

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 30, 2023

WARD: 5

TITLE: THORNHILL SNAP MULTI-YEAR AGREEMENT AND UPDATE

FROM:

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek authority to enter into a new multi-year Agreement with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) for continued and expanded delivery of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) within Thornhill.

Report Highlights

- SNAP is a program for Sustainable Urban Renewal and Climate Action that focuses on strategic neighbourhoods with overlapping priorities. SNAP helps municipalities improve efficiencies, draw strong community support, and build implementation partnerships for a broad range of initiatives in the public and private realms.
- TRCA has the unique expertise in delivery of the SNAP Program. The SNAP model was developed by TRCA and TRCA has successfully led its implementation in ten neighbourhoods in various municipalities across its jurisdiction. TRCA has also advised municipalities and other Conservation Authorities in an additional six neighbourhoods outside its jurisdiction that were interested in applying the SNAP model to develop local neighbourhood action plans.
- On February 8th, Council approved the 2023 Budget and 2024-2026 Financial Plan. Included was item PL-9575-20-Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan in the amount of \$200,000.00 for 2023.
- This Agreement is exempt under the current City of Vaughan Corporate Procurement Policy PS-003.

Recommendation

1. That the Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management or designate be authorized to execute the Thornhill SNAP Program Agreement and any related documents, including any amendments, with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority on behalf of the City of Vaughan, in accordance with this Report, in a form satisfactory to Legal Services.

Background

The City of Vaughan has a history of collaboration with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

For many years, TRCA has undertaken a variety of projects in partnership with, and on behalf of, the City and which are of common interest to both organizations. The preparation, planning and delivery of an Action Plan for the Thornhill SNAP is an example of one such project undertaken in partnership with TRCA. Other past and current examples include:

- Technical support and guidance including partnering on financing and fundraising initiatives related to important flood protection and restoration projects such as Edgeley Pond and Black Creek Renewal and Redelmeier Pond.
- Public outreach in Flood Vulnerable Areas and Flood Emergency Response Planning.
- Trail planning and development, including projects such as Vaughan Super Trail and Vaughan Humber Trail.
- Parks and greenspace development and management, including North Maple Regional Park.
- Programming at Kortright Centre for Conservation, such as Growing with Nature – Therapy in the Woods and various events involving the City and York Region.
- Community Learning and Education Programs.
- Citizen-based Restoration Events.

The City and the TRCA may enter into this Agreement pursuant to section 21.1.1 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* (the “**Act**”), which enables an authority to provide programs and services on behalf of a municipality within its jurisdiction under either a memorandum of understanding or an agreement.

TRCA has led development of the Council endorsed Thornhill SNAP Action Plan

SNAP is a program for sustainable urban renewal and climate action delivered in strategic neighbourhoods where multiple priorities overlap. It uses both a bottom-up and top-down approach to bring together municipal and TRCA technical objectives with residents' priorities. The SNAP model looks at maximizing the sustainability and climate resilience impact of infrastructure projects beyond departmental scope of work and by considering various department's projects. Through departmental collaboration to meet multiple goals and objectives, SNAP adds significant environmental and social benefits through innovation in design and public engagement.

The TRCA developed a mapping framework to organize urban renewal priorities into a comprehensive set of service area themes reflecting sustainable community attributes. Data layers obtained for the framework represented current available data for planned projects, environmental priorities and known neighbourhood climate change vulnerabilities across departments and organizations. Using this framework, the Thornhill neighbourhood was selected by representatives from seven City Divisions, in collaboration with TRCA for the City's first SNAP project because of the following overlapping priorities for needed urban renewal:

- It is a flood vulnerable area.
- It has the highest energy use and intensity in the City and has one of the highest water use rates in York Region.
- It is a high priority area for low impact development for stormwater management.
- It has a high concentration of seniors and areas of concentrated social disadvantage.
- There are multiple planned municipal capital infrastructure projects located within the Thornhill neighbourhood. These capital infrastructure projects are an important aspect of selecting a SNAP neighbourhood, as they can be leveraged to achieve higher environmental, resiliency and social impact within the community.

On May 14, 2019, Council passed a Member's Resolution to support the City's commitment to a SNAP in partnership with TRCA, focused on the Thornhill neighbourhood. The City and TRCA were successful in obtaining funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to undertake the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan, matched with funds from the Gallanough stormwater retrofit project (Stormwater Management Improvements in Gallanough Park and Surrounding Area Project budget, Capital Project EN-1879-12). A single source contract was awarded to TRCA to lead the community engagement, stakeholder consultation and the development of the Action Plan in collaboration with the City of Vaughan.

On September 27, 2021, Council endorsed the Action Plan for the Thornhill SNAP. The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan was co-developed by TRCA, the Thornhill community, and City and Regional staff from multiple departments to improve the local environment, build resiliency to climate change and encourage positive behaviour changes among residents.

Local knowledge and input were integral to identifying important community characteristics that contributed to the final Action Plan's concepts and recommendations. The Action Plan is based on technical objectives, planned municipal projects and resident priorities and it provides recommendations for sustainability and climate resilience actions on both private property and in the public realm. Implementation of Integrated Action Areas and Signature Projects, in the short term and over the next five to ten years, will make Thornhill more sustainable, climate resilient and livable.

Implementation of the Action Plan was initiated alongside finalization of the Action Plan report beginning in 2020 and 2021, including habitat and urban forest enhancement at Hefhill Park; the Oakbank Pond Park Project (including pollinator gardens, public planting event and educational signage); focus groups to inform the design of the Residential Retrofit Program; and a series of educational webinars to help homeowners and businesses in the community become more sustainable.

Recent Thornhill SNAP successes

To advance implementation of the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan, a Purchase Order Exemption was awarded to TRCA in 2022 and ends on June 30, 2023. Under this contract, the following work was implemented:

- Design and construction of a rain garden in York Hill District Park, as part of a larger Environmental Learning Zone. A planting event and educational workshop for the rain garden will occur in Q2 2023, with both local schools and community members being invited to attend.
- Native tree and shrub plantings in York Hill District Park.
- Engagement with private property owners and implementation of a network of green infrastructure projects across the neighbourhood, including urban agriculture, pollinator habitat and urban forest enhancement in multi-unit residential buildings, homes, and institutional properties. The engagement work laid the ground for future partnerships for continued greening of multi-unit residential and institutional properties. Design of educational signage, to be

installed in 2023 at various locations across the neighbourhood, explaining the benefits and functioning of green infrastructure.

- Development of partnerships with the Thornhill Historical Society and Gallanough Resource Centre, towards the celebration of the neighbourhood's heritage and the achievement of Action Plan goals.
- Collaboration with Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development to advise the revitalization of Gallanough Park.
- Vegetation clearing and tree safety work, soil testing and site visits were conducted at the JEH MacDonald House property in preparation for the enhancement/replanting of a historical orchard and a community tree planting event in spring 2023.
- Orchard Care training for Parks Forestry and Horticulture staff to build capacity to maintain the JEH MacDonald House orchard and potential future projects.
- Delivery of an educational webinar to help homeowners make their home more sustainable and advance the Home Retrofit Program.
- Development of a network of resident volunteers and delivery of five neighbourhood newsletters encouraging participation in sustainable action.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports brought to City Council regarding the Thornhill SNAP can be found at the following links:

[Council meeting extract, May 14, 2019](#) – A Member's Resolution was passed by Council in May 2019 in support of the Thornhill SNAP.

[Member's Resolution, June 4, 2019](#) – Council passed a Member's Resolution to declare a climate emergency and lists actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including the Thornhill SNAP.

[Council meeting extract, December 17, 2019](#) – Council adopted Green Directions Vaughan 2019 and includes a specific action to explore a SNAP project in Vaughan.

[Council meeting extract, September 27, 2021](#) – Council endorsed the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan and directed staff to seek external funding.

[Council meeting extract, June 28, 2022](#) – Council approved a budget increase to Thornhill SNAP Capital Project PL-9757-20 with funding from grants and woodlot compensation.

Analysis and Options

Staff propose a multi-year Agreement with TRCA for continued and expanded delivery of the Thornhill SNAP

- The main advantage to engaging TRCA in a multi-year Agreement for the development and implementation of SNAP projects is that the SNAP neighbourhood model was developed by TRCA, therefore the TRCA has unique expertise and experience in delivering SNAP projects.
- The multi-year Agreement will run for an initial term length of four years with an option to renew.
- TRCA has successfully delivered SNAP projects in ten neighbourhoods in various municipalities across their jurisdiction. It has also advised the delivery of SNAP in 6 additional neighbourhoods outside their jurisdiction that utilized the same model.
- TRCA has also led a collaborative of nine municipalities dedicated to identifying and applying factors of success for advancing the neighbourhood model towards the achievement of municipal goals.
- The SNAP model's success has been recognized beyond Canada. SNAP has been replicated in 17 municipalities in the Netherlands, advised by TRCA, and was included by C40 Cities within the top 100 list of innovative climate action projects worldwide.
- Furthermore, TRCA is the sole Conservation Authority covering the City of Vaughan and providing such SNAP-related services within the City's jurisdiction.
- The multi-year agreement is exempt under the City of Vaughan's Corporate Procurement Policy PS-003.
- The aim is for the multi-year Agreement to proceed in accordance with the SNAP implementation framework. Under the authority sought in this Report, designated staff would also be able to execute amendments in the case that the implementation framework needs to be revised with respect to scope of work and delivery thereof.
- Upon completion of the SNAP in Thornhill, the TRCA has expressed a willingness to begin a new SNAP in another neighbourhood in Vaughan. The City can explore and evaluate further options in the future with the TRCA.

The aim of the SNAP model is to maximize impact in strategic geographical areas, where multiple urban renewal, climate vulnerabilities and sustainability priorities overlap. The model helps municipalities improve efficiencies, draw strong community support, and build implementation partnerships for a broad range of initiatives in the public and private realms. The SNAP model is also a tangible approach to translate the City's sustainability plan, Green Directions Vaughan 2019, into a neighbourhood scale.

Staff realize there are additional benefits to the City to engage with TRCA for the delivery of SNAP projects, these include:

- The technical expertise and skills of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods team, in the Education and Training Division and other Divisions at TRCA, allows the provision of cost-effective project management, technical analysis, design and implementation of environmental and climate resilience projects. Additionally, TRCA can mobilize quickly, facilitate community engagement, meet tight timelines and satisfy federal and provincial environmental standards.
- TRCA can increase the investment of partner municipalities for project implementation through fundraising and innovative partnership development with all sectors. To date, the City's investment has been doubled through fundraising.
- TRCA can build the capacity of local leaders, agencies, and organizations to guarantee long term project maintenance and sustainability and the continued achievement of neighbourhood sustainability goals.
- TRCA can leverage partnerships with other municipal partners (e.g. Peel and York Region and City of Toronto) to coordinate integrated, innovative and potentially larger scale solutions that might not otherwise be possible.
- Where the City and TRCA enter a contract or partnership, frequently the partnerships incorporate a system of maintenance, monitoring, assessment, evaluation, refinement, and sharing of lessons learned towards scaling or systems-change, following implementation of projects, that exceeds the services and timelines of what private contractors would typically undertake.

Highlights of the Agreement include the following:

- The TRCA commits to:
 - Lead overall SNAP project management and the development of a yearly workplan and corresponding budget, in collaboration with the City of Vaughan.
 - Design and deliver a one-window home retrofit program which helps homeowners and the City address local priorities (e.g. flood risk reduction, stormwater management, tree planting, water and energy efficiency and renewables, rainwater supported urban agriculture, waste management, revitalization projects for multi-unit residential, commercial and institutional properties, etc.).
 - Design and deliver programming and inclusive community engagement strategies that fosters community connections, emergency preparedness and capacity building for environmental action and resilience.

- Lead monitoring, evaluation, reporting and knowledge sharing at various scales, including project, neighbourhood, system and within industry networks.
- The City of Vaughan commits to:
 - Lead public infrastructure projects such as park revitalization and greening of community centres in collaboration with TRCA.
 - Develop yearly workplans and corresponding budgets towards the delivery of the Thornhill SNAP.
 - Work collaboratively with the TRCA to secure additional funding or resourcing as necessary to support implementation projects.

Implementing the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan and monitoring progress

To facilitate the implementation of the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan:

- The SNAP team has developed a preliminary implementation framework that identifies potential partnerships and collaboration opportunities over the next five years. The implementation framework serves as a high-level guide to identify project leads and includes estimated timelines and potential funding sources. It will be a living document that will be updated with additional details as projects are developed and implemented.
- On a yearly basis, a workplan with clear deliverables responding to the Action Plan recommendations and goals will be developed by TRCA in collaboration with its primary liaison at the City (currently under the Policy, Planning and Special Programs Department). TRCA will prepare an estimated budget corresponding to the deliverables established in the workplan for the specific year, which will be approved in writing by the City.
- The Project Management Team for the SNAP will be updated every year on Action Plan implementation progress and will discuss and advise yearly plans and innovations in the SNAP.
- Working groups may be established, as required, for selected integrated projects that require multi-divisional collaboration and/or collaboration with specific local agencies or organizations. The working groups will support partnership development, assist with fundraising efforts, and provide ongoing input through the implementation and maintenance of the projects.

Output and outcome indicators identified in the Action Plan's monitoring framework will be tracked under the leadership of TRCA for each project, towards the achievement of overall neighbourhood sustainability goals.

Financial Impact

To date, a total investment of \$226,800 from the City of Vaughan for planning and implementation of the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan has been leveraged to secure \$232,536 from external grants.

Based on past experience with other SNAP projects, it is expected that investments from the City will continue to be leveraged in a similar proportion in future years.

Sustained municipal seed funding over the next four to eight years is fundamental to continue fundraising for the successful execution of the Thornhill SNAP.

Policy Planning and Special Programs submitted a budget request through the 2023 budget cycle to top-up PL-9575-20 by \$200,000 annually from 2023-2026, which was approved.

The following is a breakdown of funding that has been received and spent on the Thornhill SNAP.

1. Development of the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan - spent:
 - A grant of \$134,736 from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Green Municipal Fund.
 - A grant of \$25,000 through a TRCA application for the Transition 2050 funding stream for FCM's Municipalities for Climate Innovation Program. This funding has been provided directly to TRCA.
 - A budget of \$124,000 from the Stormwater Management Improvements in Gallanough Park and Surrounding Area Project Budget (Capital Project EN-1879-12), allocated for engagement for the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan.

2. Implementation of quick start projects – spent:
 - A grant of \$10,000 from Enbridge's Municipal Energy Plan Incentive Offer towards for the Home Retrofit Program (focus group sessions for the design of the program and webinars to help homeowners make their homes more sustainable)
 - A grant of \$5,000 from York Region's Greening Action Partnership Fund towards urban forest/ habitat enhancement in neighborhood parks
 - A grant of \$5,000 from TD Friends of the Environment towards Oakbank Pond improvements and community engagement project

3. Implementation of Signature Projects – spent:

- A grant of \$6,000 from Enbridge Fueling Futures fund to contribute to the York Hill District Park Environmental Learning Zone.
- A commitment from the City for three years of funding at \$25,000 per annum for projects under Capital Project PL-9575-20. Funds remaining in Capital Project PL-9575-20 have been specifically assigned to advance green infrastructure projects, including engagement, education and coordination with landowners, detailed design and construction of green infrastructure elements, coordination and delivery of public plantings and nature-based education, and on-going fundraising.
- \$27,800 transferred from the Natural Heritage Compensation Reserve Account to be used for tree planting initiatives at J.E.H MacDonald House.
- A grant of \$25,000 from the TD Green Space Grant program for the design and implementation of York Hill District Park's Environmental Learning Zone, including a rain garden, pollinator habitat and community engagement/ education activities.
- A grant of \$3,500 from Tree Canada for urban forest enhancement. Woodlot compensation in the amount of \$27,800 utilized for woodland enhancement at the JEH MacDonald House property.

In addition, TRCA was successful in securing \$18,300 from Environment Canada (EcoAction) towards the design and implementation of green infrastructure, and the delivery of nature-based education in the Thornhill SNAP. This initiative will be delivered in 2023-2024.

Operational Impact

Staff from Legal, Risk Management, Procurement Services, Parks Infrastructure and Planning and Delivery, Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations, Infrastructure Planning and Corporate Asset Management, Development Planning, and Infrastructure Delivery have been consulted with intent to review and advise on the final Agreement prior to execution.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Through the completion of the City's first SNAP project, we are joining a network of municipalities in York Region and across Ontario, and the Netherlands, that have committed to a collaborative, neighbourhood-based approach for advancing urban renewal, climate resilience and sustainability in older urban areas. The neighbourhood mapping exercise that was completed as a part of the Thornhill SNAP planning process also identified other strategic neighbourhoods with multiple urban renewal and climate priorities in the City that may be suitable for future SNAP projects. The action planning process that was successfully utilized in the Thornhill SNAP can be translated to these

other strategic neighbourhoods that require intensified action, to build an overall sustainable and resilient City.

Conclusion

The TRCA has broad experience, expertise and special knowledge in developing, implementing, and advising SNAP projects in Ontario and beyond, and has the ability to provide cost-effective project management, technical analysis and design, mobilize quickly for implementation, expedite required approvals, facilitate community involvement, provide maintenance and monitoring, develop innovative partnerships and inform broad systems change. Based on these benefits, staff recommend that the City enters into a multi-year Agreement, to undertake the delivery of the Thornhill SNAP.

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