



## **Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting**

**Date of Meeting:** December 6, 2023

**Report Number:** SRPBS.23.013

**Department:** Planning and Building Services

**Division:** Policy Planning

**Subject:** **SRPBS.23.013 – Draft Mill Pond Park  
Revitalization Master Plan**

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### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this staff report is to present the Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan and to outline the public consultation process that will be followed to obtain input on the Draft Master Plan document.

### **Recommendation(s):**

- a) That Staff Report SRPBS.23.013, including the Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Attachment A), be received, and that all comments be referred back to staff.

### **Contact Person:**

Michelle Dobbie, Manager, Park and Natural Heritage Planning, phone number 905-771-2467

Maria Flores, Director, Policy Planning, phone number 905-771-5438

### **Report Approval:**

**Submitted by:** Kelvin Kwan, Commissioner of Planning and Building Services

**Approved by:** Darlene Joslin, City Manager

All reports are electronically reviewed and/or approved by the Division Director, Treasurer (as required), City Solicitor (as required), Commissioner, and City Manager. Details of the reports approval are attached.

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### Introduction:

Mill Pond Park is one of five existing Destination Parks identified in the City's 2022 Parks Plan. Destination Parks vary considerably in terms of the recreational opportunities they provide, but are similar in that they contain features and facilities not found anywhere else in the City. Mill Pond Park offers a unique destination within the City as a natural oasis and cultural destination in the heart of Richmond Hill. Mill Pond Park offers a variety of scenic landscape and programmatic experiences that change with the seasons supporting a year round destination for residents.

Since 1970 when the original Mill Pond Park Master Plan was developed, the City has invested significant effort to realize the vision of a natural destination park, including woodland, marsh, and valley landscapes as well as more formal park spaces that provide active and passive recreational opportunities throughout the park. While there have been many improvements since the 1970 Master Plan was approved, many of the facilities are approaching their "end of life". At the same time, given the growth occurring around Mill Pond Park, strategic improvements are needed such as the establishment of a unified trail system, the creation of a more visible and functional entrance at the northern edge of the park on the 71 Regent Street lands, and rehabilitation and restoration of the aging stormwater management infrastructure and the valleyland areas in the park.

To address these opportunities comprehensively, the City initiated the preparation of Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (the "Master Plan") and an associated Mill Pond Stormwater Management Rehabilitation Environmental Assessment (EA). The Master Plan was prepared in conjunction with the EA to determine the best solution to manage stormwater, drainage, and the valleyland systems in order to improve water quality and reduce flooding and erosion, while establishing a revitalization vision and strategic direction to guide the future enhancement, management and programming of Mill Pond Park.

### Background:

A four-stage process is being followed to complete the Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan project as follows:

Stage 1	Research Stage
Stage 2	Options & Preferred Master Plan Stage through public consultation
Stage 3	Preparation of Draft Master Plan for consultation
Stage 4	Approval of Final Master Plan & Implementation Stage

Stage 1 (Research) of the project was completed between the spring and summer of 2021 and included a self-guided walking tour and online survey with 1,071 responses received, stakeholder meetings (i.e. meetings with TRCA, Mill Pond Gallery, local

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school boards and local environmental volunteer groups), review of background technical documents, and site analysis.

Stage 2 (Options and Preferred Master Plan) of the project included the creation of two options for public consultation:

- Option A, entitled “Adapting Landscape”, proposed revitalizing the main park components in their current location to protect and enhance the existing natural environment in the park. An improved circulation pattern was also proposed through the creation of a primary trail alignment, along with improvements to the secondary trail network. This option also included a new gateway feature and entrance into the park on the 71 Regent Street lands, along with a modest parking lot and supportive programming.
- Option B, entitled “Pond Destination Landscape”, was similar to Option A in that it protects and enhances the existing natural environment in the park, however, it anticipates an increase in park users with intensified uses centered in three park zones. There are spatial changes to some of the park facilities, and the introduction of new park facilities, lookouts, and park connections. This includes a proposed new feature bridge linking the primary trail at the north end of Mill Pond to a secondary trail in Upper Mill Pond Park.

The two design options were presented at a Virtual Open House which was posted on the project website on September 27, 2021 until October 15, 2021. Letters were sent via mail to homeowners within a 400 metre radius of the park (i.e. 2,194 addresses) advising them of the Virtual Open House and providing links to access the materials. In addition, the City undertook a social media awareness campaign, and placed QR-code A-frame signs with direct links to the survey throughout Mill Pond Park. The Virtual Open House was well attended with feedback received from 397 respondents. Option B was preferred by 72% of respondents while Option A was preferred by 23% of respondents. 5% of respondents preferred neither option. Feedback received from the Virtual Open House is summarized in Appendix C of the Draft Master Plan and was used to prepare the preferred option for consultation.

A second in-person Open House was held on June 29, 2022 for stakeholders to review and comment on the preferred option. Thirty-two (32) stakeholders signed in for this Open House. Following the in-person Open House, the information on the preferred option was posted on the project webpage between June 30, 2022 and July 17, 2022 and an online survey provided to obtain feedback from stakeholders not able to attend the in-person Open House. Twelve (12) stakeholders responded through the survey. The preferred option for Mill Pond Park presented at the June 2022 Open House was well received by stakeholders in attendance. Stakeholders expressed a desire for the City to consider the revitalization works quicker than is proposed in the phasing plan given the City’s on-going funding and resource constraints. As such, staff will continue to monitor grant funding opportunities as they become available.

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### **Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan:**

Staff and the consultants have met with internal staff and stakeholders and utilized the information obtained through the public consultation process noted above to prepare the Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan document (Attachment A) for public consultation. Following Council's ratification of Committee of the Whole's decision, the Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan will be placed on the City's website to facilitate a web-based public consultation period.

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan is structured into five sections, including:

**1. Introduction**

Outlines the background, study area, and objectives of the Master Plan, along with how to use/read the Master Plan document.

**2. Mill Pond Park Past and Future**

This section speaks to the history and evolution of Mill Pond Park, and includes the key principles for Mill Pond Park Revitalization.

**3. Master Plan Design Approach**

Provides an overview of the Revitalization Plan, including plan drawings, renderings and photographic examples by area for the Trail Network and Hierarchy, Mill Street Entry, South of Mill Street and Park Centre, Upper Mill Pond Park, and Stavert Park and the 71 Regent Street lands. Management direction is also provided for the Woodland, Marsh, and Swamp Restoration, including Invasive Species Management. Direction for parking and traffic management based on the Mill Pond Revitalization Parking and Traffic Study are also included. The Parking and Traffic Study is provided in Appendix F of the Draft Master Plan.

**4. Implementation**

This section provides recommendations on how to phase the Mill Pond Park revitalization works given the City's on-going budget constraints. It also outlines a high-level Cost Plan and Funding Sources. Opportunities for community involvement and partnerships are also provided.

**5. Appendices**

Six appendices are provided to assist the reader in understanding the Master Plan process, Site Analysis, Conceptual Master Plan Options, Community Engagement, Cost Estimate information, and Parking and Traffic Study.

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### **Financial/Staffing/Other Implications:**

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Attachment A to Staff Report SRPBS.23.013) has been used to inform the City's Capital Forecast. There are no immediate staffing or financial implications associated with this report.

### **Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities 2020-2022:**

#### Balancing Growth and Green

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan is a key project intended to aid in implementing the 2022 Parks Plan, which is identified as a major project intended to recognize the critical balance between economic development and environmental stewardship. Stewardship of green spaces such as parks and trails and longer-term sustainability planning and climate action initiatives associated with parks and the facilities within them aid the City in balancing growth and green.

#### Fiscal Responsibility

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan provides for a phased build-out to ensure the planning, design/construction, and maintenance/operational aspects of the facilities and programs outlined in the Draft Master Plan account for all costs from project inception through to construction/program formulation, and operation/maintenance.

#### Sense of Belonging

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan aids in establishing a sense of belonging by revitalizing an aging park space to serve the changing demographics of this growing neighbourhood adjacent to the Yonge Street growth corridor while providing elements that reflect on and enhance the unique cultural history of the park and area. Placemaking will be integrated not just through the proposed wayfinding and signage but also through the design elements. Placemaking may draw upon the industrial history of the site, the indigenous knowledge of the land, and the natural heritage of the site. For example, the industrial history of the site as a sawmill could be drawn upon to integrate industrial materiality into the architecture of the new park centre proposed as part of the South of Mill Street section of the park, the renovated gazebo, the gateway signage and public art, as well as through the materiality of the proposed bridge and boardwalks.

#### Getting Around the City

The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan directs for the creation of a primary trail connection between Mill Street and Regent Street, through Mill Pond Park. New enhanced crossings are proposed across Regent Street to the existing Mill Pond trail and Karindon Park to the north, along with realigning the Mill Street crossing to enhance pedestrian safety. These enhanced connections include improved streetscaping in the

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form of new trees, seating and/or paving materials along Mill Street and between Mill Street and Regent Street along the new primary trail. The enhanced connections will allow residents and visitors who wish to access Mill Pond Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when using park facilities.

### **Climate Change Considerations:**

The way we plan, design and maintain parks and the facilities within them impacts the City's larger greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how vulnerable the City is to the impacts of climate change. The 2022 Parks Plan provides direction that a climate change lens be applied to the development and redevelopment of parks, like Mill Pond Park. The Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan proposes the following elements to aid in creating a more resilient Richmond Hill by combating climate change and reducing its impacts:

- Enhanced connections between Mill Street and Regent Street through Mill Pond Park and enhanced crossings at Regent Street to the existing Mill Pond trail and Karindon Park to the north, along with realigning the Mill Street crossing to enhance pedestrian safety, allowing residents who wish to access Mill Pond Park by foot or bicycle to enjoy a seamless travel experience when using park facilities, promoting exercise and providing alternatives to getting around by car;
- Extensive natural heritage enhancements, particularly on the 71 Regent Street lands where a new naturalized meadow will be created, and in the central portion of the park where the existing woodlands, marsh and swamp ecologies will be restored and invasive species managed to reduce the need for park maintenance and enhance biodiversity within the park
- Expanded Pollinator Garden areas south of Mill Street to enhance biodiversity and provide opportunities for pollinator species to thrive within the park;
- Permeable paving and bioswales to aid with providing a low impact approach to stormwater management;
- Downcast/low-impact lighting, reducing light pollution.

### **Conclusion:**

It is recommended that this staff report and the attached Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan (Attachment A) be received for information and that this information be made available on the City's website for a 30-day public comment period following Council's ratification of Committee of the Whole's decision.

Following the 30-day public comment period, staff and the consultants will prepare the final Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan. Staff anticipates that the final Master Plan will be brought before Council in 2024.

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### **Attachments:**

The following attached documents may include scanned images of appendixes, maps and photographs. All attachments have been reviewed and made accessible. If you require an alternative format please call the contact person listed in this document.

- **Attachment A**                      Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan

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### Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.23.013 - Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization Master Plan.docx
Attachments:	- SRPBS.23.013 - Attachment A - Draft Mill Pond Park Revitalization MP - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Nov 9, 2023

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

**Maria Flores - Nov 9, 2023 - 2:33 PM**

**Kelvin Kwan - Nov 9, 2023 - 2:46 PM**

**Darlene Joslin - Nov 9, 2023 - 5:33 PM**