



Staff Report for Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date of Meeting: April 15, 2026

Report Number: SRPBS.26.009

Department: Planning and Building Services

Division: Policy Planning

**Subject: SRPBS.26.009 – 2025 Environment Strategy
Progress Update and Environmental Scorecard**

Purpose:

The purpose of this staff report is to provide Council with the 2025 *Greening the Hill* Environment Strategy implementation annual update and the 2020-2024 Environmental Scorecard.

Recommendation(s):

- a. That Council receive Staff Report SRPBS.26.009, including the attached 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker, 2025 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet, and 2020-2024 Environmental Scorecard for information purposes and that all comments be referred back to staff.

Contact Person(s):

- Myles O'Brien, Sustainability Coordinator, ext. 5464
- Ruth Rendon, Manager of Sustainability, ext. 2420
- Maria Flores, Director of Policy Planning, ext. 5438
- Gus Galanis, Commissioner of Planning and Building Services, ext. 2465

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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Key Messages:

- Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy ("Strategy") defines goals and actions for protecting the natural environment to 2031.
- The 2022 Strategy Update incorporates urban growth and climate change as key factors, aligning with other high-level City plans and policies.
- Implementation of the Strategy is collaborative, and relies on leadership, partnerships, community involvement, and innovation.
- In 2025, Richmond Hill continued to successfully implement the Strategy.
- The City's second Environmental Scorecard (2020-2024) provides a public-facing snapshot of progress, insights, and next steps on key Strategy indicators.

Background:

Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy, first released in 2014, establishes a vision to protect, enhance and restore the natural environment by fulfilling municipal obligations, responding to community priorities, and pursuing emerging opportunities.

The 2022 Council-approved Strategy Update (SRPI.22.068) builds upon Richmond Hill's legacy of environmental leadership and stewardship and emphasizes the increasing relevance of urban development and climate change. The Strategy's organizing principles – Greening our Consumption, Greening our Natural Spaces, and Greening our Growth – reflect these current priorities and guide the 90 actions to be implemented by 2031.

The purpose of this report is to outline Strategy implementation progress in 2025, as directed by Council. The report highlights links between Strategy implementation and related portfolios under the Sustainability banner (e.g. climate change, sustainable development, and natural environment/urban forest). As well, the report includes the City's second Environmental Scorecard (Scorecard), which covers the second five-year phase of Strategy implementation (2020-2024) but also uses broader trends since 2015 to demonstrate progress on environmental goals.

Discussion:

Environment Strategy Implementation

Richmond Hill's Environment Strategy recognizes the interconnections between environmental, economic, and social issues. Implementing the actions in the Strategy therefore depends on collaboration between various internal departments, and between the City, residents, businesses, and other key partners. Ongoing coordination with related plans and initiatives is essential for realizing the Strategy's objectives and ensuring its benefits are shared across the community. The Strategy's broad, multi-faceted scope makes it an important bridge between the global (e.g., United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)) and local (e.g., community environmental and climate groups) levels.

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The 2022 Strategy Update focuses more squarely on urban growth and climate change. Accordingly, its intentions and implementation are aligned with the City's Official Plan Update, Climate Change Framework, Community Energy and Emissions Plan (CEEP), and Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). Many of the Strategy's actions – reducing waste, conserving water, protecting wildlife, enabling local food – work in tandem with creating healthy, low-carbon, walkable communities, supported by natural and built infrastructure that is resilient to climate impacts.

Ultimately, successful implementation of the Strategy hinges on leadership, partnerships, community involvement, and innovation:

- Leadership

A steering committee with managers and directors from across the organization continues to guide Strategy implementation, meeting biannually to provide updates and ensure alignment with departmental workplans. As of 2024 this committee also oversees CEEP implementation. This coordinated approach helps weave sustainable thinking into the fabric of the organization, as reflected by the inclusion of a climate change “lens” in the City's 2025 Asset Management Plan.

Leadership is also demonstrated through community-level initiatives. In 2025 staff worked with Miskwaadesi Studio, a local Indigenous organization, to install five medicinal plant gardens across Richmond Hill. These gardens will help educate and connect our community around biodiversity, health, and reconciliation.

- Partnerships

The City continually leverages relationships with non-profit organizations, government agencies, and other municipalities to conduct studies, test ideas, and run programs that help meet Strategy goals. In 2025, staff partnered with Bird Friendly Richmond Hill and Richmond Hill Public Library to deliver Bird Friendly Festival: Sharing Spaces, a family (and bird) friendly event for World Migratory Bird Day. Staff also worked with TRCA to initiate a Climate Ready Homes program that teaches residents how to make their homes and properties more resilient and energy efficient. The City's evolving association with United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH) is expanding possibilities around sustainable development.

- Community involvement

Public engagement is critical for Strategy implementation, and hinges on dialogue between the City and community members. Staff regularly provide information about environmental issues, actions, and events, through a variety of activities and media. In response, residents have remained highly involved in local initiatives – spring clean ups, citizen science, workshops and webinars – and are actively collaborating with the City to find solutions and drive progress on our sustainability agenda.

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Examples from 2025 include Clean Up Green Up Weeks, Earth Day and ECO Family Fest events, bird-collision audits, and community stewardship initiatives.

- Innovation

Building a sustainable city alongside rapid urban growth and climate change requires innovation. In 2025 Richmond Hill launched the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) for Affordable Housing and Sustainable Design – a unique approach to addressing social and environmental sustainability through an established municipal planning tool. The City also laid important foundations for more sustainable transportation by developing a Micromobility Strategy and Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy, and streamlined and modernized zoning and tree permitting processes.

2025 Environment Strategy Progress Updates

Below is a summary of 2025 accomplishments from each of the Strategy's themes led by various departments throughout the corporation. Attachment 1: 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker lists the Strategy's 90 actions, their status, and recent implementation progress. Attachment 2: 2025 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet provides a visual snapshot of notable achievements from last year.

Energy

Using energy efficiently and cleanly can help lower costs, reduce air pollution, conserve resources and cut greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). In 2025, the City continued educating and engaging residents about their home energy options by launching the Climate Ready Homes program in partnership with TRCA. Richmond Hill delivered two free in-person workshops and 11 free one-on-one consultations to help residents understand and take action on energy improvements for their homes.

Staff continued implementing the 2024 Corporate Energy Plan (CEP), which sets a path for all municipal buildings to have net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. In addition to various equipment replacements and upgrades, staff completed a net-zero feasibility study for Central Library and a rooftop solar PV feasibility study for Tom Graham Arena. Construction also began at Connor Building, which will become the City's first net-zero ready facility and will provide important lessons and insights for reaching the 2050 goal.

Also in 2025, staff completed the corporate GHG emissions inventory (using 2024 data). While total emissions have risen slightly (2.6%) since the last inventory in 2019 – largely due to increased natural gas in the provincial energy generation mix – energy consumption for City facilities has dropped 6%, thanks to conservation measures.

Transportation

The way we move around our city has significant implications for the natural environment, climate change, and our quality of life. Shifting away from single-occupant gas/diesel vehicles toward more sustainable transportation is a key community priority, reflected in the Transportation Master Plan Update, Official Plan Update, and CEEP.

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In 2025, Council approved two important documents: the Micromobility Strategy and the Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Strategy. These provide guidance and rationale for enabling low-carbon mobility options, such as e-scooters, e-bikes, and EVs, in ways that align with other municipal priorities around congestion, safety and inclusivity.

Construction of the pedestrian and cycling bridge over the CN Railway, connecting Yonge St. and David Dunlop Observatory (DDO) Park, was largely completed in 2025. As well, the Rumble Pond South Trail corridor underwent a major revitalization. These projects enable and encourage active transportation in our community, providing access to parks and linkages to our growing network of trails.

Water Resource Management and Water Conservation

Managing our water use and our impacts on lakes, rivers, and streams is critical for overall ecosystem health. As well, our ability to manage stormwater is increasingly important to our community as extreme weather related to climate change brings heavier storms and more precipitation.

In 2025 staff took an important step toward greater climate resilience by initiating a Stormwater Master Plan (expected completion in 2027). This Plan uses detailed knowledge of our stormwater infrastructure, including data from modelling and monitoring programs, to ensure the system can handle future pressures from urban growth and climate change.

Implementation of the City's Stormwater Management 10-Year Capital Plan continued in 2025, with retrofits at Newman Pond and Driftwood Pond, an Environmental Assessment for Humber Flats Pond, and sediment removal at Verdi Pond. Other ongoing water resource initiatives include the Stormwater Infrastructure Monitoring and Inspection Program; Lake Wilcox Management Plan; Watershed Monitoring Program; Salt Management Plan; and Backwater Valve Subsidy Program.

Staff also continued to monitor and enforce the Sewer-use By-law and inspect and address blockages through the sanitary effluent sampling program, helping reduce the potential for hazardous spills on land and in our water.

Sustainable Land Development

The way Richmond Hill manages population growth and urban development has important consequences for the natural environment. The City's vision for compact, mixed-used, transit-oriented, and "complete" communities aligns with its commitments around environmental protection, sustainable development, and climate resilience.

The CIP for Affordable Housing and Sustainable Design saw its first full year of implementation in 2025. Under this innovative incentive program, affordable housing development proposals must meet a minimum "Silver" threshold in the City's existing Sustainability Metrics Program (the standard threshold is "Bronze"). The three successful CIP applications for 2025 will add over 1000 housing units in buildings with

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enhanced design features that support Richmond Hill's climate and environmental goals.

Staff also took a foundational step in mitigating corporate environmental impacts and adapting to climate change by integrating a "climate lens" into the 2025 Asset Management Plan. This new layer will strengthen our ability to identify and measure risk, and to strategically plan for resilient infrastructure, operations, and services.

Natural Heritage and Urban Forest

A connected network of green space and forest provides a vital foundation for individual, community, and ecosystem health. Its numerous services – shade/cooling, water absorption, and CO₂ storage – play key roles in our response to climate change.

In 2025, the City enhanced its capacity for protecting our urban forest through new setback provisions in the Comprehensive Zoning By-law update, modernized tree preservation standards, and a streamlined Site Alteration permit process By-law.

Restoration work continued at Beaver Woodland, DDO Park, Phyllis Rawlinson Park, and Saugeon Trail, and commenced at Rouge Rive Headwaters Valleys and Trail.

Community members again played a vital role in planting trees and restoring natural areas, through our Community Stewardship Program:

- 3.1 hectares of natural areas restored, 9,637 trees and shrubs planted, 19 habitat enhancement structures installed, 67 bags of garbage removed, 83 stewardship events and five webinars hosted;
- 22 schools, businesses, and community groups, and nearly 1,709 volunteers participated for a total of 3456 volunteer hours; and
- \$295,200 was leveraged from partners including LEAF, Ontario Streams and TRCA. The City also received \$102,000 in funding from York Region.

Through our Healthy Yards Program:

- 1,270 trees and shrubs, 2,824 wildflowers, 165 worm castings, 300 rain barrels and 140 backyard composters sold to Richmond Hill residents; and
- the City hosted two workshops about incorporating native plants on their property. \$12,000 in partnership funding was once again provided by York Region.

Invasive Species

The spread of invasive species, which can damage property, infrastructure and ecological integrity, is amplified by global trade/travel and climate change. Richmond Hill is developing capacity for managing this complex issue.

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In 2025, ecological restoration work continued in several locations, where increased native biodiversity will deter invasive species. At Rouge River Headwaters Valleys and Trail, staff treated a large (1.22 ha) phragmites patch, marking the first time the City has managed phragmites to this extent. The City also hosted seven Community Stewardship events where community volunteers helped remove 88 bags of invasive plants.

Wildlife

Healthy and diverse wildlife is a marker of overall environmental health. As the city grows, Richmond Hill is demonstrating leadership and innovation in protecting wildlife.

In 2025, wildlife habitat improvement and restoration was again carried out through the Community Stewardship Program, in partnership with Ontario Streams. Other projects supporting animals and their habitat include:

- DDO Park – enabling wildlife movement between north and south sections
- Rumble Pond South Trail – creek enhancements and bat box installations
- North Lake Rd., Parker Ave., and Newman Ave. – wildlife crossing signage
- North Lake Rd. – cut curbs and asphalt ramps for turtle crossing

The City began working with Turtle Guardians “Oak Ridges Turtles” chapter to install turtle nest boxes at select sites, and continued partnering with Bird Friendly Richmond Hill to promote bird stewardship through education campaigns and citizen science.

Local Food and Pollinators

Increasing opportunities to grow and access local food, along with protecting pollinating insects and birds, has benefits across the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of our community. In June 2025, the City strengthened its commitments around local food: Council approved SRPBS.25.051 – Local Food and Urban Agriculture in Richmond Hill, which endorses the York Region Food Network (YRFN) Food Charter Action Document, and more broadly directs staff to explore ways to support local food and urban agriculture as they relate to municipal sustainability goals. In October, Council passed a Member Motion supporting the goals of the Plant Based Treaty, directing staff to promote and include plant-based food options at City events and meetings based on alignment with Richmond Hill’s climate goals.

The Community Garden Program added Strong Towns Richmond Hill collective garden, managed by a community group who produced food for local food bank donations. Richmond Hill worked in partnership with Miskwaadesi Studio to install five Indigenous medicine gardens throughout the city to create a network of living classrooms and cultural gathering spaces and to help increase local access to Indigenous medicines.

The City continued to support pollinators and their habitat through the Healthy Yards and Richmond Hill Blooms programs, and through commitments to the Pollinator Partnership, Mayor’s Monarch Pledge, Bee City and Bird Friendly City initiatives.

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Waste

Richmond Hill has long been a leader in waste management and is taking important steps at the municipal level to support a more circular economy that reduces landfill waste, curbs pollution, and prevents greenhouse gas emissions.

The City continued implementing its Single-Use Plastics (SUP) policy through a public education campaign and an internal “dish library” that provides reusable plates, cups, and cutlery for small events. A second dish library has been added, based on the success of the first. The “Fill It Up” water trailer also helped reduce SUP at events, serving over 90,000 residents and refilling approximately 25,000 reusable bottles.

In 2025, the City helped prepare residents for the Blue Box program transition (to full producer responsibility) with a public education campaign. Staff also continued educating residents about litter and illegal dumping, and provided waste diversion guidance to three new multi-residential buildings. Further community engagement included collaborating with York Region to promote the Share, Reuse, Repair Hub, proclaiming and promoting Circular Economy Month in October, and completing another successful Clean Up, Green Up Weeks with over 10,800 participants.

Communicating the Environment Strategy

In 2025, the City continued to provide environmental education and outreach to the community by:

- promoting the City’s environmental achievements, programs, and stewardship opportunities on City webpages and social media accounts;
- developing environmental education materials, communications pieces, and outreach activities for staff and the community;
- dedicating close to 250 staff hours at 22 education and engagement events, including:
 - City-led events (e.g. Earth Day, World Migratory Bird Day, and RH Blooms)
 - community-led events (e.g. Climate Action RH Solar Panel Seminar, and Aging Well On Purpose seniors workshop)
 - Council-led events (e.g. ECO Family Fest)
- coordinating presentations about environmental issues and stewardship for residents (e.g. Mayor’s Sustainability Speaker Series) and staff (e.g. Coffee and Climate Change Series, and SDG 101 webinar with UNU-INWEH);
- participating in environmental liaison meetings and speaking engagements with community groups, local schools and youth to listen to concerns and promote participation in City environmental initiatives; and
- collaborating with local partners to deliver environmental education (e.g. Teen Leaders program with Richmond Hill Public Library; bird nest box monitoring with TRCA and Richmond Hill Bird Team; and Truth and Reconciliation event with Miskwaadesi Studio).

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Environmental Scorecard

The Strategy requires staff to produce an Environmental Scorecard every five years, to publicly communicate implementation progress at regular increments. In 2025, staff developed the City's second Environmental Scorecard (Attachment 3 – 2020-2024 Environmental Scorecard), which conveys trends and achievements in Richmond Hill's environmental performance following the "greening" framework established in the Strategy. Annual data collected for key indicators of the eight theme areas (e.g., wildlife, energy, waste) is analyzed and used to create colourful infographics. These are complemented by interesting "Did You Know?" boxes and concise summaries of status and next steps.

Overall, the Scorecard shows that progress is being made in many areas, but some challenges remain – underscoring the importance of leadership, innovation, partnerships, and community involvement as we pursue our environmental goals.

The Scorecard will be available digitally on Richmond Hill's website and in print version at public events and venues. Staff intend to share it with the community for the first time on April 18 at the City's Earth Day event.

Climate Change Considerations

This report considers climate change causes, impacts, and solutions as they relate to the City's Environment Strategy, which aims to align municipal environmental goals with actions that reduce GHG emissions and improve resilience to extreme weather.

Next Steps

Throughout 2026, staff will continue working on applicable Environment Strategy actions, with biannual steering committee meetings to share progress, discuss challenges and opportunities, and celebrate successes.

Staff will also begin looking forward to Phase 3 (2027-2031), to discuss how remaining actions can be addressed and how the City can continue protecting, enhancing, and restoring its natural environment once the existing Strategy is complete.

Financial Implications:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this staff report.

Relationship to Strategic Plan 2024-2027:

The 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Report relates to Pillar 1: Growing a Livable, Sustainable Community. Specifically, it supports Priority 2: Implement environmental sustainability practices in our work in collaboration with the community, including planning for climate change mitigation and adaptation, by providing updates on how staff is collaborating with the community and other partners to improve Richmond Hill's environmental footprint and address climate change.

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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 1 – 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker
- Attachment 2 – 2025 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet
- Attachment 3 – 2020-2024 Environmental Scorecard

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Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SRPBS.26.009 – 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Update and Environmental Scorecard.docx
Attachments:	- SRPBS.26.009 Att 1 - 2025 Environment Strategy Progress Tracker.pdf - SRPBS.26.009 Att 2 - 2025 Environment Strategy Highlight Sheet.pdf - SRPBS.26.009 Att 3 -2020-2024 Environmental Scorecard.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Mar 25, 2026

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

Maria Flores - Mar 24, 2026 - 5:19 PM

Gus Galanis - Mar 24, 2026 - 7:51 PM

Darlene Joslin - Mar 25, 2026 - 10:22 AM