



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: February 18, 2026

Report Number: SRPBS.26.001

Department: Planning and Building Services

Division: Policy Planning

Subject: **SRPBS.26.001 – Request for Approval - Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature Final Concept Design**

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to seek Council approval of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature final concept design (the “Yonge and Garden Gateway project”).

Recommendation(s):

- a) That Staff Report SRPBS.26.001 regarding the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature be received;
- b) That Council approve the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature final concept design appended as Attachment “B” to Staff Report SRPBS.26.001;
- c) That all comments be directed to staff for consideration as part of a future detailed design stage for the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature;
- d) That a future project be included in the Ten-Year Capital Plan Forecast to facilitate the detailed design and subsequent construction of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature project as contemplated in the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature: Final Concept Design report (Attachment “B”);
- e) That Council direct staff to collect funds through Community Benefit Charges (“CBC”) under the 2022 Community Benefit Charge Strategy for the future design and construction of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature;
- f) That Council direct staff to apply for the Region’s Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership Program for cost share funding to implement the

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Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature at the same time as the Capital Budget request for this initiative;

- g) That, should the Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership Program application be approved, the Commissioner of Planning and Building Services be authorized to execute an agreement with the Regional Municipality of York regarding the maintenance of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting feature; and,
- h) That Council direct staff to continue the detailed design and construction phases of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature once funding through the 2022 Community Benefit Charge Strategy is collected.

Contact Person(s):

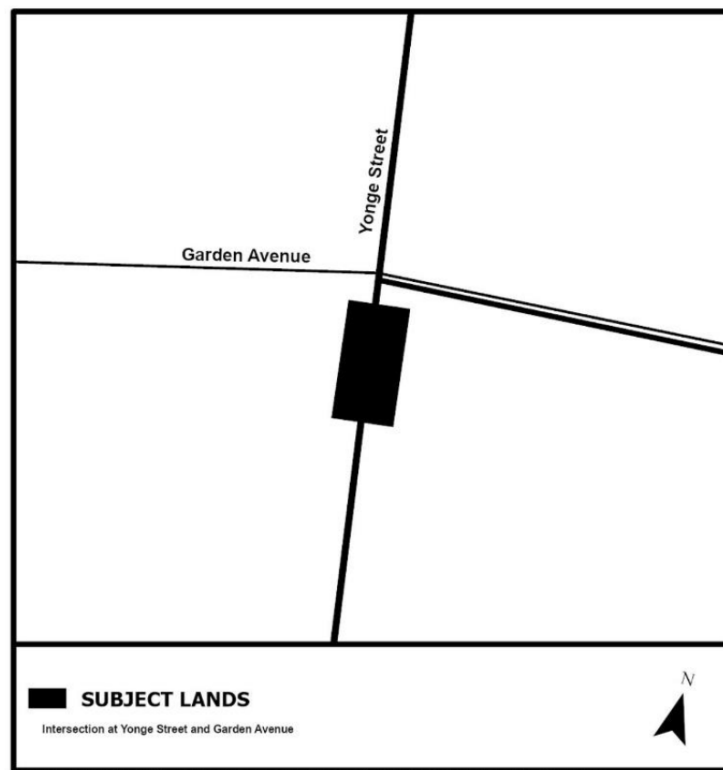
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Report Approval:

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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Location Map:



Key Messages:

- Richmond Hill's Official Plan 2010 recognizes the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue intersection as a major gateway site for the City;
- In 2012, the Region of York's Yonge Street South Streetscape Master Plan identified the opportunity to design and install a gateway feature to signify the entrance to Richmond Hill;
- In 2013, Council conceptually approved a gateway lighting feature, envisioned in the form of six vertical lighting elements within the Yonge Street median south of Garden Avenue, to welcome visitors to Richmond Hill;
- The reconstructed Y2 VivaNext BRT median provisioned appropriate electrical conduits in anticipation of the future implementation of a gateway lighting feature in accordance with the preliminary concept that included six vertical lighting elements;
- Further development of the Yonge and Garden Gateway project included the development of preliminary concept designs through internal technical meetings, and public surveys to obtain input;
- Based on public and technical feedback received, a final concept design for the Yonge and Garden Gateway has been identified for Council consideration and endorsement;

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- Following approval of the Final Concept Design by Council and once sufficient funds from the Community Benefits Charge (CBC) has been secured, staff will seek approval through the Capital Budget process to commence detailed design and construction of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature;
- Staff will apply for the Region's Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership Program for cost-sharing and implementation of the Yonge and Garden Gateway project as a part of future design and construction; and,
- Staff will consider and investigate future grant funding, partnership, sponsorship, or other funding opportunities such as Community Benefit Charges, as they arise, to help construct the gateway lighting feature as per the direction in the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature Final Concept Design (refer to Attachment "B").

Background:

An Opportunity to Identify Richmond Hill and Create a Sense of Arrival

As part of the 2012 Yonge Street South Streetscape Master Plan initiated by York Region, an opportunity was identified to design and install a gateway feature to signify the entrance to Richmond Hill at the intersection of Yonge Street and Garden Avenue. This intersection is also identified in the Official Plan as a major gateway and has strategic visibility and symbolic importance.

Located at the first intersection north of Highway 7 and Yonge Street, this site forms the southern entry to Richmond Hill and will be visible from Yonge Street, the Highway 7 and Highway 407 overpasses, as well as the Yonge North Subway Extension when complete. A well designed, iconic feature at this location will create a striking impression on northbound visitors entering Richmond Hill from Markham, Vaughan, and Toronto.

A prominent entry feature will not only signify arrival into Richmond Hill but will also help with furthering branding to identify and promote Richmond Hill. With continued growth and intensification of Richmond Hill Centre, as well as the anticipated Yonge North Subway extension, a prominent gateway feature to signify entry to Richmond Hill and the Richmond Hill Centre community can be considered appropriate.

Y2 VivaNext Bus Rapid Transit and the Yonge Street South Master Plan (2012)

The Y2 VivaNext Bus Rapid Transit (the "Y2") project was a Regional road reconstruction project to establish dedicated VivaNext bus rapid transit lanes (BRT) in the centre of Yonge Street between Highway 7 to the south and 19th Avenue to the north. In addition to creating dedicated bus lanes in the centre of Yonge Street, the Y2 road reconstruction would also allow for other enhancements on Yonge Street.

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York Region undertook the Yonge Street South Master Plan with input from three municipalities (Richmond Hill, Markham, and Vaughan) to guide streetscape design along Yonge Street. The median located at the intersection of Yonge Street and Garden Avenue was identified as a viable site for a gateway entry feature for both the City of Richmond Hill and the Region. A streetscape master plan was approved by the Region in 2012 and a preliminary concept design was prepared. Through this process, the gateway feature was envisioned as six vertical lighting elements within the median.

Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Project – Phase 1 (2013-2021)

On September 9, 2013, Richmond Hill City Council (“Council”) received Staff Report SRPRS.13.156 and endorsed, in principle, an entry feature to be located at the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue intersection. The preliminary design for the gateway feature was envisioned in the form of six vertical lighting elements 8 to 10 metres in height located within the median (refer to Attachment “A”). In accordance with the design parameters as envisioned by City Council and the Region, compatible electrical conduits were incorporated into the reconstructed Y2 VivaNext BRT median in anticipation of the future implementation of the project.

In 2019, City staff retained a consultant to develop three gateway lighting concept designs (refer to Attachment “A”) to further the completion of the Y2 VivaNext BRT project. In December 2020, the Y2 VivaNext BRT project was completed by York Region, including the construction of the Yonge Street median, south of Garden Avenue. With the incorporation of the electrical conduits for six vertical lighting elements, Phase 1 of this project was complete. The only remaining portion was the City’s future contribution of the gateway lighting feature.

Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Project – Phase 2 (2022-present)

Phase 2 of the Yonge and Garden Gateway project began in 2022 and includes the finalization of a concept design for a vertical multi-unit lighting feature at the median.

On May 25, 2022, Council received Staff Report SRPI.22.032 with respect to the Phase 2 component of the Gateway Feature project. The report outlined three design ideas prepared by the consultant and next steps to advance the Yonge and Garden Gateway project. The report also sought Council’s direction to conduct public consultation towards an ultimate design and construction of the lighting feature.

In July 2022, City staff conducted the first public survey in which 390 residents participated. The 2022 public survey sought design input from the public on how the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway feature could best represent Richmond Hill and reflect the broader community’s aspirations. The responses indicated a desire for a sophisticated, abstract design that reflected both history and the future of Richmond Hill. The community also expressed a strong desire for the feature to embody the values of being “fair and responsible” and “trusting and wholesome.”

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Survey respondents expressed general support and excitement for the idea of a gateway lighting feature. The survey findings indicated that:

- ‘fair and responsible’ and ‘trusting and wholesome’ were identified as the two most popular word sets that best describe Richmond Hill;
- more ‘sophisticated’ than ‘playful’ was selected when asked about what comes to mind when thinking about Richmond Hill; and,
- respondents preferred an ‘abstract’ over ‘literal’ expression for the gateway design.

The feedback indicated a vision for a sophisticated design that strikes a balance between history and the future of the city through an abstract representation.

On April 17, 2024, Council received Staff Report SRPBS.24.051 providing an update on the Yonge and Garden Gateway project, its continuation, and retention of the consultant previously retained in 2019 to finalize the conceptual design, contingent upon:

- review and consideration of the input received from the 2022 public survey;
- additional engagement and consultation with the public; and,
- review and input from an internal Technical Advisory Team.

Discussion:

Design Inspiration

Following retention of the consultant, refinement of the three concept designs resumed offering different interpretations of Richmond Hill’s identity in the form of gateway lighting suitable for a centre median (Attachment “A”). Each design concept celebrates the City’s heritage in a unique way while representing the public’s preference for a modern, sophisticated, and visually engaging gateway feature. Richmond Hill’s cultural and natural heritage served as design inspiration. The concept designs are summarized below:

Concept Design 1, celebrates Richmond Hill’s unique geological landscape and its thriving rose industry from the 1900s. This option features 6 columns proposed to be made from locally sourced stratified stone, arranged to echo the layers of kettle lakes found within the Oak Ridges Moraine. One face of the stone columns is accented with vertical metal panels that extend above the columns and bent at varying angles. These metal panels incorporate a rose motif, symbolizing the connection to the city’s rose industry.

Concept Design 2, draws inspiration from Richmond Hill’s natural landscape, specifically native trees and hedgerows that once separated early farmsteads. This design envisions 6 columns adorned with dynamic circular metal rings of varying sizes and heights to represent the natural vegetation.

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Concept Design 3, pays tribute to the geological significance of the Oak Ridges Moraine in Richmond Hill. This option features 6 columns clad in layers of locally sourced stratified stone representing the different layers of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

2024 Public Consultation

In November 2024, a second public survey was posted and received over 500 responses. The aim of the public consultation was to assess the public's preferences on aesthetic quality and design interpretation of the three concept designs and question which of the concept designs best:

- evokes positive feelings;
- represents Richmond Hill's cultural and natural heritage;
- embodies the previously identified values, from the first public survey, of being 'fair and responsible', and 'trusting and wholesome' through an abstract representation; and,
- strikes a balance between the history and future of the City.

To promote the survey, the City undertook a social media awareness campaign, digital advertisements, and display board signage at community centres. Respondents were asked to reflect on five qualitative statements and rank all three concept designs for each question based on a 5-part scale ranging from 'strongly agreed' 'agreed' to 'neutral' to 'disagreed' 'strongly disagreed'.

The questions asked whether the concepts represented Richmond Hill's cultural and natural heritage, tell the story of Richmond Hill's history and future, evoke positive feelings about Richmond Hill, reflect the strength of Richmond Hill's growing community, and if the respondent would be proud to see it at the gateway entrance. Respondents were also asked to rank the concepts, in order of preference, based on the ability to demonstrate Richmond Hill's history and future and represent the values of being fair and responsible, and trusting and wholesome. Lastly, respondents also had an opportunity to provide additional feedback or comments through a long answer response at the end of the survey.

Technical Advisory Team Review

An internal Technical Advisory Team ("TAT") comprised of various business units reviewed the three concept designs. The TAT members provided a range of feedback and comments with respect to the Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan policies, construction, materiality and finishes, illumination, as well as long-term maintenance considerations. The following key considerations were noted among the technical comments:

- Policies of the Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan, particularly Sections 10.1.2 Vision and 10.1.3 Principles;
- Difficulty sourcing and fabricating multiple and differently sized components for replacement;

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- Dependence on external manufacturers to produce replacement components can be costly;
- The need to select materials and finishes that are durable and will not deteriorate or fade over time;
- The need to design lighting features to reduce uplighting and material glare to comply with Richmond Hill's Light Pollution By-law through various design strategies;
- The need to design and construct lighting features in a way that minimizes maintenance and associated costs;
- Access for maintenance and replacement of components; and
- Ensuring readily available and standardized parts for long-term maintenance and upkeep of the lighting feature.

Identification of a Preferred Concept Design

A comprehensive analysis was conducted to determine the most preferred concept design, based on the public survey results, technical comments, and estimated costs.

The following criteria and key indicators were used:

- **Aesthetic Design:** Aesthetic quality and design interpretation based on the results of the public survey. The most preferred concept design should embody the identified values through an abstract representation and strike a balance between the history and future of the City.
- **Construction Feasibility:** Considerations related to fabrication of components and constructability. The most preferred concept design should be simple to fabricate, use materials and finishes that are durable as well as standardized forms.
- **Maintenance Requirements:** Considerations related to ongoing upkeep. The most preferred concept design should minimize the need for maintenance and use readily available components.
- **Estimated Costs:** Considerations related to preliminary costing for each concept design, including the materials, fabrication, and illumination. The most preferred concept should deliver value for money and provide an efficient design that reduces maintenance expenses.

Combining Public Survey Results and TAT Review Comments

A total of 524 respondents filled out the public survey, answering the qualitative and ranking questions. Almost half of those respondents provided further comments and feedback to consider through the long-answer response.

Based on the long-answer responses, 28% of all respondents provided comments and suggestions on design aesthetics, symbolism and technical matters, while 21% indicated they were not in favour of the project citing concerns about the costs. These concerns and considerations were further noted to help evaluate and refine the concept.

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Statistically, the public survey rankings did not reveal a clear winner among the concept designs. While there was a slightly higher preference for Concept Design 2, Concepts 1 and 3 scored only a 1% difference. In determining how the public feedback should be incorporated, aggregating and analyzing the qualitative statements factored into the combined rankings. While aesthetics and symbolism contributed to the preferences in the public survey, concerns over costs were also expressed.

As noted previously, the TAT review emphasized the practicality of the design as well as long-term costs, function and safety. For example, while the public survey favoured Concept Design 2, the high cost of long-term maintenance requirements were identified as cost-prohibitive and challenges with fabrication and construction outweighed the benefits of its short-term lower construction costs. Likewise, although the form of Concept Design 3 could be feasibly constructed, more complex elements such as integrated light rings would result in higher long-term maintenance requirements.

For these reasons, Concept Design 1 emerged as the most preferred concept. It was identified as the simplest design to fabricate and construct with the least maintenance, providing value for money in the long run. Recognizing public survey feedback on the aesthetics of Concept Design 1, it was agreed that additional consideration would be given to refine the aesthetics based on the public comments.

The combined rankings, which scored most preferred, preferred and least preferred with scores of 3,2 and 1, respectively helped arrive at a more conclusive and preferred concept design, as summarized in the evaluation table below.

Table 1: Evaluation of Design Concepts

Criteria	Design Concept 1	Design Concept 2	Design Concept 3
Aesthetic Design	Least preferred (1)	Most preferred (3)	Preferred (2)
Construction	Most preferred (3)	Least preferred (1)	Preferred (2)
Maintenance	Most preferred (3)	Least preferred (1)	Least preferred (1)
Cost Estimates	Preferred (2)	Most preferred (3)	Least preferred (1)
Total Score	= 9	= 8	= 6
Overall Ranking	Most preferred	Preferred	Least Preferred

Refinement of Preferred Concept Design

In order to refine and improve the aesthetic and functional qualities of the preferred concept design (Concept Design 1), staff reviewed all the responses from the 2024 public survey and the TAT technical review to identify additional considerations.

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Key design recommendations that emerged from the public consultation include:

- Improving the legibility of the rose symbolism within the concept design for passing vehicles;
- Emphasising the geological significance of the Oak Ridges Moraine as a defining element in the base of the structure;
- Including opportunities for additional signage to welcome and display messages and celebrate City and community events; and,
- Enhancing the material selection to ensure the concept designs remain prominent and appealing well into the future.

Technical comments that were collected through TAT meetings included comments with respect to the Richmond Hill Centre Secondary Plan policies, construction, materiality and finishes, illumination, as well as maintenance considerations.

Key design recommendations that emerged from the TAT review include:

- Improving the structural integrity of the gateway feature to support the weight of the metal panels;
- Designing lighting elements using different luminaires, visors, and aiming angles to comply with the City's Light Pollution By-law;
- Simplifying assemblies and components to ensure ease of maintenance;
- Considering alternative materials to copper panels to extend the lifespan of the gateway feature and minimize ongoing maintenance; and,
- Coordinating future construction of the gateway with future infrastructure improvements to support future growth in the Richmond Hill Centre.

Staff directed the consultant to refine the preferred concept and arrive at a final concept design that balances all the public comments and TAT's technical concerns. Additional considerations included simplifying assemblies, refining proportions and prioritizing material efficiency while maintaining artistic intent, ensuring that the gateway's expressive quality aligns with construction and maintenance needs, as well as financial costs.

Final Concept Design

The Final Concept Design represents a 'hybrid' option consisting of various elements of all three concept designs and addresses key themes and desires that emerged from the public consultation as well as technical comments received from the TAT.

The Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature concept is designed as a cultural landmark that marks the entrance to Richmond Hill. It is composed of six vertical metallic panels, or fins, that bend at varying angles, placed atop concrete columns. Integrated, programmable lighting will enable the the Gateway feature to be lit in various colours throughout the year in celebration of public holidays and other events. All components, from the weathered panels/steel fins with the rose motif, to dynamic

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lighting, and the stone-clad bases contribute to an expression of civic pride, with durability and low-maintenance at the forefront.



Figure 1: Perspective view of the Final Concept Design



Figure 2: Perspective view of the Final Concept Design

The design maintains its inspiration that celebrates the City's cultural and natural heritage through interpretation of the early rose industry, the Oak Ridges Moraine, and Richmond Hill's natural landscape, specifically native trees and hedgerows. The rose motif has been enlarged and prominently placed on the steel fin at eye-catching

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intervals to improve legibility at different scales, particularly when viewing at a distance for motorists traveling along Yonge Street. The motif has also been simplified and re-stylized to reflect the traditional pattern found on the City's Crest.

Moreover, the representation of the stone layers of the Oak Ridges Moraine have been revised from a gabion wall panel system with layers of stone, to a reinforced concrete column and base with stamped stone patterns or potential for locally-sourced stone veneer to represent the layers of the Moraine. The reinforced concrete columns anchor the steel fins and ensure the long-term structural stability of the vertical lighting elements and its aesthetic quality.

Further to the above inspiration strategies, the final and refined concept design consists of six vertical structures all bent at various angles, which, when viewed directly from the north or the south, appear like an abstract, foliated tree, and also mimic the idea of 'open hands and arms' to create a welcoming, sculptural form.

An important consideration that emerged through the public consultation was the desire for signage within the gateway design. While the original gateway concept contemplated by the South Yonge Street Master Plan was envisioned as a sculptural vertical lighting element within the median, the comments received from the public consultation indicated that the gateway feature should include clear 'welcome' signage to greet residents and visitors to Richmond Hill. Examples of entry signage as well as other creative forms were reviewed and drawn upon as inspiration. The Final Concept Design features aluminum graphical panels that are mounted to one face of each concrete column. The graphical panels provide a durable, low-maintenance surface for graphics application to display messages, similar to the light-standard banners found within the Village along Yonge Street. The graphical panel also includes a concealed top-mounted LED channel with a downward-facing visor to illuminate signage at night, while maintaining lighting that is fully shealed and directed downward to comply with the Light Pollution By-law. The graphical panels present a unique opportunity to promote events taking place in the City, and celebrate important milestones or holidays throughout the year.

It is also noted that due to cost increases for materials as a result of international tariffs and broad supply chain disruptions, efforts have been made at this stage to consider only locally sourced materials, fabricators, and Canadian made components in the conceptual design. While subject to further change, the preference to consider only local and Canadian suppliers and manufacturers will be carried through to future detailed design and construction of the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature.

The final Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature report (refer to Attachment "B") was prepared to outline the history of the project, the design development from concept options to a preferred final concept design and includes a discussion on materiality and high-level cost estimates. Subject to Council approval, the final Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature report will be used to

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guide future detailed design and subsequent construction drawings for fabrication and installation of the gateway lighting feature.

Next Steps:

Subject to Council endorsement of the final concept design, it is recommended that the detailed design and construction phases of the project be paused to a future date in the Capital Budget forecast and until such time that adequate funds become available through the Community Benefit Charge Strategy, the Region's Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership program, and other funding sources that can be explored by City staff. This approach allows the City to successfully realize an identified and important gateway site within the city while a pause will allow the City to focus on other identified priority projects, and facilitate the implementation of a gateway lighting feature in a more fiscally responsible manner.

Financial Implications:

Information and high level cost estimates for this project are outlined in the Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature: Final Concept Design report (Attachment "B"). The total estimated cost of design and construction is approximately \$1,787,000 and will require budget approval through a future formal Capital Budget request process when the noted funds are available.

The future construction phase will be eligible for cost share funding under the Region's Sustainable Transportation and Urban Design Partnership Program, formerly known as the Municipal Streetscape Partnership Program. Under the terms of the program, local municipalities are responsible for the operation, maintenance and long-term rehabilitation of enhanced streetscape features, and therefore a maintenance agreement must be signed between the Region and the municipality, if an application submitted by the City is approved by the Region.

As this gateway lighting feature is associated with growth and the intensification of Yonge Street, it is eligible for and identified under the City's 2022 Community Benefit Charge Strategy, which enables the City to collect community benefit charges from new development to help pay for capital projects. Community Benefit Charges (CBC) are a financial tool available to municipalities under the the *Planning Act* intended to replace the former Section 37 density bonusing tool.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

The Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting feature helps implement the 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan Pillar 1, "Growing a Liveable and Sustainable Community", specifically, Priority 1, to "advocate for the development of complete communities as we work with other levels of government to build a vibrant and inclusive Richmond Hill" by enhancing placemaking at a major gateway to the city that will support and strengthen Richmond Hill's unique character and sense of community and identity.

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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”: 2013 Preliminary Design and 2019 Concept Designs (three)
- Attachment “B”: Yonge Street and Garden Avenue Gateway Lighting Feature: Final Concept Design report

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.26.001 - Request for Approval – Yonge and Garden Gateway Lighting Feature Final Concept Design.docx
Attachments:	- SRPBS.26.001-Attachment A - AODA.pdf - SRPBS.26.001-Attachment B - AODA.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jan 27, 2026

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

Maria Flores - Jan 26, 2026 - 1:15 PM

Gus Galanis - Jan 26, 2026 - 1:16 PM

Darlene Joslin - Jan 27, 2026 - 11:55 AM