

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, May 7, 2025

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: GREEN GUARDIANS COMMUNITY PROGRAMS STRATEGY

FROM:

Emilie Alderman, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek approval of the *Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy*, a four-year plan to engage, educate, and expand the City's Green Guardians environmental stewardship program.

Report Highlights

- Vaughan's continued growth and urbanization supports the expansion of the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program which aligns with the Term of Council Environmental Sustainability Strategic Priority.
- The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy four-year implementation plan is informed by a jurisdictional scan of best practices from municipalities across Canada.
- Under three focus areas, the plan commits to 19 actions over the next four years, aiming to increase engagement and boost environmental sustainability.
- The financial strategy identifies multiple funding sources, including internal efficiencies through continuous improvement, grants, sponsorships, partnerships with external organizations, and revenue from Green Guardians initiatives.

Recommendations

1. That the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy (Attachment 1), outlining a four-year implementation plan to expand the City's Green Guardians environmental stewardship program, be approved; and
2. That staff be directed to pursue funding options, including internal budget reallocations, grants, sponsorships, and cost-sharing partnerships, to support the strategy and its associated costs.

Background

The City's Green Guardians environmental stewardship program was endorsed by Council in 2021 and has engaged over 20,000 residents since its inception

Vaughan has a long-standing tradition of implementing environmental stewardship programs that effectively balance human health with environmental well-being. Vaughan Council endorsed the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program in 2021 and, since then, the program has led multiple seasons of volunteer-driven initiatives that have made a tangible difference, boosting civic pride and beautifying neighbourhoods. Initiatives include community cleanups, tree planting events, creation of pollinator beds, and recognition of properties through the Curb Appeal program. To date, over 20,000 people have been engaged through the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program, helping advance beautification and environmental stewardship across the city. Vaughan's continued expansion provided an opportunity to review the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program so that it continues to meet the demands of a growing city.

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy is based on three areas of focus and 19 actions to support program growth

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy provides a four-year plan to develop and grow the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program by focusing on three areas:

1. **Engage:** Deepen the connection with the community by actively involving residents in community-led initiatives such as cleanups, creation of pollinator beds and tree planting events.
2. **Educate:** Raise awareness and enhance knowledge about the importance of protecting and preserving the environment through educational initiatives that highlight environmental sustainability, plant and animal biodiversity, forestry, horticulture, and plant sciences.

3. **Expand:** Identify opportunities for growth and expansion by introducing new initiatives and establishing strategic partnerships, fostering inclusivity and engagement.

The strategy aims to expand the existing eight initiatives currently offered by the City and add five new initiatives. With 19 planned actions over the next four years, the strategy provides a framework to optimize the three areas of focus. See Attachment 1 for the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy.

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy aligns with the priorities identified in the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan and other Council endorsed strategic plans

By engaging residents and businesses, the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program encourages responsible use and protection of the natural environment, directly aligning with Council's commitment to environmental sustainability as identified in the Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan (2022–2026). The initiatives further support the development of active, engaged, and inclusive communities.

Additionally, the results of the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program contribute to several other Council-endorsed documents and initiatives, including Green Directions Vaughan (2021), the Litter Reduction Action Plan (2024–2026), and the Urban Forestry Management Plan (2024).

Previous Reports/Authority

[VAUGHAN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM](#)

Analysis

Vaughan's continued growth and urbanization provides opportunities for the expansion of the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program

Vaughan's population is expected to surpass half a million by 2051, suggesting an annual growth rate of 1.9 per cent over the next 30 years. This rapid growth and urbanization increase the need for community-driven sustainability actions to support healthy environments and vibrant communities.

The Green Guardians program engages residents and businesses to support community planting activities, community clean-ups, pollinator protection, and beautification efforts, fostering a sense of pride and ownership of local green spaces. In

addition, the program provides learning opportunities, including adopting eco-friendly practices to help conserve water, increase tree canopy, reduce storm-water run-off, and protect pollinators.

In addition to the growth in population, planned infrastructure projects, including North Maple Regional Park, McMillan Farm, and Edgely Park, provide opportunities for increased community engagement and program growth through volunteer-driven and community-led initiatives.

Plans to expand current offerings and introduce new initiatives were informed by a comprehensive jurisdictional scan, assessing over 30 programs across Canada

A jurisdictional review was conducted to evaluate over 30 community initiatives implemented by 10 municipalities: Aurora, Brampton, Brantford, Calgary, Guelph, Markham, Ottawa, Richmond Hill, Toronto and Vancouver. The primary objective of this review was to assess best practices from similar programs implemented by other municipalities with the goal of enhancing and refining existing offerings while identifying opportunities for new program development.

Although many programs resembled those offered through the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program, a few examples from other jurisdictions demonstrated success in boosting community participation and resident satisfaction while creating more vibrant, livable communities. These initiatives have been incorporated into the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy.

Financial Impact

The successful implementation of the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy will require dedicated resources, including personnel, operational funding, and strategic partnerships.

Staffing and operational expenses for 2025 will be absorbed within the approved budget. In 2026, a budget request of \$161,410 will be submitted to establish a full-time permanent Program Coordinator (Grade 7) to oversee the coordination and delivery of the program, including community outreach, volunteer management, tracking results, and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. Additionally, \$41,000 in annual operational costs will be required to support a volunteer management system, paid marketing campaigns, and materials for public events and initiatives.

Staff will continue to leverage corporate sponsorships and grants to support operational expenses for community initiatives such as cleanups, tree planting events and pollinator gardens. By prioritizing efficiencies through continuous improvement and external grants, the City will optimize resource allocation to sustain the Green Guardians program.

Operational Impact

The development of the Green Guardians Community Program Strategy was completed in consultation with the following departments: Policy Planning and Special Projects, Environmental Services and Economic Development.

To ensure each initiative meets the community's needs, feedback from external participants and organizations will be gathered on a program-by-program basis, allowing for continuous improvement.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy will strengthen York Region's Greening Strategy (2022) and directly aligns with two action areas: enhancement and rehabilitation, and community stewardship and education. These areas focus on inspiring stewardship and action through education and facilitating connections with nature to enhance and rehabilitate natural environment on public and private lands.

Conclusion

Over the next four years, the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy will continue to build on the Green Guardians environmental stewardship program's successes, leveraging community involvement and strategic partnerships to create a more vibrant and sustainable city. By expanding eight existing initiatives and introducing five new ones, the City will empower both residents and businesses to actively contribute to preserving and enhancing Vaughan's natural environment while contributing significantly to the beautification, cleanliness and safety of neighbourhoods. The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy provides a plan for the development and delivery of the City's environmental stewardship program.

For more information, please contact Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo, Director, Parks Forestry and Horticulture Operations, ext. 6308

Attachment

1. Green Guardians: Engage, Educate and Expand

Prepared by

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