and lingering impacts of the pandemic, many citizens are growing increasingly frustrated. Many cities in Ontario and beyond, including Richmond Hill, are experiencing a decline in social discourse, along with growing distrust of government. The toxicity of many social media feeds is both a contributing factor to and symptom of this fraying of the social fabric.



93% staff survey respondents and **88%** of community survey respondents said:

“Ensuring transparency and accountability from government” is important to them.

It is also becoming increasingly challenging for municipalities to communicate, access, and reach community members in traditional ways. Garnering trust and fostering transparent communication through forums such as public meetings and town halls has become less effective as they no longer see the same participation from residents as they used to. The inability to reach large segments of the community and the competing online narratives and misinformation creates a potential threat for the City of Richmond Hill,

and other municipalities, when it comes to building bridges between local government and the constituency it serves and, in the most serious cases, could put staff and Council at risk of harassment or abuse. This climate also has the potential to discourage those that look to engage in balanced and productive dialogue with the City through traditional forms of civic engagement.

Despite these trends, Council and staff are committed to upholding the principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability by creating more clear and accessible communications channels with the public and prioritizing robust community engagement and involvement in decision-making processes.

Responding to unpredictable legislative changes from other levels of government.

There have been many legislative changes that have occurred over the last few years that threaten the stability of local governments in Ontario, and Richmond Hill is no exception. In conversations with staff and the community, several comments were made about the unpredictability of legislative changes, including the recent addition of strong mayor powers, key changes to the *Planning Act*, and the possibility of a municipal governance review of York Region. It is difficult to plan for Richmond Hill’s future if that future could be upended by legislative changes. In addition, the City is already contending with the impacts of changes, particularly the recent expansion of strong mayor powers as of July 1, 2023, and reduced revenues to fund growth-related infrastructure as a result of Bill 23. During the community consultations, it was noted that new legislation and major announcements from the Government of Ontario are also creating confusion amongst residents about what is changing and how these changes specifically affect them. These external decisions, which are often made without consulting the City, pose a threat to how Richmond Hill governs itself and induce anxiety within the organization and in the wider community about its future stability.

Addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change.

While not a leading priority, taking action on climate change and environmental protection remains deeply ingrained as a top-of-mind concern for Council, staff, and residents. As the City works toward its vision to be a resilient, low-carbon community and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, community members and staff expressed that it should continue working collectively with the community and other levels of government in implementing its [Community Energy and Emissions Plan](#) (CEEP) and reporting back on progress.

Advancing climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in the Corporation and the wider community continues to be an important priority, as the City looks to ensure long-term resiliency for residents and the organization itself. Furthermore, given Richmond Hill's strong appreciation for its natural assets, safeguarding, and preserving these resources is a matter of paramount importance for the community.



When asked if there is one priority that stands out, many respondents to the community survey said:

“Ensure environmental protection and green spaces” as being most important to them.

Navigating an uncertain economic landscape.

All stakeholders expressed growing concerns regarding the current economic challenges that are affecting growing numbers of Richmond Hill residents. Although Richmond Hill has a high median household income compared to many other municipalities in Ontario, the increasing cost of living and housing, high-interest rate environment, ongoing inflation, and the threat of an economic recession worry many in the community. Consultation revealed that Council, staff, and community members largely recognize the complexities of these issues and understand that the City cannot single-handedly address or alleviate these economic pressures. As a result, collaborative efforts and partnerships with other stakeholders, including senior levels of government, were identified as being necessary to effectively tackle these challenges and ensure residents have the supports they need.

The escalating housing supply and affordability crisis, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area.



51% of respondents to the community survey said:

“Encouraging a range of housing options to improve access and affordability for all residents” is important to them.

While intertwined with the discussion on affordability and cost of living, the matter of housing affordability demands specific attention given the severity of the issue in many municipalities across Ontario and Canada. Community feedback gathered about housing affordability in Richmond Hill highlights the nuanced nature of this hot-button issue, with varying experiences and concerns. On the one hand, some residents expressed contentment with their stable and secure housing situations, indicating that housing affordability is not a key priority for them. However,

this sentiment is not universal—on several occasions, individuals, including newcomers to Richmond Hill, reported feeling the pressure of escalating housing costs.

While some community members are more concerned about housing affordability than others, a common theme centered around a shared anxiety concerning the future housing prospects for the next generation of City residents, especially the children of current community members. A mounting concern is that rising housing costs in Richmond Hill may deter future potential residents, including young families and youth, from establishing roots in the community. This situation could result in young people being compelled to seek more affordable living options elsewhere, not only leaving family and friends but taking their talent and skills away from the City.

RECOMMENDATIONS & NEXT STEPS

Summary and Recommendations

Throughout this comprehensive engagement process, a multi-faceted portrait of Richmond Hill emerged, showcasing a blend of its strengths, aspirations, and challenges. Amidst the diverse voices of Council, staff, and the community, there was alignment on a number of key issues, underscoring the need to prioritize the most pressing issues facing Richmond Hill's community and administration.

Outlined below are recommendations for consideration as City staff begin developing the Term of Council Strategic Plan, based on all of the feedback and input that has been provided as part of the engagement process. These high-level recommendations take into consideration strengths to be built upon, opportunities for improvement, and threats to be managed and encapsulate the collective, aggregated input of all stakeholder groups including Council, staff and the community and all engagement activities (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, pop-ups, etc.). Though the City is already actioning many of the recommendations below, all stakeholders agree that prioritizing these focus areas will allow Richmond Hill to address top-of-mind issues and build upon existing strengths to better serve community members more effectively.

The next phase of work, to be led by City staff, will focus on developing concrete action items to help address and advance progress in these focus areas outlined below. **These recommendations are presented in alphabetical order and do not indicate any particular level of importance.**

1. Advance Richmond Hill's ongoing commitment to financial sustainability to ensure the City can continue to deliver on community priorities while also maintaining affordability for residents and value-for-money in service delivery. Achieving this balance will require making choices and decisions about where to invest and the need to prioritize based on available financial capacity, current economic conditions and considerations about what residents and users can afford or are willing to bear ([see page 18](#)).
2. Advance Truth and Reconciliation to continue to remember, recognize, and rebuild relationships with Indigenous treaty rights holders and urban Indigenous groups. ([see page 21](#)).
3. Build greater trust with the Richmond Hill community by prioritizing active and inclusive community involvement in decision-making processes through a variety of accessible channels ([see page 24](#)).
4. Champion more initiatives that safeguard Richmond Hill's natural assets (e.g., parks, trails, ponds) and prioritize sustainable practices to ensure a resilient and vibrant natural environment ([see page 15](#)).
5. Collaborate with government and non-government partners to explore solutions that promote affordability and attainability across the housing continuum and accommodate the diverse housing needs of the community ([see page 26](#)).
6. Commit to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives both within the organization and throughout the community, fostering an environment where everyone feels represented, valued, and empowered to contribute to Richmond Hill's growth and success ([see page 16](#)).

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7. Continue to focus on providing exceptional customer service through continuous improvement and innovation, transparent and accountable decision-making and effective communications and engagement. The City may want to consider inclusion of customer service as a potential foundational value for the Strategic Plan, given its centrality to the organization and everything it does **(see page 23)**.
 8. Continue to offer and expand upon recreational and cultural programming while maintaining affordability, ensuring that a diverse range of community members can access and enjoy these activities **(see page 17)**.
 9. Embrace a holistic and forward-thinking approach to growth and development (including for the downtown) that encompasses diverse perspectives, anticipates future challenges, and enables growth in a manner that also preserves Richmond Hill's unique character. Given the current provincial commitment to building 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years and its focus on ensuring municipalities meet their growth targets, continued advocacy, and collaboration with the Province of Ontario to enable Richmond Hill to grow in a way that is authentic to it will be required **(see pages 19-20)**.
 10. Engage in proactive advocacy with senior levels of government to address pressing community challenges that are outside the City's direct sphere of control, such as homelessness, mental health and addictions challenges, access to healthcare services, and the rising cost of living, among others **(see page 26)**.
 11. Focus on staff well-being, attraction, and retention of top talent, and foster a collaborative work environment to collectively pursue a unified vision for the City's future **(see pages 22-23)**.
 12. Protect the safety of all community members navigating the City by continuing to develop strategies to enhance transportation infrastructure, encourage alternative modes of travel, and improve mobility and accessibility **(see pages 19-20)**.
 13. Uphold Richmond Hill's dedication to combatting climate change by staying on course with its emissions targets, continuing to collaborate with other levels of government, and prioritizing long-term resilience through climate mitigation and adaptation planning and implementation **(see page 25)**.

Next steps

Once this report is refined and validated by Council and community feedback, City staff will move into the next phase of the strategic planning process – the drafting of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. The feedback provided will enable the City to not only build on existing initiatives and projects underway but identify new paths forward that capitalize on current strengths, celebrate past achievements, and focus on realizing future aspirations and addressing the known – and unknown – challenges facing Richmond Hill.

As the City moves forward, collaboration will remain pivotal. With a strong sense of shared purpose, the City is excited to develop a Term of Council Strategic Plan that will serve as a compass, guiding them through the important years ahead.

All contributions from the community and other stakeholders have laid the groundwork for a future that everyone can be proud of and share in, as the City continues on this journey.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Summary of Engagement Opportunities

Overview

From May 22-July 28, 2023, StrategyCorp and City staff facilitated **27 different engagement activities** with Council, staff, and community members to gather feedback as part of the City’s strategic plan development. Approximately 1300+ total stakeholders were engaged over this two-month period.

Council and Committees of Council		
Engagement Activity	Date and Location	Number of Participants
1-on-1 interviews with Mayor and members of Council	May 22 - June 23 Virtual	Approximately 60+ individuals
Youth Action Committee Focus Group	May 31 Bayview Hill Community Centre	
Accessibility Advisory Committee Focus Group	June 8 Virtual	
Heritage Richmond Hill Committee Focus Group	June 15 Virtual	
Affordable Housing Strategy and Implementation Committee Focus Group	July 4 Virtual	
Age Friendly Community Council Focus Group	July 11 Virtual	
City Leadership and Staff		
Engagement Activity	Date and Location	Number of Participants
1-on-1 interviews with members of the City’s Executive Leadership Team	May 22 - June 23 Virtual	Approximately 70+ individuals
Planning & Infrastructure Departmental Workshops	June 26 and June 28 Virtual	
Community Services Departmental Workshop	June 26 Virtual	
Office of the City Manager Departmental Workshop	June 30 Virtual	
Corporate & Financial Services Departmental Workshop	July 7 Virtual	
Staff Survey	May 30 - July 7 Online / paper	326 responses
Summer Staff BBQ Pop-Up	June 6 Richmond Green Park	Approximately 40+ individuals

Richmond Hill Community		
Engagement Activity	Date and Location	Number of Participants
Community Survey	June 12 - July 31 Online / in-person	531 responses¹
Pre-engagement interviews with community groups	June 5 - 16 Virtual	Approximately 250+ individuals
Virtual Open House	June 23 Virtual	
In-person Open House	June 27 Elgin Barrow Arena	
Richmond Hill Business Community Focus Group	July 24 Virtual	
Canada Day Celebration Community Pop-Up	July 1 Richmond Green Park	
Concert in the Park Community Pop-Up	July 13 Mill Pond Park	
Hillcrest Mall Community Pop-Up	July 16 Hillcrest Mall	
Richmond Green Public Library Community Pop-Up	July 19 Richmond Green Public Library	
Richvale Public Library Community Pop-Up	July 19 Richvale Public Library	
Ribfest Community Pop-Up	July 22 Richmond Green Park	
Richmond Hill Central Library Community Pop-Up	July 25 Richmond Hill Central Library	
Oak Ridges Public Library Community Pop-Up	July 25 Oak Ridges Public Library	
Richmond Hill Public Library Staff Workshop	July 28 Virtual	

¹ In addition to the 531 responses to the community survey, Richmond Hill received five (5) responses from different L'Arche Daybreak community groups (e.g., Leadership Team, Able Network, Daybreak Program).

Appendix 2 – Community Survey Results

Overview

StrategyCorp, in consultation with the City of Richmond Hill, conducted a community survey to gather feedback for the new Term of Council Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The survey included **seven (7) main questions** that asked City residents to share their views on what they value about Richmond Hill today and their priorities for the future. The survey also included **six (6) demographic questions** to support analysis and interpretation of the survey results.

Note that this was a self-selecting survey, in which respondents chose whether to participate in the survey and does not represent a randomized sampling of the Richmond Hill population.

Please note: For open-text box questions, responses have not been edited for spelling, grammar, style, or context. They appear as written in the survey.

Key Findings

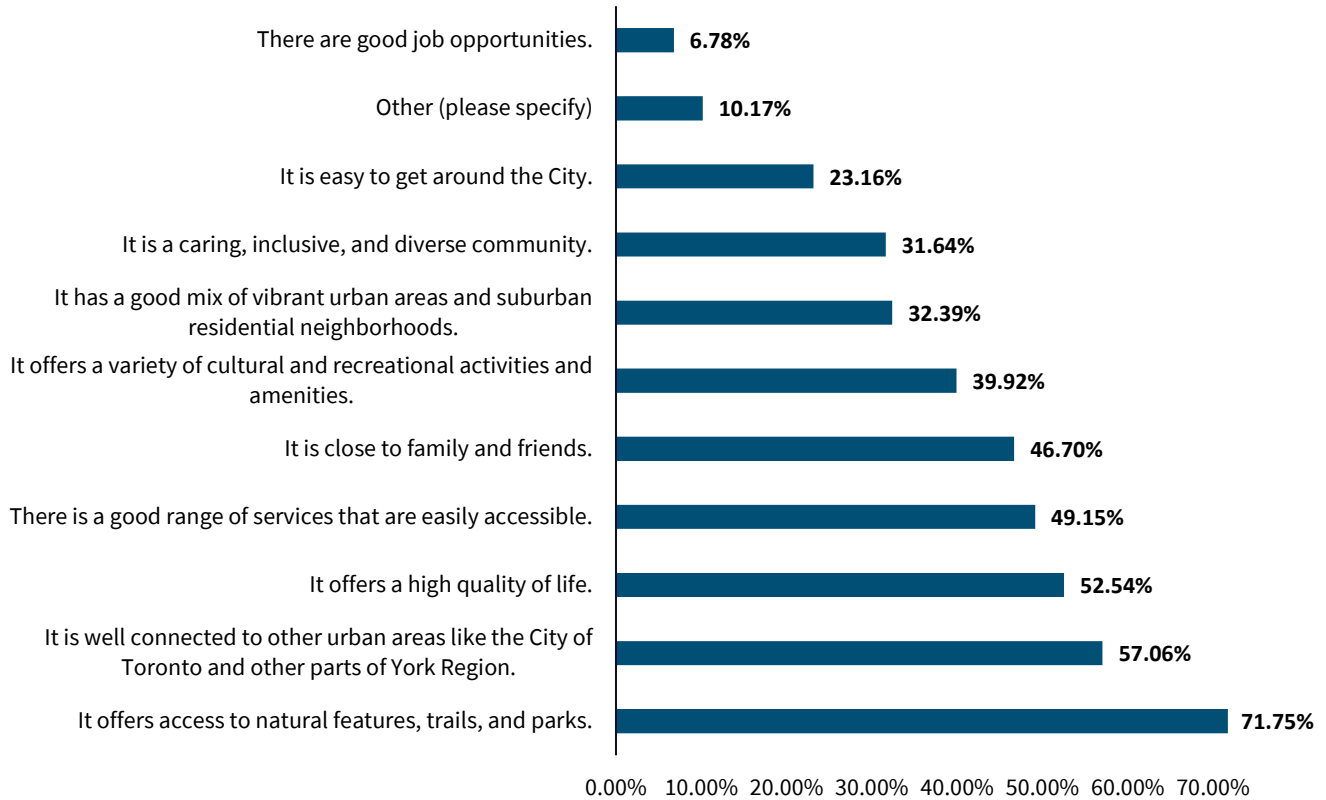
- The survey gathered **531 total responses** from across the City which is statistically valid with a 95% confidence level.
- **Survey demographics:** Note these results reflect only the responses of individuals that choose to disclose their answers to the demographic questions.
 - 90.38% of respondents were full-time residents, of which 81.55% have lived in Richmond Hill for 11+ years.
 - 31.87% of respondents were between the ages of 55-64 years old; 24.62% were between the ages of 65-74 years old; and 20.22% were between the ages of 40 to 54 years old.
 - 39.28% of respondents described their ethnicity to be other than White (e.g., German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc.).
- **Top three (3) attributes of Richmond Hill**, according to respondents: “It offers access to natural features, trails, and parks” (71.75%); “It is well connected to other urban areas like the City of Toronto and other parts of York Region” (57.06%); and “It offers a high quality of life” (52.54%).
- **Top three (3) priorities** identified as most important for the next term of Council: “Protect and respect the City’s natural environment and assets” (89%); “Ensure transparency and accountability from government” (88%); “Improve traffic congestion and safety” (84%) and “Proactively manage growth and density in Richmond Hill (84%).
- **65.7% of respondents are very satisfied/satisfied** with the quality and delivery of services provided by the City.
- **Key themes** identified by respondents when asked about a priority that stands out as being most important for the City (in no particular order):
 - Improve housing access and affordability for all residents;
 - Improve transportation and traffic congestion;
 - Ensure environmental protection and green spaces;
 - Promote inclusivity to meet the diverse needs of the community;
 - Advance safety and crime prevention;
 - Balance growth and density to create complete communities; and

- Demonstrate value for money in how the City delivers its services.

Detailed Results

Question 1: What do you like most about Richmond Hill? Select all that apply.

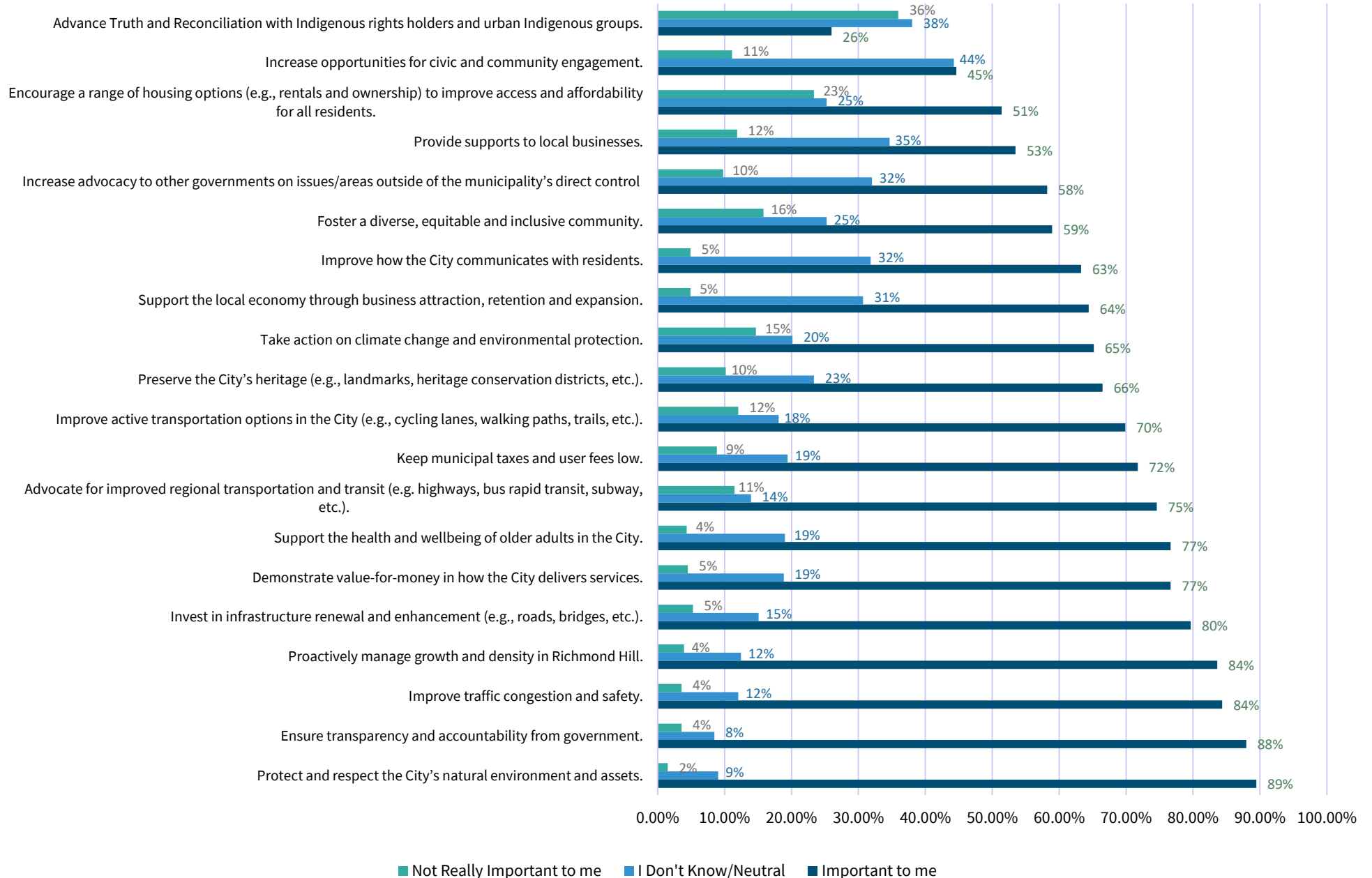
Total Answers = 531 Skipped = 0



An additional choice for this question was "Other" – a selection that gathered a total of 54 open-ended responses. These responses have been synthesized into the subsequent themes:

- **Natural features, trails, and parks** – Appreciation for green spaces and the need for their protection and nurturing.
- **Clean and well-maintained environment** – Less pollution, well-maintained roads, and a safe community with low crime rates.
- **Accessible facilities and programs** – Positive remarks on parks, recreation programs, and library systems.
- **Central location** – Convenience of being close to other urban areas and major cities.
- **Safety and family-friendly environment** – Considered a safe place for families with good schools and a great place to raise a family.

Question 2: From your perspective, where should the City focus its attention over the next 5 years (2023-2027)? *note that these values have been rounded to the nearest whole number*



Total Answers = 531 Skipped = 0

The **top five (5) most important priorities** for the respondents, ranked by percentage of responses:

1. Protect and respect the City's natural environment and assets = 89%
2. Ensure transparency and accountability from government = 88%
3. Improve traffic congestion and safety = 84%
4. Proactively manage growth and density in Richmond Hill = 83%
5. Invest in infrastructure renewal and enhancement (e.g., roads, bridges, etc.) = 80%

The **top three (3) least important priorities** for the respondents, ranked by percentage of responses:

1. Advance Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous rights holders and urban Indigenous groups = 36%
2. Encourage a range of housing options (e.g., rentals and ownership) to improve access and affordability for all residents = 23%
3. Foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community = 16%

Although the three above-mentioned priorities scored the lowest, they were still considered to be a priority as no substantial number of respondents strongly disagreed.

An additional choice for this question was "Other" – a selection that gathered a total of 64 open-ended responses. These responses have been synthesized into the subsequent themes:

- **Environmental conservation:** Many respondents strongly advocated for the protection of green spaces, trees, and the environment. This includes recommendations to plant more trees, maintain green spaces, protect the greenbelt, and cease development on wetlands.
- **Housing and development:** The issue of housing and development was raised in multiple responses. Some respondents highlighted the urgency of addressing homelessness, while others underscored the importance of balancing growth and green, emphasizing the significance of affordable housing.
- **Safety and crime reduction:** Many respondents highlighted the importance of safety and reducing crime in the City, including increasing the presence of the police, addressing car thefts, and improving response times.
- **Infrastructure and transportation:** Several respondents touched on infrastructure and transportation concerns. Major topics include improving public transit, adding more cycling lanes, addressing traffic issues, beautifying the City's downtown, and increasing access to recreational facilities.
- **Fiscal responsibility and government transparency:** Some respondents stressed about the need to prioritize core municipal services (e.g., enforcing local bylaws, maintaining roads and infrastructure, and providing water and sewer services, etc.). While low taxes are desirable, respondents recognize the need to strike a balance between fiscal responsibility and the delivery of mandated and discretionary City services that promote quality of life. Additionally, there is a strong emphasis amongst many respondents on fostering increased transparency and accountability within the local government moving forward.

Question 3: Is there one priority that stands out to you as being most important for the City to make progress on over the next few years? Please explain why this priority is important to you.

Total Answers = 531 Skipped = 0

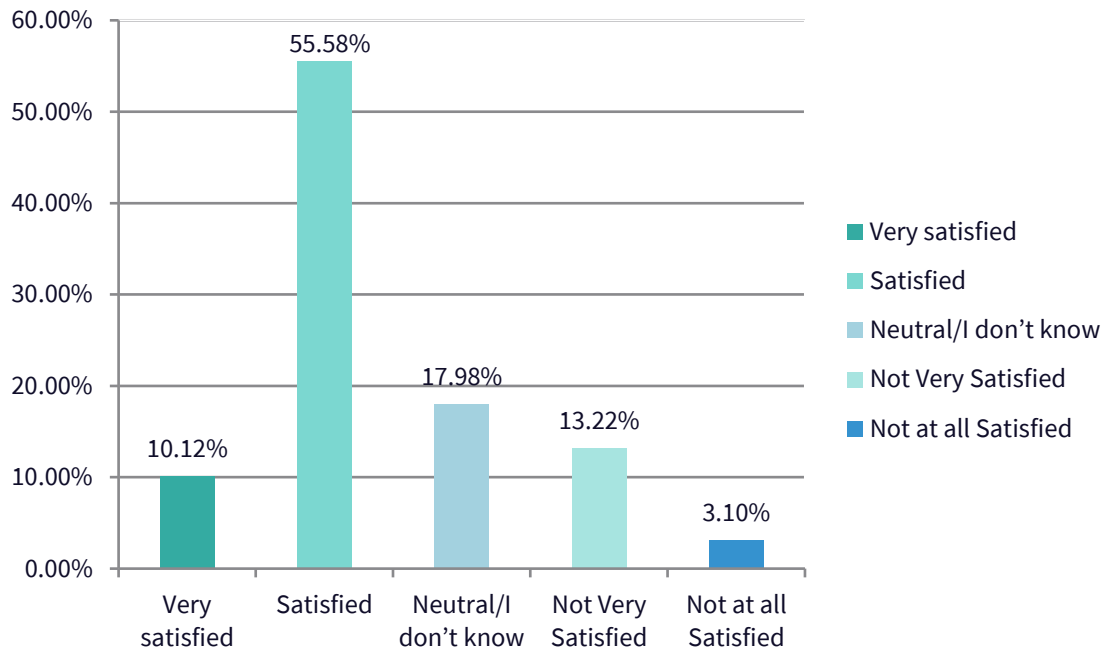
The following themes emerged from participants' responses:

- **Improve housing access and affordability for all residents:** Many respondents are concerned about housing affordability in Richmond Hill, particularly for young families, newcomers, and seniors. To address this issue, they suggested that the City should diversify its housing portfolio, including both rental and ownership alternatives, thereby fostering an accessible and affordable housing market.
 - “Housing affordability. I would like children to have a choice in becoming Richmond Hill residents if they choose.”
 - “Availability of homeownership. It worries us as parents how our kids will be able to afford their own housing with this crazy bubble house market.”
 - “Encourage a range of housing options (e.g., rentals and ownership) to improve access and affordability for all residents. Housing and a dignity is something that everyone should have access to.”
- **Improve transportation and traffic congestion:** Improving transportation and transit is a top priority for many respondents. They recommend that the City should explore solutions to implement such additional bike lanes, and improved regional and local transit to ease commuting pressures and enhance mobility.
 - “Improve traffic congestion and safety: a good example is the Oneida Cres with 2 schools in between the Langstaff Community Centre plus the ongoing building condominiums within the existing condominiums around High Tech and Bantry sharing Oneida Cres is a huge challenge residents faces daily. There should be a road to open and divert cars from other condos to exit/enter besides Oneida Cres.”
 - “Improve transportation and congestion on our roads. There is far too much speeding and dangerous driving happening which needs to be addressed. It endangers motorists as well as pedestrians.”
 - “Transportation. Would like to be able to travel downtown and across the city using the go train. Take pressure off the highways.”
- **Ensure environmental protection and green spaces:** Preserving the natural environment and creating more green spaces is top of mind for many respondents. Respondents recommended that the City should proactively address climate change, ensure the conservation of the Oak Ridges Moraine, and protect local green spaces that significantly contribute to the physical and mental well-being and overall health of the community.
 - “Green spaces, parks with walking trails and water features. I find this to be important for residents physical and mental well-being.”
 - “Environmental protection and climate change because the rest won't matter if we are not able to protect the earth for future generations.”
 - “More programs to promote Healthier active lifestyles and environmental protection.”

-
- **Promote inclusivity to meet the diverse needs of the community:** Many respondents expressed a desire for a united and collaborative community with a focus on diversity and inclusivity. They suggested that the City should invest in more recreational facilities, community centres, and local businesses to create a vibrant downtown core and neighborhood hubs where people can come together and have access to the services they need. Additionally, connectivity through improved transit options and accessible community services is highlighted to ensure the safety and well-being of residents, especially seniors and youth.
 - “Fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community. What is most important to me is ensuring this is inclusive of disabled people as well as ethnicity, culture, gender, etc.”
 - “Supporting local Indigenous communities in Richmond Hill.”
 - “Work on creating vibrant space and community. Walkable and improve downtown. Increase placemaking efforts.”
 - **Advance safety and crime prevention:** Ensuring the safety and security of residents is a priority, as many respondents expressed that the City should identify and implement new measures to reduce crime and protect vulnerable populations, such as seniors and un/underhoused populations.
 - “Decrease crime, make neighborhoods more safe”
 - “Safety of residents (no matter how many trails we have, when we get break-ins and thefts in our Richmond Hill homes. Just check “nextdoor” app entries from residents, or the open files at the police station.”
 - “Safety, crime, drugs, homelessness in the heritage area at Yonge & Major Mackenzie.”
 - **Balance growth and density to create complete communities:** Many residents stressed the need for controlled growth and density that considers the City's infrastructure capacity and community well-being. They want to ensure that Richmond Hill, even as it grows, retains a ‘sense of place.’
 - “Proactively manage growth and density” would be my top priority, even if it's the toughest for councillors to achieve! Our council must work to push back on the provincial bills that force unreasonable growth (both height and density) yet try to allow more residential growth with housing options, such as low-rise, more affordable and secondary suite housing.”
 - “Density and development. There are too many too large condos which don't take into account the local neighbourhoods and infrastructure to make sense. RH will be more dense than anywhere IN THE WORLD. I expect my local government to do better in ensuring density is managed properly and developers are kept in check.”
 - “Balance intensification with affordability while at the same time offering complete communities with enough natural features retained.”
 - **Demonstrate value for money in how the City delivers its services:** Residents continue to want the City to be fiscally responsible and ensure that tax dollars are spent wisely and transparently.
 - “Transparency and communication of government is most important because we've seen from previous local council and the Ford government how critical transparency and honesty is.”
 - “Political accountability”
 - “Keep municipal taxes and user fees low. Attract corporations and workers into RH. Be a good stalwart of tax revenues that invest in infrastructure, value-for-money services. Stop wastage.”

Question 4: Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality and delivery of services provided by the City?

Total Answers = 484 Skipped = 47



Question 5: Please explain your answer to Question 4.

Total Answers = 484 Skipped = 47

For those who answered very satisfied/satisfied (**318 responses**), the following themes emerged:

- **Overall satisfaction and positive feedback:** Many participants expressed contentment with the quality and delivery of services provided by the City, including specific services such as curbside waste collection, library services, parks, and recreational programs.
- **Opportunities for improvement and expansion:** Some respondents highlighted areas that need further enhancement, such as public transit, sidewalk maintenance, affordable housing options, and digitization of services. There was also a desire for more community programs and better communication of available services.
- **Urban planning and development concerns:** Some participants expressed concerns regarding the direction of development, particularly the approval and construction of high-rise buildings. Moreover, they conveyed a perceived decline in the quality of services, now that Richmond Hill has a “city feel”.
- **Community engagement and accessibility:** Several respondents appreciated the availability of services but felt that there was room for improvement in terms of accessibility, especially for seniors and those with physical limitations. They requested better communication and more resident-centric services.

For those who answered Neutral/Not Very Satisfied/Not At All Satisfied (**166 responses**), the following key themes emerged:

-
- **Infrastructure and transportation:** Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with traffic congestion, inadequate public transportation options, poor road maintenance, and insufficient pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.
 - **Communication and transparency:** Many respondents advocated for clearer and consistent communication from Council about the City's vision, plans, and decision-making processes. There is a perceived lack of transparency and engagement with the community.
 - **Affordability and housing:** Concerns about high property taxes, unaffordability of housing, and the overall cost of living in Richmond Hill contribute to respondents' dissatisfaction with City services.
 - **Environmental concerns:** Some respondents emphasized the need to further improve the City's commitment to environmental sustainability, including the preservation of green spaces, trees, and efforts to combat climate change.

Question 6: Looking ahead to the next 5 years, what kind of City do you want Richmond Hill to be?

Total Answers = 484 Skipped = 47

The following key themes emerged from participants' responses:

Community engagement and vibrancy:

- Strong desire for a vibrant and exciting downtown core.
- Call for more community-building opportunities, recreational activities, and events.
- Emphasis on promoting a sense of community, inclusivity, and diversity in the community.
- Interest in creating spaces for social interaction, such as coffee shops, parks, and cultural events.

Well-managed growth and green space:

- Concerns about overdevelopment and intensification at the expense of complete communities.
- Continued focus on maintaining green spaces, nature trails, and parks as well as implementing eco-friendly practices in City planning.
- Desire for controlled growth and balanced urbanization.

Affordable housing and accessibility:

- Need for more affordable housing options, especially for the next generation.
- Need for accessible public transportation and well-planned infrastructure.
- Emphasis on providing housing options for families, seniors, and those with disabilities.

Safety and quality of life:

- Strong desire for safety, reduced crime, and a clean environment.
- Focus on maintaining a low-density community.
- Prioritization of health services, recreational activities, and amenities for seniors.

Question 7: Is there any additional feedback you would like to share as the City looks to develop its Strategic Plan?

Total Answers = 282 Skipped = 249

Answers are similar to the previous question and have been categorized in similar themes:

- **Traffic and congestion management:** There is a significant concern about traffic congestion, especially along major roads like Yonge Street and Highway 7. Respondents suggested improving traffic flow, addressing road closures during construction, and implementing traffic calming measures.
- **Balanced development and density:** Many respondents emphasized the need for responsible and balanced development. Concerns were raised about high-density housing, overdevelopment, and preserving the City's character while managing growth.
- **Affordable and attainable housing:** Affordable and attainable housing is a consistent concern. Respondents recommended providing incentives for developers to create affordable housing options for those in need, such as secondary suites or rental tenure, and to ensure that housing remains attainable to a diverse range of residents.
- **Community engagement and transparency:** The importance of engaging residents in decision-making processes was highlighted. Respondents want their input to be taken into consideration, and they suggested using various communication channels (e.g., website, social media, pamphlets, newsletters, etc.) to keep residents informed about City plans and developments.
- **Improved infrastructure and facilities:** Respondents called for improved infrastructure, including road maintenance, snow removal, and access to public services. Respondents also suggest enhancing community facilities, such as libraries, community centre, and outdoor recreation spaces like pickleball courts.

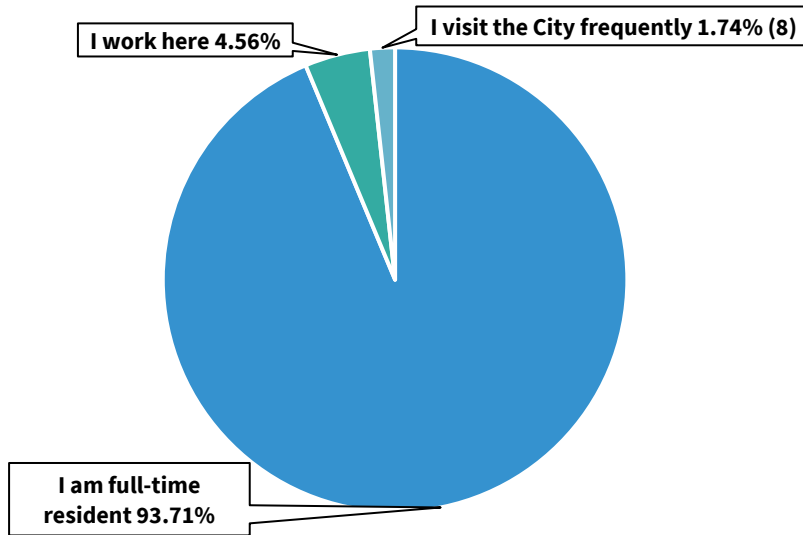
Demographic Information

The following questions were asked to ensure the community engagement process included a diversity of experiences and perspectives. Answers were for statistical purposes only.

Question 8: Richmond Hill is home to both full-time and part-time residents, workers, and business owners. Please select the option(s) below that best describes you:

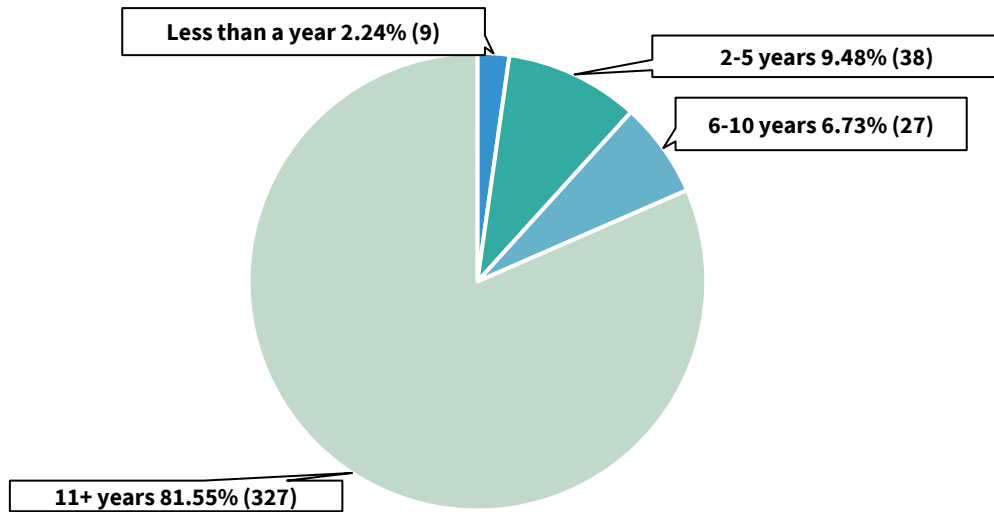
Total Answers = 466

Only 5 respondents answered that they own a business – As such, it was omitted from the graph below.



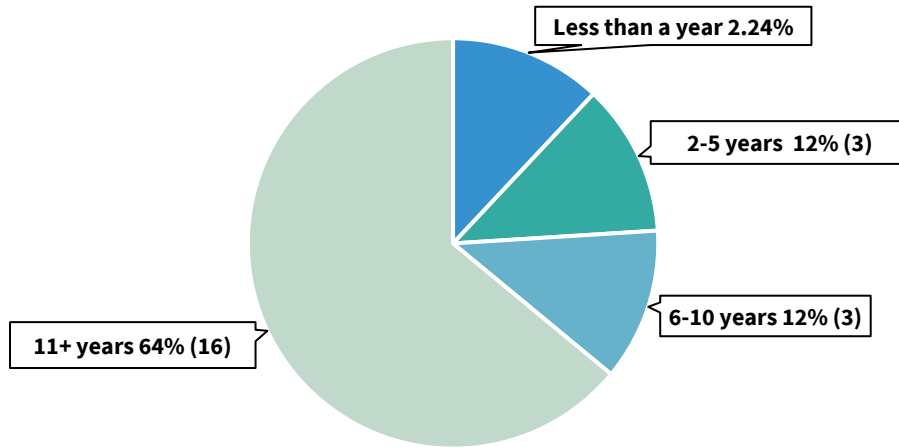
Question 9: if you live in Richmond Hill, how long have you lived here?

Total Answers = 401



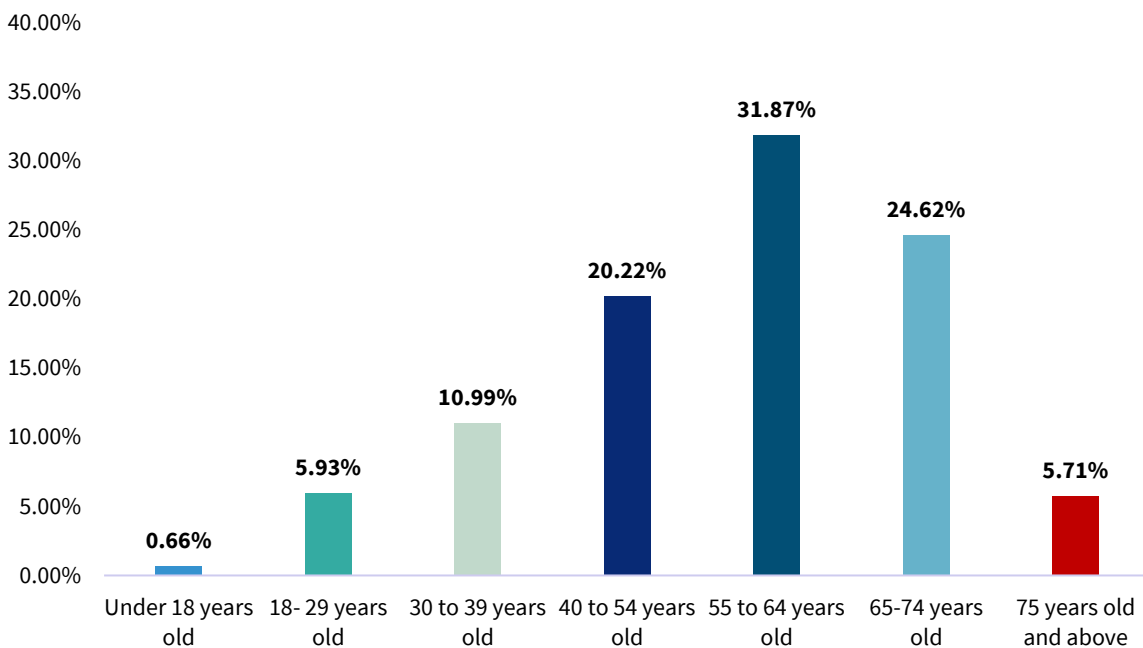
Question 10: If you work or own a business in Richmond Hill, how long have you worked here or owned your business?

Total Answers = 25



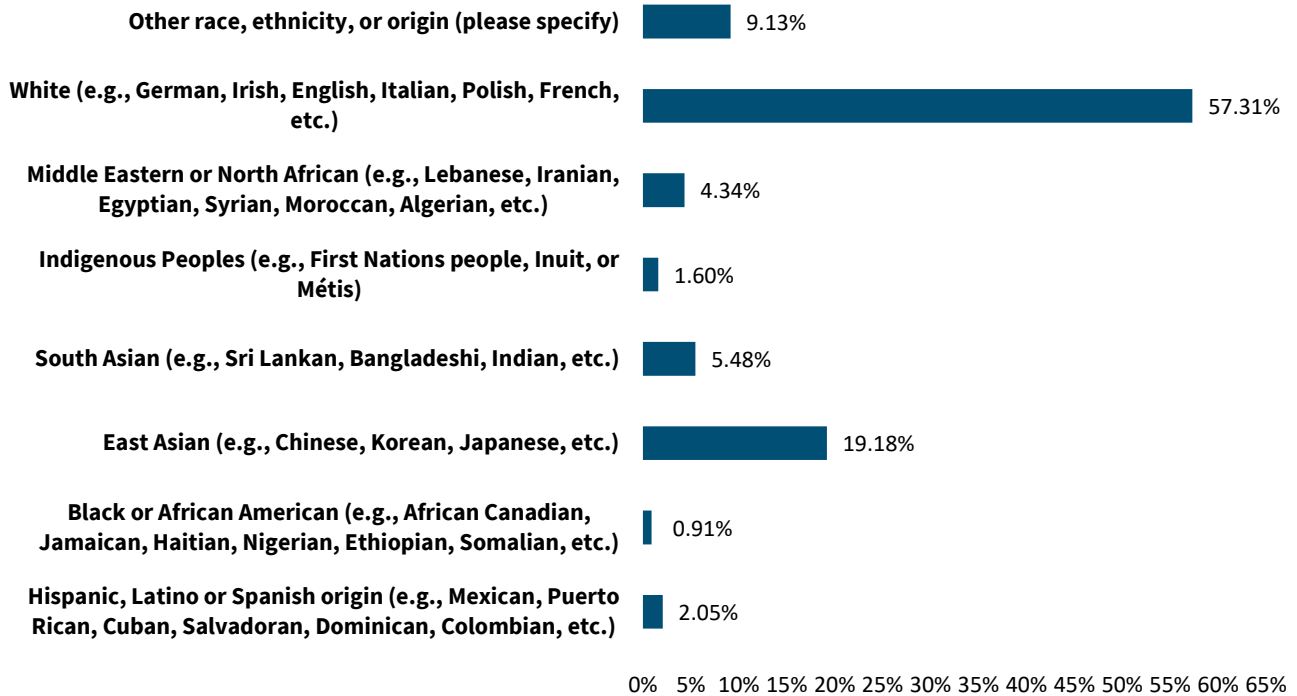
Question 11: What is your age group?

Total Answers = 455



Question 12: How would you best describe your ethnicity? (if mixed origin, select all that apply)

Total Answers = 476

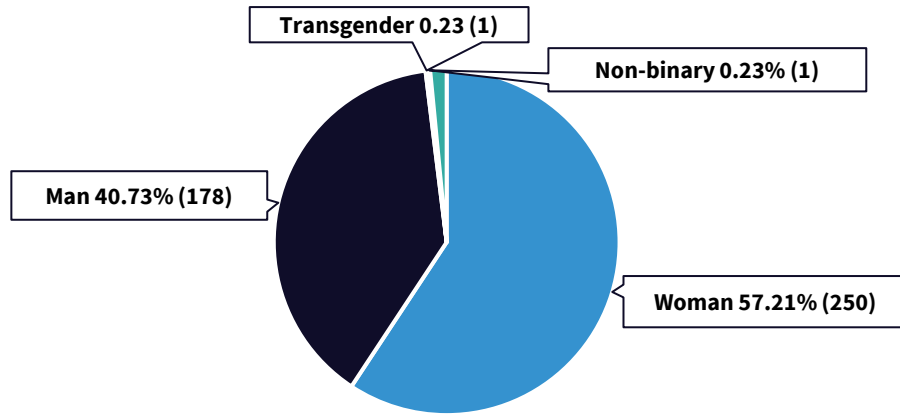


“Other” included the following:

- “Greek”
- “Southeast Asian (Filipino)”
- “Armenian”
- “Jewish”
- “Turkish/Armenian”
- “Estonian”
- “Jamaican Chinese”
- “Brazilian”
- “Portuguese from Africa”
- “Latvian Canadian”
- “Acadian/French Canadian”
- “Pakistani”
- “Canadian”
- “Greek”
- “Netherlands”
- “Ukraine”

Question 13: How would you describe your gender identity?

Total Answers = 430



Appendix 3 – Staff Survey Results

Overview

StrategyCorp, in consultation with the City of Richmond Hill, conducted a staff survey to gather employee feedback for the new Term of Council Strategic Plan 2023-2027. The survey included **ten (10) questions** that asked City staff to share their views on working at the City as well as the priorities that should be considered as part of the creation of the Strategic Plan. The survey also included **six (6) demographic questions** to support analysis and interpretation of the survey results.

Note that this was a self-selecting survey, in which respondents chose whether to participate in the survey and does not represent a randomized sampling of the City's employees.

Please note: For open-text box questions, responses have not been edited for spelling, grammar, style, or context. They appear as written in the survey. Additionally, hard copies were printed and distributed within City facilities; subsequently, these copies were manually entered and factored into the following results.

Key Findings

- The survey gathered **326 total responses** from across the organization. Note that the following results reflect only the responses of individuals that choose to disclose their answers to the demographic questions.
 - 46.64% of respondents have been working with the City **for 0-5 years**.
 - Majority of respondents work within the **Community Services Department** (44.5%), followed by the Planning and Infrastructure Department (19.8%).
 - 76.16% of respondents **live outside of Richmond Hill** while 26.8% live in the City.
 - More than half (57.75%) of the respondents are **over the age of 40**.
- **Vision and Mission:** 41.88% of respondents resonated with the current Vision, and 65.58% resonated with the current Mission.
- **Most important organizational values:** Accountability (54.9%); Transparency (47.9%); Continuous Improvement (46.3), Effective Internal Communications (34.1); and. Service Excellence (31.6%).
- **Top priorities:** Based on a pre-populated list of priorities, participants identified delivering high-quality services to residents (96%), ensuring good governance through transparency, accountability, and collaboration (93%), and supporting employee retention and growth (91%) as the most important/important priority areas for the City.
- **When asked what participants like most about working at the City,** the following themes emerged: positive working environment, job security and benefits, community impact, flexibility and work-life balance, and learning opportunities.
- **When asked what about their job keeps them up at night,** the following themes were identified: workload and stress, financial concerns, and affordability, worries about job security and professional growth, difficulties maintaining work-life balance, and lack of strategic direction.

Detailed Results

Question 1: What do you like most about working at the City?

Total Answers = 326 Skipped = 0

The following key themes emerged from participants' responses:

Positive working environment:

- The people themselves – strong organizational culture.
- Enjoyment of a friendly, supportive, and collaborative atmosphere.
- Building strong relationships and feeling like a part of a team or family.

Job security and benefits:

- Appreciation for job security, stability, and consistent hours.
- Recognition of benefits such as pension plans and competitive pay.

Community impact:

- Fulfillment from contributing to the community and improving residents' lives.
- Satisfaction with providing public services and making a positive difference.

Flexibility and work-life balance:

- Favorable work-life balance, including options for remote work or flexible schedules.
- Appreciation for the ability to work from and/or close to home.

Learning opportunities:

- Engagement with diverse projects, tasks, and learning experiences.
- Enjoyment of hands-on work and the chance to use a variety of equipment or skills.

Question 2: What about your job keeps you up at night?

Total Answers = 326 Skipped = 0

The following key themes emerged from participants' responses:

Workload and stress:

- Overwhelming workload and pressure to meet deadlines.
- Stress from dealing with difficult situations, projects, or demands.
- Balancing multiple priorities and striving to meet high expectations.

Financial concerns and affordability:

- Lack of alignment between wages and current costs of living.
- Feeling underpaid for the work being done, especially in relation to rising living costs.

Job security and professional growth:

- Worries about job security, layoffs, and advancement opportunities.
- Concerns about not being recognized, promoted, or given opportunities for growth.

Difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance:

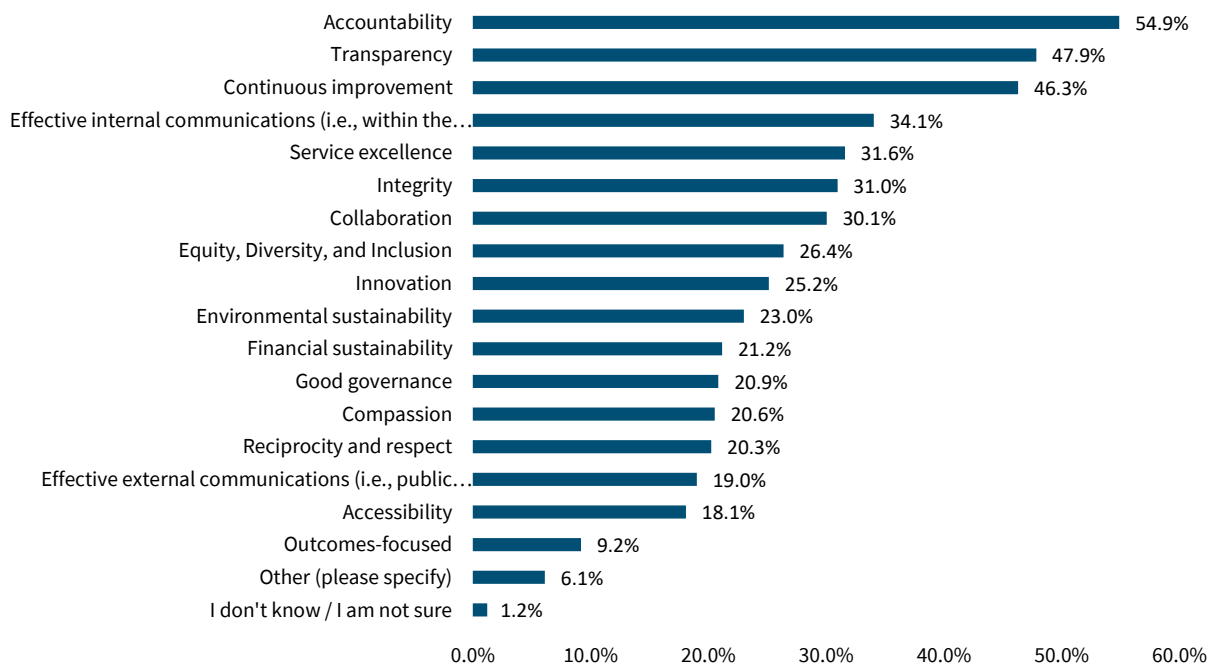
- Struggles to maintain work-life balance, especially when dealing with on-call duties or irregular work hours.
- Anticipating calls during standby periods and potential impacts on personal time.

Lack of strategic direction:

- Frustration with management decisions, lack of support, and unclear priorities.
- Feeling undervalued by the leadership and lack of transparency.
- Lack of succession planning within departments.

Question 3: Below is a list of organizational values often associated with municipalities. Please choose your top 5 values that you think that should be instilled in the delivery of our services.

Total Answers = 326 Skipped = 0



An additional choice for this question was "Other" – a selection that gathered a total of 20 open-ended responses. These responses have been synthesized into the subsequent themes:

Innovation and improvement:

- Proactive problem-solving and process improvement.
- Openness to innovation and change.
- Future planning and issues management.

Collaborative excellence:

- Goal-oriented teamwork and collaboration.
- Consistency in achieving desired outcomes.
- Fairness, equal treatment, and respect among co-workers.
- Evidence-based decisions to enhance collaboration.

Question 4: Below is a list of potential priorities for the City. For each, please answer whether it is most important, important, neutral/I don't know, somewhat important, or not important.

Total Answers = 326 Skipped = 0

The **top five (5) most important priorities** according to respondents, ranked by percentage of responses:

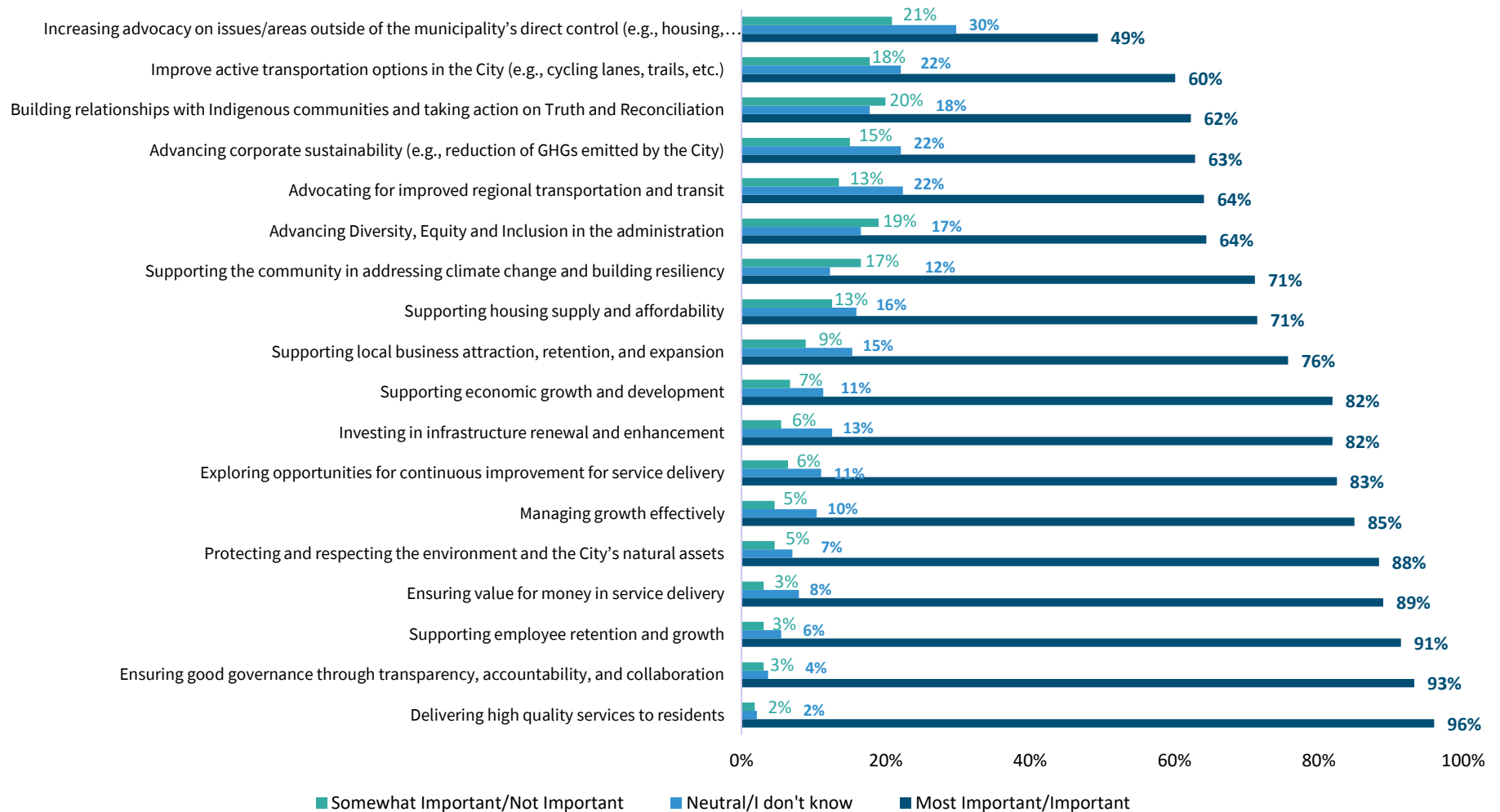
1. Delivering high-quality services to residents = 96%
2. Ensuring good governance through transparency, accountability, and collaboration = 93%
3. Supporting employee retention and growth = 91%
4. Ensuring value for money in service delivery = 89%
5. Protecting and respecting the environment and the City's natural assets = 88%

The **top three (3) least important priorities** according to respondents, ranked by percentage of responses:

1. Increasing advocacy on issues/areas outside of the municipality's direct control (e.g., housing, healthcare, etc.) = 21%
2. Building relationships with Indigenous communities and taking action on Truth and Reconciliation = 20%
3. Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the administration = 19%

Although the three above-mentioned priorities scored the lowest, they were still considered to be a priority as no substantial number of respondents strongly disagreed.

Question 4: Below is a list of potential priorities for the City. For each, please answer whether it is most important, important, neutral/I don't know, somewhat important, not important. Note that these values have been rounded to the nearest whole num



Question 5: Is there one priority that stands out to you as being most important for the City to advance as it looks to the years ahead? Please explain why this priority is important to you.

Total Answers = 326 Skipped = 0

The following top five (5) themes emerged from participants' responses:

- **Workforce and employee well-being:** Many respondents have expressed that supporting employee retention, growth, and well-being is top of mind. They emphasized that the City should consider exploring more competitive salaries and opportunities for professional growth along with continuing to foster a positive working environment.
 - “supporting employee retention and growth.”
 - “pretty surprising that you don't have: 1. improving Culture, 2. Fostering Innovation (continuous improvement is different).”
 - “Continuously educating and providing training to the staffs: For more opportunities in the future and a safer working environment.”
- **Delivering High-Quality Services to Residents:** Providing excellent services to the community is a recurring theme. Many respondents stressed the importance of maintaining service standards that benefit the residents.
 - “Focus on delivering top notch service to its residence.”
 - “Delivering high quality services to residents since this has a large direct impact on residents, and it is fully within our control.”
 - “Delivering High Quality Service, since that would be something that every taxpayer expects from the City.”
- **Environmental sustainability:** Many participants highlighted that protecting the environment, addressing climate change, and preserving natural assets are important priorities to build a sustainable and resilient city.
 - “Supporting the community in addressing climate change and building resiliency.”
 - “Sustainability in general, both environmental, economic and the decisions we make - considering all costs and benefits not just bottom line and impact to future generations.”
 - “Protecting and respecting the environment and the City's natural assets. With the developmental pressure seen across major cities, the green cover goes down significantly. Essentially ensure the new development is not at the cost of losing green covers.”
- **Cost of living and housing affordability:** Many respondents are concerned about residents' ability to access suitable and attainability housing and, in a few cases, even their own ability to live in Richmond Hill due to the rising cost of living.
 - “Supporting housing and affordability. People can no longer afford homes and it is a big issue as the cost of living continues to rise, I feel that I will not be able to continue living here.”
 - “Housing Supply and Affordability”
 - “Transportation and accessibility. These directly impact everything going on in a community including housing, jobs, comfort.”

-
- **Transparency, Accountability, and Good Governance:** Many respondents expressed that the City should focus on continuing to foster a transparent and accountable governance structure while also involving the community in decision-making and maintaining ethical practices. For them, this is fundamental for successful city management.
 - “Ensuring good governance through transparency, accountability, and collaboration - because it's a good foundation for the other priorities. City leadership needs to lead and be accountable, by supporting staff to achieve the strategic priorities.”
 - “Ensuring good governance through accountability, transparency, and collaboration. This is important to me as it's the foundation for other initiatives such as sustainability, transportation, housing etc.”
 - “Ensuring good governance through transparency, accountability, and collaboration because the absence of these characteristics leads to corruption and waste.”

Other themes that emerged include:

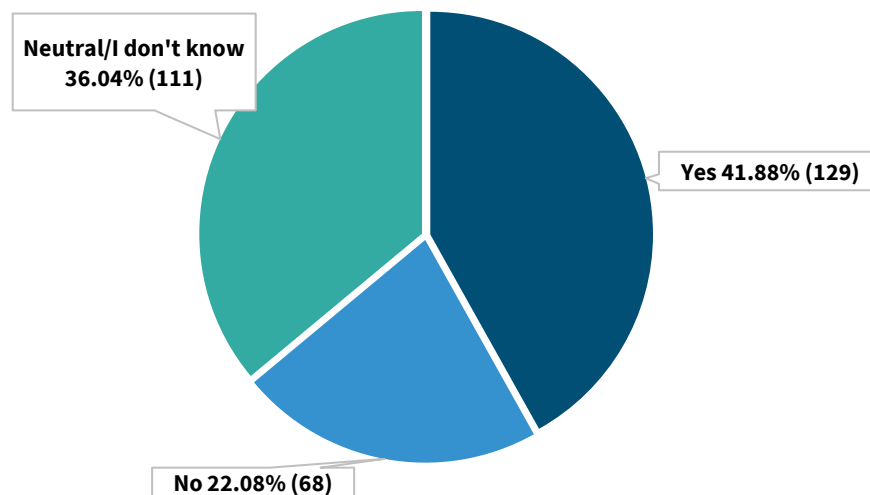
- **Managing growth effectively:** For some respondents, managing the City's growth in a strategic and sustainable manner is critical. For them, this involves infrastructure development, planning, and building organizational capacity to be able to meet the service delivery demands of growth.
 - “Managing growth effectively. The City should ensure that growth is adequately supported infrastructure, and that traffic and other concerns are mitigated.”
 - “Managing growth by ensuring we have sufficient staff and resources to meet the growing service levels.”
 - “By signing the government of Ontario's housing target pledge, the City will need to ensure that new growth is conducted smartly to create a community that is attractive and vibrant. Haphazard or rushed approvals will lead to unbalanced and communities.”
- **Infrastructure investment and maintenance:** Some respondents have also expressed that the City should invest in and maintain infrastructure to support future growth and to ensure essential services are available to all residents.
 - “.. Including City's future infrastructure from secure-safe roads, lights, water, public transit (metro trains/mono-rail) etc. to ensure with more housing being build.”
 - “Investing in Infrastructure”
 - “Investing in infrastructure renewal and enhancement.”
- **Innovation and continuous improvement:** Participants also highlighted that incorporating innovative practices and continuously improving the City's internal processes and procedures are critical for effective and efficient service delivery.
 - “Also, IT systems/Infra expansion, which is cybersecure, robust and able to handle City's expansion to manage more automated/ AI enabled technologies.”
 - “Innovation. We need to adapt to new and different ways of providing services.”
 - “Innovation in our delivery of services to residents.”
- **Community well-being and quality of life:** Several staff stressed the need to create a vibrant community with quality amenities, green spaces, and services that contribute to residents' overall health and well-being.

- “This is a combination of the above priorities, but generally supporting a strong quality of life and community for residents of all ages and housing needs within the City. Building a vibrant mainstreet would also be important.”
- “It's hard to narrow it down to just one. They're all important in their own ways. If I absolutely have to pick one, it would be ensuring that key development areas and RH Centre are planned and developed in a way that benefits to community.”
- “Care for community and staff.”
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** Some respondents mentioned the importance of DEI initiatives – both internal to the administration and external to the community – to ensure that the City is inclusive, representative, and fair for all residents.
 - “Pay equity to retain quality workforce who can deliver quality service to residents and City”
 - “supporting the development of equitable communities for all financial backgrounds, incl. sustaining local business and affordable housing.”
 - “Inclusion very important to me.”

Question 6: Does this vision statement still resonate?

“Richmond Hill, where people come together to build our community.”

Total Answers = 308 Skipped = 18



Question 7: Please explain your response to #6.

Total Answers = 215 Skipped = 111

Below is a synthesise of the reasons provided by respondents as to why the vision does or does not resonate with them.

Participants who answered “resonates”:

-
- **Community focus:** Many respondents appreciated the emphasis on people – in and outside the City administration – coming together to build and maintain a strong community.
 - **Reflective of reality:** Some respondents find the vision statement relevant and accurate to Richmond Hill’s current state and growth.
 - **Teamwork and collaboration:** Several respondents valued the idea of working together and the role of collaboration in achieving Richmond Hill’s vision.
 - **Inclusivity:** The statement’s recognition of diversity and the inclusion of various communities within Richmond Hill resonated with some participants.
 - **Positive atmosphere:** The sense of a supportive and positive environment for growth and development in the City appeals to some respondents.

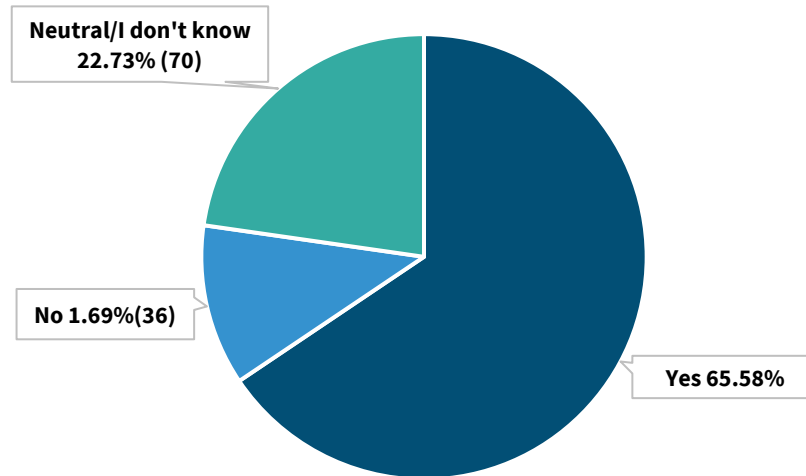
Participants who answered “does not resonate”:

- **Vagueness:** Many respondents find the vision statement vague, lacking clarity about the specific goals or outcomes of community building. Some indicated that the vision needs to be more specific, including elements like what type of community is being built and how it will look in the future.
- **Evolution and change:** Some respondents feel that Richmond Hill has evolved beyond just building a community and requires a vision that reflects its current urban and dynamic nature.
- **Lack of unity:** Some respondents expressed concerns about divisions and tensions within the community and a perception that people are not truly working together to build a cohesive community.
- **Not reflective of reality:** Some respondents believe that the vision statement does not accurately represent the current state of Richmond Hill, citing factors such as a lack of community engagement or collaboration.

Question 8: Does this mission statement still resonate?

“The City of Richmond Hill Council and staff are committed to providing exceptional public service to our community.”

Total Answers = 308 Skipped = 18



Question 9: Please explain your response to #8.

Total Answers = 198 Skipped = 128

Below is a synthesize of the reasons provided by respondents as to why the mission does or does not resonate with them.

Participants who answered “resonates”:

- **Alignment with purpose:** Many respondents think that the mission statement reflects the core purpose of the City and its commitment to serving residents and businesses.
- **Commitment to providing exceptional public service:** Many staff believe that providing exceptional programs and services is a fundamental goal for the City and its administrative team.
- **Staff dedication:** Some respondents noted appreciation for the dedication and efforts of staff to serve the community and provide high-quality services.
- **Positive impact on community:** Many respondents felt that exceptional public service has a positive impact on the community's satisfaction and well-being.
- **Ongoing efforts:** Several respondents mentioned that they see continuous efforts from both staff and Council to achieve this mission.

Participants who answered “does not resonate”:

- **Lack of resources:** Some respondents felt that the City lacks the necessary resources and capacity to truly provide exceptional public service, leading to stretched efforts.
- **“Exceptional” is too broad:** Several staff observed that the term "exceptional" is too vague and should be better defined or replaced with a more achievable goal.
- **New Council’s direction is uncertain:** Respondents mentioned that they are unsure what direction the new Council is heading and are uncertain about the alignment of Council’s actions with the City’s vision and mission.

-
- **Impact of growth and demands on service delivery:** Several respondents believe that the challenges brought by growth and changes in the community have made it difficult to consistently provide exceptional service.

Question 10: Is there any other feedback you would like to share about the Strategic Plan?

Total Answers = 131 Skipped = 195

The responses to this question have been synthesized into the following themes:

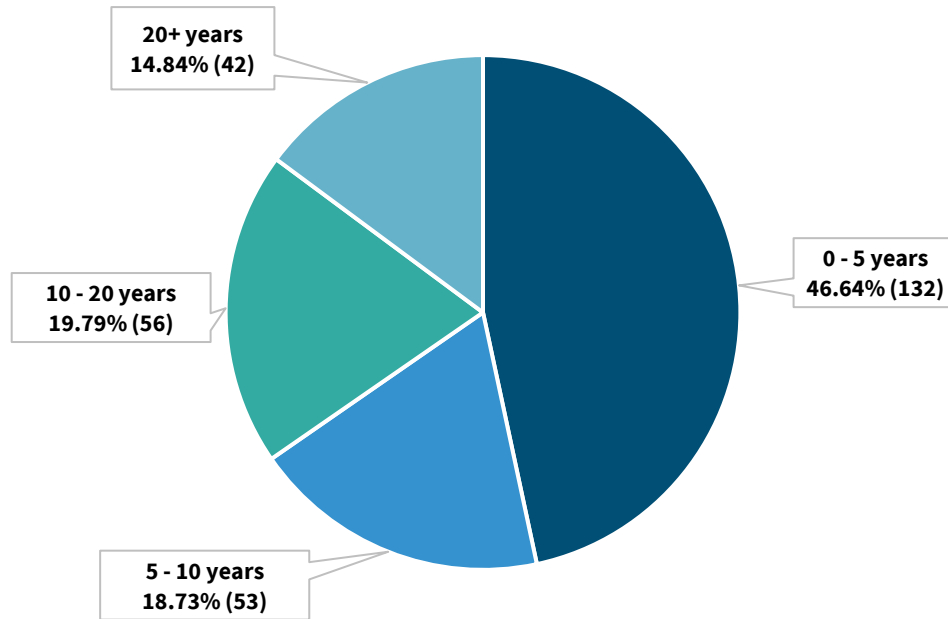
- **Council should delegate more to staff:** Many respondents expressed a desire for Council to trust departments to handle matters they understand and only intervene when needed, allowing staff to be more autonomous.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Some respondents called for honest and transparent leadership and effective utilization of staff's time towards delivering on Council's strategic direction.
- **Public transit accessible to all:** The importance of providing accessible public transit to meet the diversity of needs in the community is a major priority for many respondents.
- **Simplicity and focus:** Many respondents stressed the importance of keeping the strategic plan straightforward and tracking progress against established goals which are key to the success of the City.
- **Resource constraints:** Many staff highlighted the need for more resources or a realistic assessment of what can be achieved in view of current organizational capacity and available financial resources.
- **Staff well-being and engagement:** A number of staff emphasized the importance of employee satisfaction and well-being, along with the need for better communication between senior management and staff.
- **Community engagement:** Some respondents emphasized the value of community engagement and participation in effective decision-making and the need for increased civic engagement.
- **Environment and Equity:** The need for the City to focus more on environmental sustainability, preserving biodiversity, and promoting equity within the administration was mentioned by a few.

Demographic Information

The following questions were asked to ensure the staff engagement process included a diversity of experiences and perspectives. Answers were used for statistical purposes only.

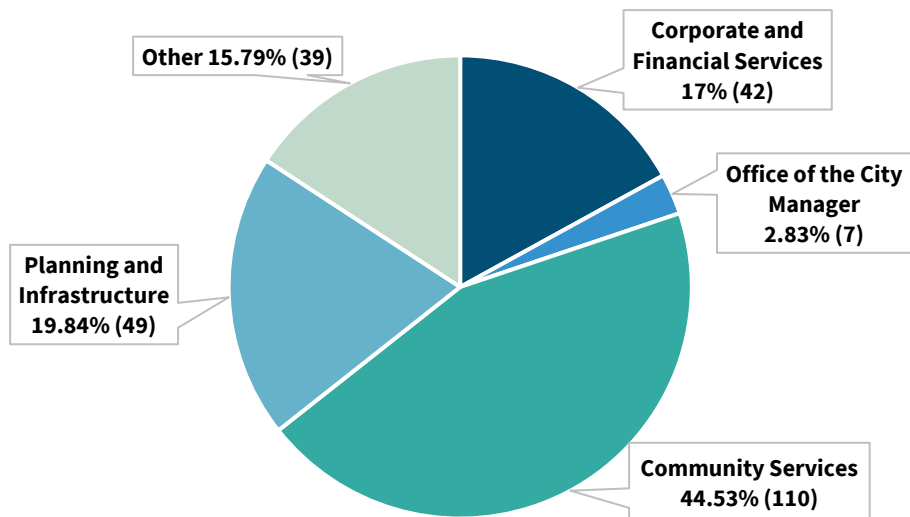
Question 11: How long have you worked with the City?

Total Answers = 283 Skipped = 43



Question 12: Which department do you work for in the City?

Total Answers = 247 Skipped = 79

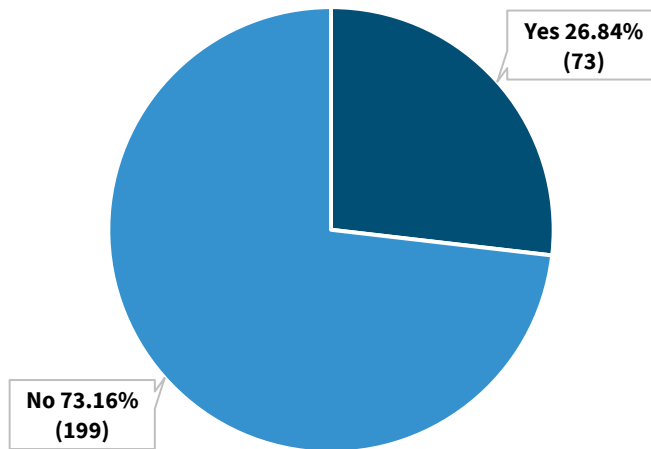


“Other” includes the following responses:

- Parks and recreational services
- Council members
- Horticulture
- Public Works and Operations

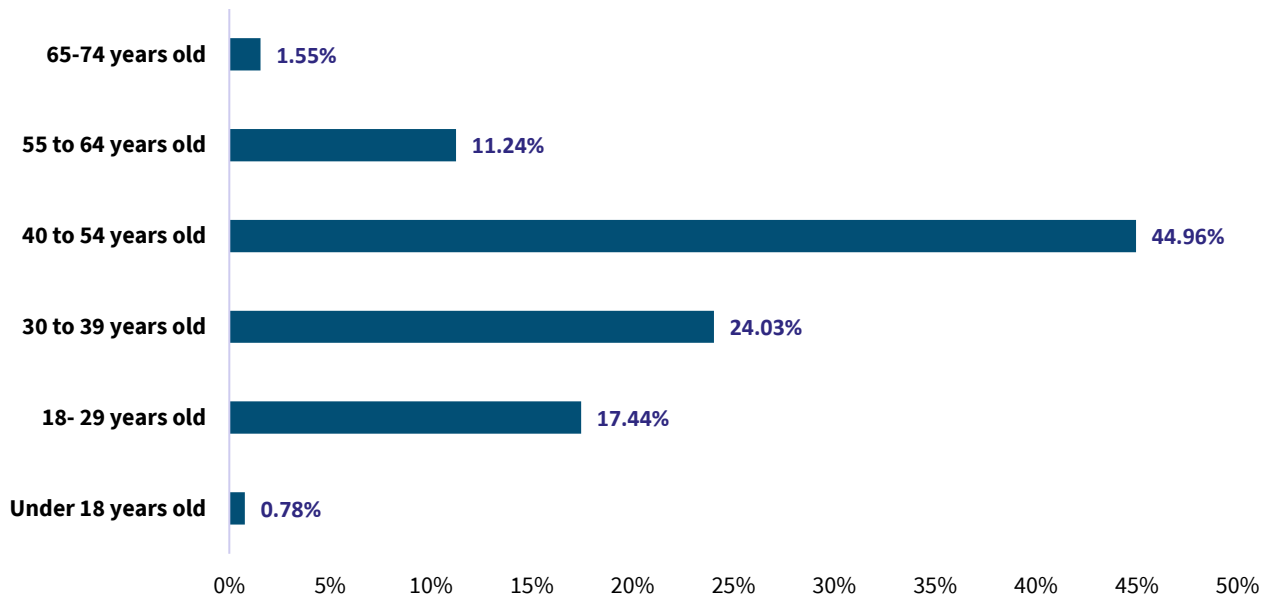
Question 13: Do you live in Richmond Hill?

Total Answers = 272 Skipped = 54



Question 14: What is your age group?

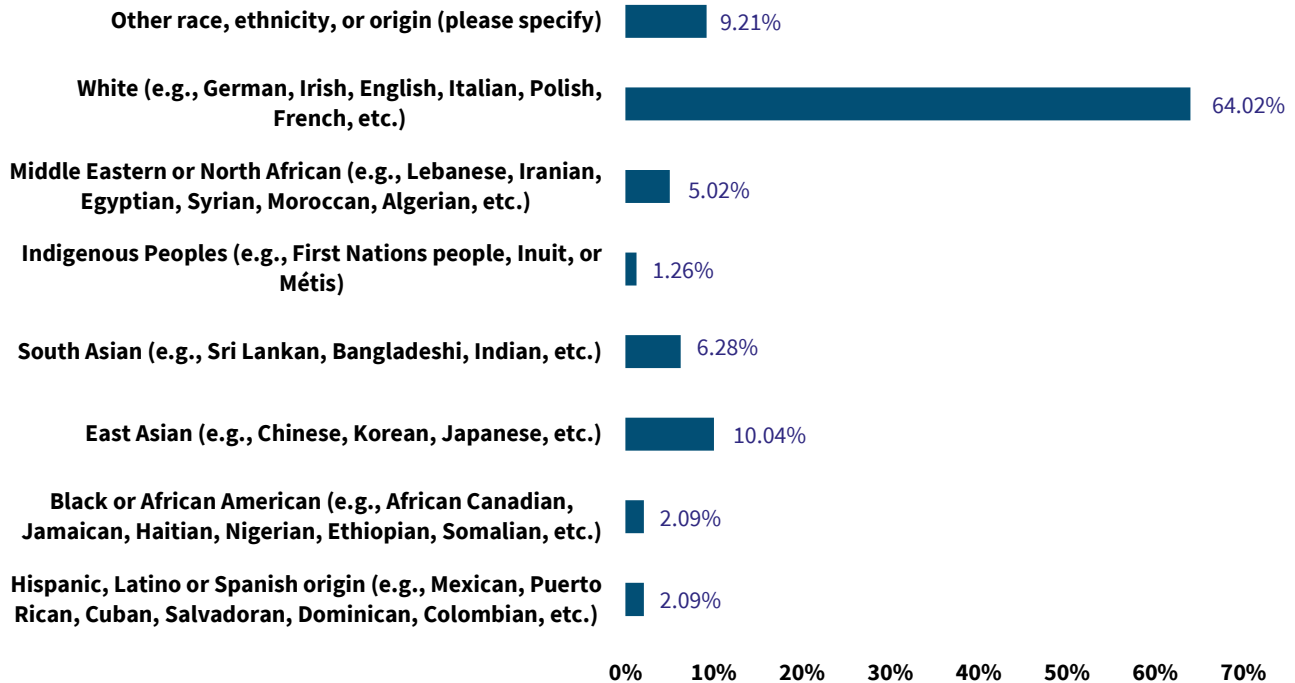
Total Answers = 258 Skipped = 68



Note: No respondents selected 75 years old and above, hence it is not included in the graph above.

Question 15: How would you best describe your ethnicity? (If mixed origin, select all that apply)

Total Answers = 239 Skipped = 87

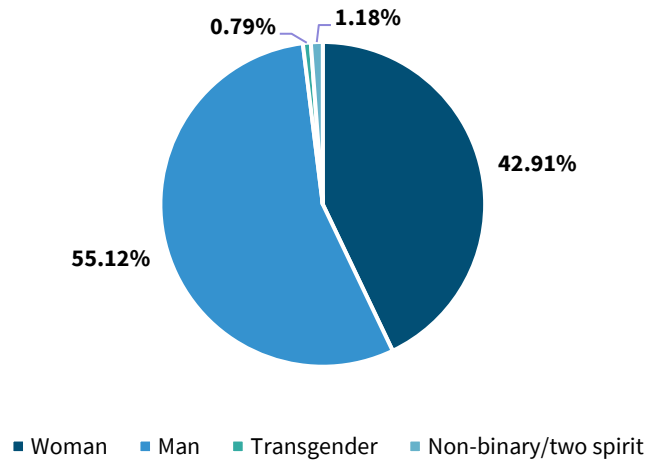


“Other” includes the following responses:

- “white and Metis”
- “east European”
- “Mixed Race (Asian/White)”
- “Visible Minority”
- “Canadian”
- “Filipino”
- “Japanese/Persian”
- “Latino and White”
- “Caucasian Jewish”
- “European and West African”
- “Mixed - Guyanese - Chinese – Romanian”
- “Pacific Islander, Caribbean, and East Asian”
- “White African”
- “Afro-latino”
- “Jewish”
- “North American (Canadian), Southern European (Greek/Macedonian), Northwest European (English, Irish, Welsh)”

Question 16: How would you describe your gender identity?

Total Answers = 254 Skipped = 72





Background Research, Community Engagement and Key Findings to Inform Richmond Hill's Strategic Plan

Benchmarking and Best Practices Review

May 17, 2023

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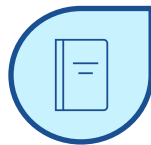


Purpose of this Report

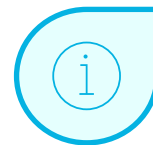
As the City of Richmond Hill embarks on a new Strategic Plan for the new Council term, this document provides a high level overview of the City's emerging themes as well as assesses community engagement efforts and strategic planning processes in select comparator municipalities. The purpose of this report is to:



Identify key tactics, strategies and methodologies that could be applied to Richmond Hill's engagement process.



Provide a deeper context into the key trends and issues that the City of Richmond Hill will need to consider as it develops its new strategic plan.



Inform the development of the draft comprehensive communication and engagement strategy.

We have taken a nuanced approach to benchmarking given Richmond Hill's growth and demographic attributes – benchmarking is not a 'perfect science' and what works in one municipality may not work in another.

Richmond Hill Today: Community Profile and Preliminary Key Themes

Introduction and Limitations of the Analysis



The following section outlines several key emerging themes that the City should take into consideration as it develops its new strategic plan. These themes will also inform the stakeholder engagement process, ensuring that it is focused on and reflective of the current state of Richmond Hill.

The analysis in the following slides is based on publicly available information and reports, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Demographic data (e.g., census)
- ✓ 2020-22 Council's Strategic Priorities
- ✓ Richmond Hill's Capital and Operating Budgets
- ✓ Parks Plan
- ✓ Recreation and Culture Plan
- ✓ Asset Management Plan
- ✓ Official Plan

However, it should be noted that these findings are based on limited information, as no consultations or engagement activities have been undertaken to date. As a result, these findings may not capture the full range of factors that may impact the City of Richmond Hill as it updates its Strategic Plan.

The City of Richmond Hill – Demographic Overview

The City of Richmond Hill is a growing community that offers an abundance of outdoor recreational activities, a vibrant arts and culture scene, and is a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. Richmond Hill's commitment to supporting economic growth and development has made it a desirable location for both large corporations and small businesses.

Steady Growth

- The population of Richmond Hill **increased by 3.6%**, or 7,000 people, between 2016 and 2021, which is slightly higher than the City of Markham (2.9%).
- While the City has experienced growth, this rate is lower than the overall population increase of 5.5% observed in the City of Vaughan and 5.8% observed in the Region of York during the same period.
- However, the City's population is forecasted **to increase** from 202,022 to reach **317,000 by 2051**.

Diverse Community

- The City is a **culturally diverse community** with more than half (58%) of the population born outside of Canada, and over 66% identifying as a visible minority.
- At least **126 different languages** have been identified as a mother tongue language for Richmond Hill residents demonstrating the diversity of the community.
- As Ontario's population continues to become more diverse, the City of Richmond Hill is well positioned to **attract and welcome newcomers**.

Strong Workforce and Local Economy

- Richmond Hill is home to **4 main business sectors**: Professional, Scientific and Technical Services; Finance and Insurance; Information and Culture; and Health.
- Median household income is **\$102,000**, higher than the median for Toronto Region, but lower than York Region's.
- The City is one of Canada's most **highly educated workforces**, with more than 50% of its residents holding a university degree.
- It has experienced **significant job growth** and is projected to reach 122,600 jobs in 2051.

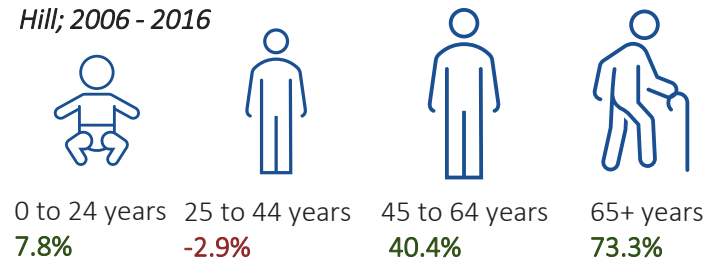
Addressing Affordable Housing Challenges in Richmond Hill

Like other municipalities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, the City of Richmond Hill is obligated to comply with the provincial growth plan, which has renewed concerns about ensuring equitable access to affordable housing for all members of the community. As the City is actively exploring and implementing innovative tools and incentives to address the housing gaps in Richmond Hill, **it will also need to remain adaptable in addressing shifting mandates, responsibilities and targets.**

The City of Richmond Hill faces numerous challenges on the housing front:

- As the household demographics continues to diversify and shift to smaller households (<= 2 members), there is a growing need **for a diversification of the housing stock** including apartments buildings, triplexes and townhouses.
- As the City's population continues to age, there is a growing need **for options for older adults and seniors** to be able to down-size and/or age-in-place.
- The aging population in Richmond Hill may add to the challenges faced by younger individuals seeking to reside in the City. This is because younger people may have limited incomes or lack home-equity, making it difficult for them to access housing that **is suitable and affordable.**
- Since April 2013, the average sale price for both houses and condos in Richmond Hill has risen by 108.9%. These increases in home prices have outpaced the increases in income and other assets. As a result, homeowners have experienced significant financial gains that are not available to non-owner households, thereby **contributing to income inequality.**

Rate of Change: Population by Age: The City of Richmond Hill; 2006 - 2016



As shown above, the population aged 45 years and older had the highest rate of increase between 2006 and 2016, indicating that Richmond Hill will continue to age in the next decade.

Proactive Planning And Development

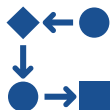
Richmond Hill is a growing city, like most other areas in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). In its 2020-2022 Strategic Priorities, the City identified proactive growth management and the balance between growth and preservation of the natural environment as a key priority. **This priority will remain crucial as Richmond Hill prepares for projected growth in the future and contends with other challenges, including climate change.**



The total population of Richmond Hill is forecasted to reach **317,000** people and **122,600** jobs by 2051.



Target **new residential units** (2006 to 2031) to be built as a result of development that conforms to the Official Plan is **15,300**.



The City manages and maintains more than **410,000 infrastructure assets** (such as roads, watermains, sewer pipes, etc.). As the infrastructure ages, the City must plan to support planned growth and intensification.

The City will need to continue its efforts to grow in responsible and sustainable way by:

- ✓ Advancing initiatives that support quality of life and place, such as the Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plans.
- ✓ Continuing to verify and update the municipal water and wastewater infrastructure improvements required to support the City's planned growth and intensification.
- ✓ Continuing to maintain and improve the City's recreation facilities, recreation and culture programs and services, and cultural opportunities to meet the needs of its diverse communities.
- ✓ Ensuring the growing population in the City has access to a multi-modal transportation to accommodate the different needs of its community, especially with the future Yonge North Subway Extension expected to be completed by 2030. The expansion will foster higher levels of intensification, and there is already an MZO in place at the future Bridge Station.

Continued Efforts To Address Climate Change

The City has been recognized as a leader in climate action and is working towards achieving its vision to be a thriving, resilient, low-carbon community with a diversified and strong economy. It has already implemented several initiatives, including energy-efficient building standards, cycling infrastructure improvements, and community education and outreach programs and **will continue exploring new opportunities.**

The City has an ambitious climate change agenda.

The City has developed the [Community Energy and Emissions Plan](#) (CEEP) and has identified actions to reduce overall community greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, conserve energy and explore related economic opportunities.

Additionally, the City has created the [Climate Change Framework](#) that demonstrates its commitment to applying a climate change lens on how it manages the organization and its assets as well as fosters collaboration and innovation among stakeholders.

Infrastructure and asset management will also be critical to the City's future sustainability.

A 2022 report from the Canadian Climate Institute, [Damage Control](#), demonstrated that if the public and private sectors start investing in infrastructure resiliency, the economic impact of climate change could be cut by 75%.

Accomplishments

- The City received an **Award of Distinction** from the So(cial) Good Design Awards, presented by the Association of Registered Graphic Designers for the Resilient Richmond Hill video.
- The City was also awarded the **Best Web GIS Award** by BeSpatial/URISA Ontario, the premier geospatial and information non-profit organization in Ontario, for the Resilient Richmond Hill Story Map.
- The City launched **Resilient Stories** – a social media campaign in which Richmond Hill residents share personal accounts of their hopes, concerns and actions in response to climate change.
- The City is the founding partner of the **SNAP project** – a community-driven model for sustainable urban renewal and climate action which is helping make neighborhoods more resilient.


Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

The City is taking meaningful steps towards promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (EDI). As of March 2023, Council has approved Richmond Hill's first [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan](#) and **will be moving forward to implement the recommendations in the plan.**


The City of Richmond continues to grow as a diverse community.

- According to Census 2021, there were 510 individuals who identified as Indigenous in Richmond Hill. This represents approximately 0.3% of the City's total population.
- The proportion of Richmond Hill's population that are immigrants continues to increase: from 57.4% in 2016 to 58.2% in 2021.
- As per the City's DEI engagement in 2022, the largest number of recent immigrants were from Asia, but also from Europe, the Americas and Africa. Specific places of birth for recent immigrants include China, Iran, India and the Philippines.
- The proportion of the population in Richmond Hill identifying as a visible minority has continued to increase over time: from 52.9% in 2011, to 66.4% in 2021.

These trends underscore both the attractiveness of Richmond Hill as a destination for newcomers and the diverse range of communities that call Richmond Hill home. **As such, the City will need to continue its commitment to DEI, including application of a DEI lens to City operations and service delivery, policy design and community engagement.**



As per the City's recent DEI survey, **80%** of the participants believe service **were equitable and inclusive** but **20% did not** – an answer more prominent among diverse respondents.



To demonstrate its commitment to DEI, the City has developed an **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan**. The City will be hiring a temporary resource to support implementation of the Strategy in the immediate term.


City's Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

The City of Richmond Hill is committed to the principles of Truth and Reconciliation and strives to foster an inclusive community that respects and embraces Indigenous cultures, traditions, and rights. Through ongoing dialogue, education, and collaboration with Indigenous communities, the City **will continue to explore opportunities that support relationship-building with indigenous rights holders and action on Truth and Reconciliation.**

Compared to provincial figures, Richmond Hill has a relatively small urban Indigenous population, remaining stable at **510 members** between 2016 and 2021, according to census data. Of those individuals, 305 identify **as First Nations** and 135 **as Métis**. It is important to note, however, that the census is not a fully reliable tool for accurate estimates of Indigenous populations.

As per the City's DEI engagement survey conducted in 2022, 55% of the respondents agree that the City of Richmond Hill is a "safe and supportive provider for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color." At the same time, however, when the responses are filtered by respondents (in terms of how they self-identify), it is evident that there is still to work to be done to ensure that individuals identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour feel safe and supportive in their engagements with the City and how they receive City services.

Along with its work on DEI, the City has recognized the need to address the ongoing challenges related to Truth and Reconciliation and build respectful, collaborative relationships with the Indigenous rights holders who host the City of Richmond Hill.



To demonstrate its commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, the City is advancing several initiatives, including:

- ✓ The adoption of the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, which was developed after consultation with First Nations and Indigenous Communities.
- ✓ Exploring various training opportunities that the City of Richmond Hill can provide to its staff and leadership to support reconciliation and relationship-building.
- ✓ Encouraging more learning opportunities about Indigenous rights holders who have ties to Richmond Hill.

Key Considerations and Recommendations (1/2)

Following an internal environmental scan outlined in previous pages, we have identified several considerations and recommendations for the City as it refreshes its Strategic Plan and works towards realizing the collective vision for the future of the community. **At this time, these recommendations are high-level and preliminary, given the limited scope of this scan. Many underscore the importance of initiatives already underway at the City and continuing to invest in and appropriately resource these projects.**

- **Continue to prioritize financial sustainability and capital planning:** City's Council has demonstrated a continued focus on fiscal responsibility through the recent approval of the 2023 budget, which includes investments of \$84 million in new and updated parks, trails, and other community amenities, as well as timely maintenance of core City assets. However, in view of high inflation and increasing construction costs, the City will need to ensure that it can effectively navigate a volatile economic landscape while minimizing impacts on operating and capital budgets and maintaining affordability for residents. In addition, the City has or is in the process of completing several overarching strategies and plans (e.g., the Transportation Master Plan, Community Energy and Emissions Plan) that will have significant funding envelopes (particularly spending on capital) in terms of implementation. Finally, focusing on robust long-term financial planning is also critical in view of changing provincial legislation (e.g., Bill 23) that will create funding gaps for the City to advance growth-related infrastructure.
- **Continue to advance advocacy and partnerships to address affordable housing:** Ongoing challenges around affordable housing are not unique to the City of Richmond Hill but are major concerns in municipalities small and large across Ontario. The City should continue to build effective working relationships with its community and regional partners to help and engage in advocacy with the provincial and federal governments to address housing supply and affordability challenges. Richmond Hill should also continue to work with its Affordable Housing Strategy Implementation Committee to advance its Affordable Housing Strategy.

Key Considerations and Recommendations (2/2)

- **Greater focus on DEI :** As Richmond Hill continues to grow and becomes more diverse, there is a need for an added focus on embedding a DEI lens into the organization, in terms of how the City delivers services and engages with residents. The Corporation has developed its first [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan](#), supporting the City into building “an inclusive municipal service environment and community that embraces diversity, promotes equity, and is accountable to the people it serves.”
- **Continued action on Truth and Reconciliation:** With the recent adoption of its first official Land Acknowledgement Statement and the continued efforts for education and open dialogue with Indigenous rights holders, City Council and the administration are taking important steps towards acting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. Going forward, the City should continue to explore additional opportunities and initiatives that can further strengthen dialogue and relationships with Indigenous rights holders.
- **Continue to address climate change challenges and embed climate into the organization:** As the City is working towards its vision to be a resilient, low-carbon community and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, it should continue working collectively with the community and other levels of government in implementing its [Community Energy and Emissions Plan](#) (CEEP) and reporting back on progress. Additionally, the City should also continue applying the [Climate Change Framework](#) while managing the organization and developing new programs and services.
- **Continue to work together as an organization and create further alignment across all City’s departments and staff:** In the past, the administration has faced challenges in effectively prioritizing various initiatives, leading to a lack of strategic direction in decision-making. To address this, the City is implementing the Organizational Management Framework (OMF) to promote greater cohesion and collaboration and break down siloes within the organization. The updated Strategic Plan is also an opportunity to support greater alignment within the organization and between Council and the administration as to the City’s priorities and the roadmap for the next four years in terms of how to make progress against those priorities.

Best Practices and Recommendations for Strategic Planning and Community Engagement

Peer Selection Criteria

StrategyCorp undertook a comparative analysis to benchmark and compare the City's community engagement efforts and strategic planning processes to several peer municipalities: **Markham, Vaughan, Burlington** and **Oakville**. This selection was based on the following criteria to ensure that the results and recommendations were relevant to Richmond Hill:

Lower-tier: In view of different jurisdictional roles and responsibilities among lower-, upper- and single-tier municipalities, the analysis was limited to lower-tier municipalities.

Urban and GTA: All peer comparators are urban municipalities in the GTA with relatively similar growth profiles (although Oakville's growth rate between 2016-2021 is considerably higher than the others) and trajectories.

Size and Service Profiles: Potential peers were also reviewed in terms of have been selected based on having similar population density and scope of municipal services.



NOTES

- The analysis presented is based on publicly available data that was accessible at the time of the report's writing. It is important to note that due to the limited scope of publicly available information, there may be some data gaps in the analysis.
- StrategyCorp has utilized various sources of information to support our findings and recommendations, including data from Statistics Canada and comparator municipalities' websites and reports.

Overview of Comparator Municipalities

The following table summarizes the municipal profiles for the select comparator municipalities. Additional detail is provided in [Appendix A: Municipal Profiles](#).




Comparator Municipality	Population (2021)	Growth from 2016-2021	Projected Population (2051)	Population Density per km ²	Land Area in km ²	Type of Municipality
The City of Vaughan	323,103	5.5%	568,700	1,185.9	272.44	Lower-tier
The Town of Oakville	215,700	10.3%	266,000	1,538.5	138.94	Lower-tier
The City of Burlington	186,948	2%	290,500*	1,004.4	186.12	Lower-tier
The City of Markham	338,503	2.9%	619,200	1,604.8	210.93	Lower-tier

*The projection is for 2041
 Source: Census 2021, Statistics Canada





Overview of Key Recommendations

The following recommendations were identified as part of the benchmarking and best practices review and have informed the approach and tactics outlined in the Draft Engagement and Communications Strategy for the City.

What makes an effective Strategic Plan?

-  **A Plan that is implementable and anchored within the organizational and community context** – This will ensure that the plan is tailored to the needs and realities of Richmond Hill and its residents, as well as it aligns with the City's goals, resources, and constraints. This ultimately will lead to greater community buy-in and support for the plan.
-  **Establish a combination of community and corporate key performance indicators (KPIs)** - KPIs can support tracking, evaluating and regular reporting on progress against goals, which in turn builds accountability and fidelity to the Plan and its desired outcomes.
-  **Prioritize** – An effective and useful Strategic Plan should identify those key priorities upon which that the resources, efforts and attention on the most critical areas that will drive success and desired outcomes.

How can we engage stakeholders in the strategic planning process?

-  **Work to eliminate barriers to engagement** – Design the process to eliminate physical, technological, and socioeconomic barriers to enable participation by all groups.
-  **Go where the people are** - Leverage existing events to bring the engagement to stakeholders, rather than trying to draw them out. This increases accessibility and convenience and can reduce key barriers to participation (e.g., work, childcare, etc.)
-  **Use a mix of engagement tools** – There is no single effective tool for engagement. Combining a range of tools across different formats (i.e., virtual, in-person, hybrid) can be most effective in reaching a broader subset of the population.
-  **Co-develop consultation approaches with equity-deserving groups (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+ focus groups, BIPOC, Youth Committees, etc.)** - To ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs and priorities are reflected in the strategic planning process.

Summary of Comparator Findings and Best Practices

The table provides an overview of key tactics for community engagement and best practices in strategic planning among comparator municipalities.

Comparator Municipality	Stakeholder Engagement				Strategic Plan Elements		
	Online engagement (e.g., surveys, focus groups)	Community events and pop-ups	Mix use of print and digital media	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan	Type of Strategic Plan	Key Performance Measurements	Progress Reporting
The City of Vaughan	✓	✓	✓	✓	Detailed – 9 strategic priorities with objectives and corresponding key activities	Included – for each strategic priority.	Annually
The Town of Oakville	✓	✓	✓	✓	High level – Vision 2057 for all City plans Detailed – 5 key focus areas with objectives and corresponding specific actions	Included – for each focus area.	Annually
The City of Burlington	✓	✓	✓	✓	High level – Vision 2040 Detailed – Four-year work plans	Included – for both 25-year and 4-year horizons.	Annually and mid-term review of the plan
The City of Markham	✓	✓	✓	✓	Detailed – 4 strategic priorities, with objectives and corresponding specific actions	Included – for each strategic priority.	Annually and mid-term review of the plan

City of Vaughan

Strategic Plan	Engagement Tools And Tactics	Equity And Inclusion Lens
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In March 2023, Council approved the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan.• The Strategic Plan includes 9 strategic priority areas, goal statements and objectives for each area as well as specific key activities for the objectives.• Progress reports on the Plan’s key activities are provided to Council annually and include performance measures as well as milestones and achievements. There is also an online performance dashboard.• The City uses the Objectives, Key Activities, Results (OKR) methodology to support monitoring and reporting of results.• The OKRs, together with the City’s Corporate Performance Measurement program, enable an integrated approach that connects the Strategic Plan to annual business planning, the budget process and individual staff performance plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The community was informed on engagement opportunities for the strategic plan through a variety of communication channels including social media, paid advertisements, public service announcements and eNewsletters.• The strategic planning project portal was hosted on the EngagementHQ platform, to act as a destination for frequently asked questions, updates and engagement opportunities.• The City has also developed a Stakeholder and Community Engagement Strategy to guide all its engagement efforts and activities. Planning for meaningful and effective engagement involves four steps: initiate, brainstorm, action and finally evaluate and celebrate.• Looking ahead, the City aims to use a variety of engagement methods to broaden outreach, including public meetings, surveys and focus groups. According to 2022 Citizen Survey results, 65% of respondents agreed that they can influence municipal decisions affecting Vaughan by participating in public engagement events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Led by Vaughan’s first-ever Diversity and Inclusion Officer, the City has developed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and Multi-Year Action Plan.• To ensure engagement with Indigenous and equity-deserving groups, the City has committed to applying an equity lens to all existing communication and outreach strategies.• The City has also committed to seek out opportunities to engage and collaborate with diverse communities, community partners and municipalities (e.g., Vaughan Food Bank, Anti-Black Racism Special Advisory Committee).• As part of the strategic planning process, the City engaged all 2018-22 Term of Council Task Forces, including the Diversity and Inclusion and Older Adult Task Force, which included community members and subject-matter experts, to get a deeper understanding of the needs and priorities of the community.

Town of Oakville

Strategic Plan

- Since 2007, Oakville has adopted a mission-driven approach to strategic planning that converts the Town's vision, mission and values into strategic goals that are prioritized by Council.
- [Vision 2057](#) brings together all the Town's master plans, Council's strategic plans and other key planning initiatives.
- The [2019-22 Council's Strategic Plan](#) includes five key areas of focus as well as goal statements and specific actions for each area.
- The plan also includes a performance dashboard that listed key measures were identified and were reported on annually.
- The Town's Progress and Final Accomplishments reports highlight the status of initiatives (completed or substantially complete; initiated or in progress; deferred or not started).
- Oakville is in the process of developing its long-term vision and 2023-2026 Business Plan.

Engagement Tools And Tactics

- The Town has developed a [Public Engagement Guide](#), a toolkit to ensure open two-way communication with the community. The guide includes 8 guiding principles that should inform all engagements as well as guidelines for designing engagement (e.g., define objective/project, conduct stakeholder analysis, develop strategy per the International Association for Public Participation, identify engagement tools, measure outcomes etc.).
- Common engagement tools and techniques include FAQs, social media, e-newsletter, advisory committees, focus groups, fairs, information kiosk, telephone hotline, posters, digital screens, mobile signs, TV and radios. They are also categorized by the level of community impact and type of engagement (sharing information, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering).
- Part of the strategic planning process, the Town has conducted 2022 citizen survey between January and February. It registered 811 phone responses and 990 online survey responses. The questions gauged the public opinion on the quality services, customer service and acquired on residents' priorities.

Equity And Inclusion Lens

- Accessibility considerations are offered to participants in public engagements depending on the magnitude and complexity of the project. Examples include adding baby stations, shuttle bus service and care-A-van pick-up locations.
- The Town also provides virtual access to public meetings and sign language interpretation services.
- The Town has developed an [Inclusion Lens Worksheet](#) on how to apply the lens, including prompting questions for projects, programs and services (e.g., What am I already doing to promote inclusion? Who might be impacted and who is not included in the work I'm doing? What changes or recommendations am I going to make to modify the potential impact(s)?).

City of Burlington

Strategic Plan

- In 2021, the City of Burlington updated its [Vision 2040 Strategic Plan](#). The Plan acts as the City's long-term guiding policy document, and aligns with other medium-term documents (e.g., City Work Plans) and short-term implementation plans (e.g., operating/capital budgets).
- The City also commits to developing four-year Work Plans (i.e., Strategic Plans) for each new term of Council to identify key goals and strategic actions required to move forward the four key priorities outlined in the 25-year Strategic Plan.
- Burlington's latest Work Plan ([2018 to 2022 Plan: From Vision to Focus](#)) includes a results-based accountability framework that requires the City to periodically report on community measurement results (e.g., conditions of well-being for a selected population/community) and performance measurement results (e.g., service delivery metrics) through public [Progress Reports](#) and the [City's Integrated Reporting Dashboard](#).

Engagement Tools And Tactics

- The City employs [IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum framework](#) that shows the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities. The spectrum also shows the increasing level of public impact progressing through the spectrum beginning with "inform" through to "empower".
- The City uses [Get Involved Burlington](#), an online engagement portal to provide residents with information about City's projects and initiatives and allow them to provide feedback online.
- For the Vision 2040 Strategic Plan, the public engagement process was conducted over several phases between 2018-2019. The process included a variety of methods to engage the community, including online surveys, workshops, public meetings, focus groups, and social media outreach. The City also leveraged local media outlets, such as InsideHalton.com and the Burlington Post to promote its engagement activities.

Equity And Inclusion Lens

- The City has developed a [Diversity and Inclusion Charter](#), which sets out the City's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of its operations. This Charter's overarching objective is to enhance communications and access to information for citizens, and to facilitate and enable meaningful engagement.
- The City of Burlington has made efforts to engage with equity deserving groups online, through social media and other digital platforms. This includes sharing information about public meetings and consultations, as well as creating online surveys and discussion forums to gather feedback from residents who may not be able to attend in-person meetings.

City of Markham

Strategic Plan

- Markham’s 2020-2023 Strategic Plan ([Building Markham’s Future Together](#)) focuses on achieving four strategic goals.
- To achieve these goals, the City’s plan outlines specific strategic objectives (i.e., “how we will get there”) as well as key performance indicators (i.e., “how we will measure our success”) for each of the four goal areas.
- Since publishing the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, the City has released two public progress reports (i.e., the [2021](#) and [2022](#) Accomplishments Summary documents).
- These documents include several (approximately 25) quantitative (e.g., constructed 8 new public parks) and qualitative (e.g., revised the City’s Land Acknowledgement) progress measures for each of the four goal areas of the Strategic Plan.

Engagement Tools And Tactics

- To develop the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, the City engaged residents, businesses and community stakeholders through a community open house, Twitter town hall, and an online survey which received more than 1,800 responses.
- The outputs of these engagements were used to confirm draft strategic priorities established by the City.
- To inform the City’s next phase of strategic planning, Markham conducted a [Citizen Satisfaction Survey](#) (i.e., a telephone survey of 300 residents) to survey residents on a variety of topics including: overall quality of life, satisfaction with City facilities and programs, and services offered by the City.
- The survey was useful for identifying emerging areas of concern for community members, including a desire for increased communications related to City efforts to bring more affordable & rental housing to Markham and enhanced responsiveness to resident complaints.

Equity And Inclusion Lens

- In 2022, the City published [Markham’s Diversity Action Plan \(2022-2027\)](#). The Plan has been developed as a living document that will grow alongside City priorities, adapting to fit evolving City and community needs.
- The Plan was developed through City-wide consultations to understand first-hand, lived experiences from a diverse group of individuals, families, and communities.
- As part of Markham’s Diversity Action plan, a community survey was conducted and majority responded that they have a positive view of the City’s provision of inclusive services as well as its awareness-raising of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The Plan also outlines a ‘recommended action’ focused on applying a diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination lens to all City communications. Examples include developing a language and translation policy and ensure the City’s website is user-friendly, accessible and AODA compliant.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Conclusion and Next Steps

The analysis presented in this document has highlighted both **successful areas** and **opportunities for improvement** as the City moves forward with developing its 2023-27 strategic plan. Additionally, by examining community engagement efforts and strategic planning processes used by select comparator municipalities, the City has gained **valuable insights** that can inform **its future strategic planning and community engagement efforts**.

These insights have informed StrategyCorp's Draft Comprehensive Communication and Engagement Strategy. As we developed the plan, we have selected engagement opportunities and tools that are right-sized to Richmond Hill in terms of its distinct context and are designed to be inclusive and authentic to the City.

In the next phase of work, StrategyCorp will work on implementing Draft Comprehensive Communication and Engagement Strategy in conjunction with the City of Richmond Hill project team.

Appendix A : Municipal Profiles

City of Vaughan



The City of Vaughan is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, quickly transforming into an urban centre with significant economic activity and employment growth. Four decades ago, Vaughan was a collection of distinct agricultural-focused villages. Today, it is a critical part of the Greater Toronto & Hamilton Area and considered a “big city” both in terms of population and economic impact.

Population (2021)	Operating Budget (2023)	Total Land Area	Population Density
323,103	\$ 355M	272.44 km ²	1,185.9 per km ²

46.44 %
of the population is immigrant

113
Different spoken languages

\$24.95B
Real GDP

- Now through 2051, Vaughan will become home to 228,800 more people, resulting in a total estimated increase of 76%.
- The median household income is \$124K, higher than the provincial median at \$91K, and the average household size is 3.2 persons per household, which is indicative of Vaughan’s suburban nature.
- The City has access to a labour force of labour force of 3.381 million within a one-hour drive.
- Vaughan’s key employment sectors continue to grow and diversify. Between 2016 and 2021, there was a 19% growth in employment within the healthcare sector, a 15% growth in professional, scientific and technical services employment, and an 11% growth in construction employment.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.

Town of Oakville



Known for its picturesque scenery, rich history, and a vibrant culture, the Town of Oakville offers a unique blend of small-town charm and big-city amenities that make it an ideal destination for businesses and entrepreneurs. The Town's livability, robust job market, and continued investment from industry leaders has resulted in Oakville being recognized as one of Canada's best locations for investment.

Population (2021)	Operating Budget (2023)	Total Land Area	Population Density
215,700	\$ 349M	138.94 km ²	1,538.5 km ²

41.18 %

of the population is immigrant

70,000

Residents identify different languages as their mother tongue

119,212

Labour Force

- The town's population is projected to grow to 266,000 by 2051, resulting in a total estimated increase of 23%.
- The median household income in Town of Oakville is \$128,000, higher than the provincial median at \$91K, and the average age of their residents is 40.4 showcasing an older population.
- The Town is home to an innovative ecosystem fueled by the award-winning Sheridan College, local companies pushing the boundaries of new technology, and community organizations dedicated to helping companies accelerate their growth.
- The Town has the highest share of knowledge-based and institutional jobs in all of Halton Region.
- Between April 2021 and March 2022, the Town welcomed Amazon, Hilti Canada, HealthPRO, Wisacre Studios Inc., National Veterinary Associates, and Wolseley; Dana Canada Corp., and Spark Power.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.

City of Burlington



The City of Burlington is a place where people, nature and business thrive. Located 45 minutes west of Toronto, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, it is known for its beautiful parks, scenic waterfront, and historic architecture. With a population of over 180,000 people, Burlington offers a mix of urban amenities and small-town charm.

Population (2021)	Operating Budget (2023)	Total Land Area	Population Density
186,948	\$ 314M	186.12 km ²	1,004.4 km ²

Canada's #1 Community

Rated by Maclean's Magazine

\$10.6 B

Burlington's annual GDP

95%

Residents rate their quality of life as "Good" or "Excellent"

- The projected population growth for the City of Burlington from 2021 to 2041 is estimated to be 48%, resulting in a total population of approximately 290,500 by 2041.
- The median household income in the City of Burlington is \$110,000, higher than the provincial median at \$91K, and the average age of their residents is 42 showcasing an older population.
- Burlington's economy is diverse, with a mix of industries including advanced manufacturing, technology, healthcare, and professional services. Major employers in the city include IKEA Canada, Evertz Microsystems, and Joseph Brant Hospital. Burlington also has a strong small business community, with over 9,000 registered businesses in the City.
- More than half of the City of Burlington is greenbelt used for agriculture, natural heritage and recreational purposes. Every resident lives within a 20 minute to a park or a green space.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.

City of Markham



The City of Markham is known to be Canada’s most diverse community and enjoys a rich heritage, outstanding community planning and services, and a vibrant local economy. With more than 330,000 residents and the largest of nine communities in York Region, is home to over 650 corporate head offices and more than 1,500 high tech and life science companies.

Population (2021)	Operating Budget (2023)	Total Land Area	Population Density
338,503	\$ 430M	210.93 km ²	1,604.8 per km ²

38%
of the Population’s mother tongue
is Chinese

\$19.4 B
Markham’s annual GDP

9 in 10 residents
are satisfied with life in Markham &
find it a great place to live, work &
live

- The City’s projected population is expected to be approximately 390,000 by 2031, resulting in a total estimated increase of 15%.
- The median household income in the City of Markham is \$104,000, higher than the provincial median at \$91K, and the average age of their residents is 41.8 showcasing an older population.
- The City of Markham has the highest concentration of information and communication technology (ICT) employers per capita in Canada. Over 1,500 technology and life sciences companies are based in Markham. These two sectors alone employ 35,400 people – over one-fifth of the total workforce of 179,610.
- The City of Markham is home to high-quality healthcare services through facilities such as the expanded Markham Stouffville Hospital, part of the Oak Valley Health Network.
- The City also offers various cultural attractions and supports art galleries and museums as well as a 500-seat theater and extensive parklands.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.



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