

GREEN GUARDIANS

ENGAGE, EDUCATE AND EXPAND



May 2025





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A raised garden bed filled with various plants and flowers. Several colorful signs are placed in the garden, including a purple sign with a plant illustration, an orange sign with a hand icon and the word 'WASH', a blue sign with an eye icon and the word 'SEE', a red sign with a trash can icon and the word 'TRASH', and a yellow sign with a flame icon and the word 'LITTER'.

INTRODUCTION

Being one of Canada's fastest-growing cities, Vaughan's population is expected to reach 575,900 by 2051, necessitating a strong focus on environmental sustainability. It is crucial to maintain the health and viability of the City, creating and maintaining conditions under which Vaughan's residents and businesses can exist in productive harmony with nature while protecting human health and the environment.

Aiming to protect and foster a sustainable future, the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan identifies environmental sustainability as a strategic priority. Objectives include advancing stewardship of green infrastructure, supporting community and corporate sustainability initiatives, and investing in climate change mitigation and resilience. In alignment with these objectives, the Green Guardians program contributes to Vaughan's environmental and beautification goals, while reinforcing the City's dedication to environmental sustainability and active, engaged and inclusive communities.

Since its inception in 2022, Green Guardians has led multiple seasons of the Curb Appeal program and organized numerous community initiatives such as the 20-Minute Makeover, community cleanups, tree planting events, pollinator gardens, and tree and bench dedications. These efforts have engaged over 20,000 residents and local organizations, making a meaningful impact on Vaughan's environment.

The Green Guardians: Engage, Educate and Expand plan provides a framework for the growth and development of the program. The four-year plan focuses on growth using 'engage,' 'educate' and 'expand' as areas of focus. This plan aims to enhance existing initiatives and implement new ones over the next four years to help create a more sustainable environment and a vibrant city for current and future generations.





2024 AT A GLANCE

City of Vaughan maintains 800 hectares of park lands and open space, 195 hectares of woodlots, 1,600 horticulture assets and 130,000 trees.

Curb Appeal



- More than 1,670 curb appeal nominations
- 36 volunteer judges

Community Cleanups



- 15 community cleanups with more than 250 participants

Grow with Vaughan



- 21 flowerbeds, pollinator beds and flowerpots sponsored by Vaughan-based businesses generating \$58,000 in revenue for the City

20-Minute Makeover



- 115 teams and approximately 6,400 participants registered

National Pollinator Week



- Distributed 1,700 pollinator seeds in partnership with the Woodbridge Pollinator Group
- Engaged 320 youth during Flight of the Monarch Day

Tree and Bench Dedication



- Processed more than 20 Tree and Bench Dedication applications

Corporate and Community Tree Planting



- 50 volunteers contributed to







COUNCIL COMMITMENTS

Council has consistently demonstrated its commitment to environmental sustainability, beyond the goals outlined in the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan. This commitment is reflected in key initiatives aimed at enhancing Vaughan’s natural environment, promoting community engagement and fostering long-term ecological resilience, including:

- **Urban Forest Management Plan (2024)** is a comprehensive strategy developed to manage and enhance the urban forest within the city’s boundaries. The plan aims to protect and care for every tree in Vaughan, recognizing their importance to the city’s character and quality of life.
- **Litter Reduction Action Plan (2024-2026)** is a data-driven framework to address litter issues throughout the city. The action plan includes a commitment to enhance education and engagement through community-based cleanup initiatives.

- **Green Directions Vaughan (2021)** emphasizes the importance of educational programs and community outreach to enhance understanding and implementation of environmental practices across the city.
- **Beautification 2.0 (2021)** guides the City’s beautification efforts by establishing service levels for flowerbeds, planters and hanging baskets, ensuring consistent maintenance and plant selection across public spaces.
- **The Mayor’s Monarch Pledge (2018)** commits to a range of actions designed to support and protect the pollinator population in Vaughan. As part of this commitment, the City has planted approximately 5,700 square metres of pollinator habitats across 20 sites.

With the key focus areas – Engage, Educate and Expand – the plan aims to enhance eight existing programs and implement five new ones over the next four years to create a more sustainable environment and vibrant city for current and future generations.

AREAS OF FOCUS





ENGAGE

Deepen the City's connection with the community by actively involving residents in community-led initiatives such as cleanups, pollinator bed creation and planting events.

Commitment 1

Strengthen community connections – deepen connection with the community with increased presence at community events and acknowledgement of community achievements.

Commitment 2

Empower local leaders and volunteers – offer community members opportunities for meaningful participation through community-led initiatives, fostering long-term impact and collaboration.







EDUCATE

Raise awareness and enhance knowledge about the importance of protecting and preserving the environment with educational initiatives that showcase environmental sustainability, plant and animal biodiversity, forestry, horticulture and plant sciences.

Commitment 3

Promote sustainable practices – increase knowledge and awareness by collaborating with schools, neighbourhood associations, community groups and organizations to incorporate eco-friendly habits.



EXPAND

Identify opportunities for growth and expansion by introducing new initiatives and establishing strategic partnerships, thus fostering inclusivity and engagement.

Commitment 4

Expand outreach to drive program growth – collaborate with key organizations to strengthen existing programs and develop new ones that address emerging needs and opportunities.

Commitment 5

Increase inclusivity and resilience – explore opportunities to cater to a wide range of interests and groups, reflecting Vaughan’s diversity.





CURRENT PROGRAMS

The City currently administers eight initiatives through the Green Guardians program. Over the next four years, we aim to enhance and expand the existing programs:

- Community Planting Fund
- Curb Appeal
- Community Cleanup
- Grow with Vaughan
- 20-Minute Makeover
- National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day
- Tree and Bench Dedication
- Corporate and Community Tree Planting





COMMUNITY PLANTING FUND

The Community Planting Fund encourages schools and community groups to enhance the health, resilience and sustainability of Vaughan’s natural environment through community-led projects such as pollinator gardens, rain gardens and species-at-risk habitats. Approved projects under this fund directly contribute to the City’s commitment to environmental sustainability, including the National Wildlife Federation’s Mayor’s Monarch Pledge.

Community Impact

- Improve the local environment with projects that enhance greenspaces and wildlife habitats.
- Foster creativity, teamwork and a sense of ownership as participants research and learn about various ways to contribute to environmental conservation.
- Expand knowledge of native plants, pollinators and gardening practices.

“ The Community Planting Fund has allowed the Woodbridge Pollinator Group to implement the Mayor’s Monarch Pledge. Our members feel the urgency to address the critical decline of biodiversity locally and globally. Having the privilege of working as a group in Woodbridge along with the City has given us a sense of place and a sense of ownership and responsibility toward our environment. It’s also given us a feeling of connection to our city and our region. The grant has given us an outlet for positive group action and we’re happy that our city shares our vision for preserving and restoring our local natural environment. ”

- Woodbridge Pollinator Group



Did you know? Guardian Angels Catholic Elementary School extended the pollinator garden planted in 2023 at the front of the school and uses it as a pollinator learning garden.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Create online portfolios highlighting the impact of approved projects on the City’s website and through social media campaigns to inspire participation, increase engagement and foster community connections.	2025
Broaden outreach efforts to engage and promote the Community Planting Fund to diverse cultural and environmental groups.	2025-2027
Consider expanding the funding availability to include food/herb gardens, outdoor learning spaces and sensory gardens.	2028



CURB APPEAL

The Curb Appeal program is an annual beautification program that recognizes homeowners who take pride in maintaining and beautifying their properties. Through volunteer-led evaluations, residents and businesses are motivated to actively participate in the beautification of their neighborhood, fostering a collective sense of pride and ownership. In 2024, the City awarded more than 850 signs to outstanding properties for their exceptional landscaping that incorporated a variety of flowers, plants and rain barrels, demonstrating sustainable lawn and garden care.

Community Impact

- Beautify neighbourhoods and boost civic pride.
- Encourage sustainable landscaping practices, including the use of drought-resistant plants, rain barrels and pollinator-friendly gardens.
- Raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Introduce an interactive digital map showcasing gardens that have been recognized under the Curb Appeal program.	2026



COMMUNITY CLEANUP

The Community Cleanup program is an opportunity for residents to unite and act against litter while raising awareness about the negative impact it has on our environment. It actively engages community groups, schools, businesses, local and non-profit organizations by inviting them to participate in litter collection events throughout Vaughan’s parks, trails and open spaces throughout the year.

Community Impact

- Hands-on involvement in learning the importance of environmental stewardship.
- Shared responsibility in preserving our environment and protecting local ecosystems.
- Creating a culture of respect for the environment.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Develop educational resources and learning sessions at Vaughan Public Libraries and community centers focused on litter reduction, recycling and the positive impact of cleanups, raising awareness and encouraging sustainable practices.	2026
Partner with schools and community organizations to drive program growth and increase awareness around the negative impacts of litter on the environment, encouraging environmental stewardship.	2027

In 2023, the City conducted its first-ever litter audit. The Green Guardians Community Cleanup initiatives contribute directly to commitments identified in the Litter Reduction Action Plan (2024-2026) by encouraging community members, schools, local and non-profit organizations to help preserve the environment by collecting litter in parks, trails and open spaces throughout the year.



GROW WITH VAUGHAN

Launched in 2020, the Grow with Vaughan program is an annual sponsorship initiative designed to support and engage local businesses. It provides a unique opportunity for businesses to enhance their brand visibility by sponsoring flowerbeds, pollinator beds or flowerpots at key locations across Vaughan. By offering cost-effective advertising opportunities, the City supports local businesses' contribution to the beautification of our neighborhoods, while increasing their brand awareness and strengthening their connections with the community.

Community Impact

- Promote pollinator-friendly environments and boost community pride.
- Provide cost-effective opportunities for local businesses to promote their services.

“ We are thrilled with the opportunity to make our community a more beautiful place. The Grow with Vaughan program provides an opportunity for us to work together to achieve that goal. ”
 - Bruno's Cars



Did you know? According to engagement surveys from the 2021 Beautification 2.0 Plan, 71 per cent of residents believe that the 'Grow with Vaughan' initiative presents an excellent opportunity for small businesses, viewing it as an effective way to offset maintenance costs and enhance beautification efforts.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Introduce multi-year discounts and early-bird rates to incentivize and increase participation.	2026
Explore opportunities to recognize local sponsors on the City's website.	2027



20-MINUTE MAKEOVER

The 20-Minute Makeover is a week-long annual community-driven environmental initiative that invites residents, schools, businesses, local organizations and City staff to spend 20 minutes cleaning up litter. Held in honor of Earth Day, the event encourages participants to improve the cleanliness of Vaughan’s public spaces by tackling litter and waste in neighborhoods, parks, trails and other outdoor areas. The City provides the necessary tools to make cleaning easier, empowering community members to take action and contribute to a cleaner environment.

Community Impact

- Unite residents, businesses, schools, organizations and City staff in a collective effort to improve community spaces.
- Raise awareness about environmental stewardship and waste reduction.
- Boost civic pride while enhancing the natural environment.

“Participating in the City of Vaughan’s environmental cleanup was a rewarding and positive experience, bringing the community together to make a real difference. It felt amazing to contribute to a cleaner, greener environment while working alongside passionate volunteers and friends!”

– Creating Alternatives

ACTION	TIMELINE
Increase participation rates by enhancing outreach efforts targeting large corporations and businesses.	2027



NATIONAL POLLINATOR WEEK AND FLIGHT OF THE MONARCH DAY

National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day are education campaigns, as part of the 2018 Mayor’s Monarch Pledge, aimed to raise awareness and support the conservation of pollinators, particularly monarch butterflies. As part of this initiative, the City offers pollinator seed packets to residents during City events and by mail, encouraging community members to plant native species on their property to provide food and habitat for pollinators.

Community Impact

- Provides residents with a variety of engaging online and accessible opportunities to learn about and support pollinator protection.
- Increase knowledge and awareness about pollinator conservation including creating pollinator-friendly habitats.

The City of Vaughan proclaims **National Pollinator Week** on the third week of June each year to raise awareness about the importance of pollinators like birds, bees, butterflies, bats and beetles, which are vital to our ecosystem. Residents are encouraged to plant pollinator-friendly gardens.

The City of Vaughan proclaims **Flight of the Monarch Day** on Aug. 20 each year. This annual event is dedicated to raising awareness for the monarch butterfly and the need for habitat conservation. Residents are invited to take part in activities happening throughout August in support of the iconic monarch butterfly.

ACTION

Engage with community associations to identify opportunities to plant monarch-friendly gardens.

TIMELINE

2027



TREE AND BENCH DEDICATION

The Tree and Bench Dedication program offers a meaningful way for residents to honour loved ones and significant occasions while contributing to the beautification of the community and supporting environmental preservation. Trees play a crucial role in improving air quality, enhancing biodiversity and increasing urban tree canopy. Park benches dedicated through the program provide rest and enjoyment for residents while further enriching the natural beauty of the area.

Community Impact

- Creates a positive impact on the community's local ecosystem.
- Provides opportunities to honour loved ones in a meaningful way.

ACTION

Explore tree and bench sponsorship opportunities for local businesses.

TIMELINE

2028



CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING

The Corporate and Community Tree Planting program encourages businesses and community groups to actively participate in environmental stewardship by planting trees in Vaughan’s parks and green spaces.

Community Impact

- Provides hands-on experience, guidance and instruction on proper planting techniques.
- Improves urban environments by reducing carbon footprint and supporting pollinators and biodiversity.

“ Participating in the Corporate Tree Planting program allows us to make a lasting, positive impact on the environment, while also fostering a deep sense of fulfillment as we work together. Each tree planted symbolizes hope for the future, and it’s truly rewarding to know our efforts are part of a larger movement toward a greener, more sustainable Vaughan. ”

- Tru North Orthodontics

ACTION

Explore opportunities to increase participation from corporations and community groups for tree planting initiatives through increased program marketing and partnerships.

TIMELINE

2029



NEW PROGRAMS

The City aims to expand the Green Guardians program by implementing five new initiatives over the next four years. These programs will focus on engaging the community, educating residents and expanding the reach of our green efforts.

- Communities in Bloom
- Vaughan Gardeners
- Adopt-a-Park
- Vaughan Healthy Yards
- Vaughan Green Helpers





COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

Proposed Implementation: 2025 to 2026

Communities in Bloom (CiB) is a non-profit organization committed to fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility and beautification through community participation and the challenge of friendly competition.

The program recognizes cities and communities, both nationally and internationally, by engaging citizens to create a sustainable urban environment.

Community Impact

- Builds relationships with other municipalities across Ontario, sharing innovative approaches to urban beautification and environmental stewardship.
- Learn from best practices and successful beautification strategies.
- Place Vaughan on a national and international scale.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Collaborate with the CiB community to learn from best practices and innovative approaches to beautification.	2025
Explore opportunities to become recognized as a CiB participating member.	2026



VAUGHAN GARDENERS

Proposed Implementation: 2026

This program offers a series of engaging workshops and informative gardening sessions designed to empower residents to grow their own food and nurture plants and trees.

Community Impact

- Offers residents practical opportunities to enhance their gardening skills, including growing and preserving, seed-saving and invasive species management.
- Empowers residents to make informed decisions about plant care and sustainable food production.

ACTION

TIMELINE

Organize annual workshops and informational videos covering topics such as growing and preserving, seed saving and educating on invasive species.

2026



ADOPT-A-PARK

Proposed Implementation: 2026

The Adopt-a-Park program is designed to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for the care and upkeep of Vaughan’s green spaces. Through this program, local organizations, businesses, community groups and residents can “adopt” a local park or green space, taking on responsibilities such as litter removal, planting and general maintenance. This program is a refresh of the previous Adopt-a-Park program.

Community Impact

- Preservation of public assets through “adoption” of City parks and open spaces.
- Boost a sense of belonging and community pride.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Refresh the Adopt-a-Park program to include a minimum number of stewardship activities required per year and renewal of membership annually.	2026



VAUGHAN HEALTHY YARDS

Proposed Implementation: 2026 to 2028

The Healthy Yard Program provides Vaughan residents with the opportunity to pre-order rain barrels and composters, and offers educational resources on native trees, shrubs and perennial wildflower kits. The program offers tools to help residents create environmentally friendly yards and gardens, promoting sustainable practices such as biodiversity and pollinator support, water conservation and waste reduction.

Community Impact

- Provides residents with the tools to take meaningful action toward environmental sustainability on their property.
- Directly contributes to creating sustainable neighborhoods, encouraging lasting behavioral changes and a collective commitment to preserving the environment.
- Encourages residents to use native plants and employ sustainable gardening practices.

ACTION	TIMELINE
Offer educational resources, such as a guide to planting and garden designs, to residents about how to develop and maintain healthy yards and the benefits of eco-friendly practices on the environment through social media campaigns.	2026
Launch seasonal pre-order campaign list for rain barrels and composters for pickup.	2028



VAUGHAN GREEN HELPERS

Proposed Implementation: 2028

Through a volunteer-driven initiative, Vaughan Green Helpers will focus on tree planting, removal of invasive species, restoration of wildlife habitat and maintaining garden beds at key City sites, with a special emphasis on the new additions and expansions to North Maple Regional Park. This program aims to transform key City-owned spaces into vibrant gardens and pollinator-friendly habitats maintained by dedicated volunteer groups.

Community Impact

- Creates hands-on involvement and a shared sense of stewardship.
- Promotes environmental awareness and increases knowledge about local flowers, native species, biodiversity and pollinator practices.

North Maple Regional Park (NMRP): As one of the largest urban parks in Vaughan, NMRP serves as a cornerstone for recreational and environmental activities. With its expansive green spaces, trails and potential for ecological restoration projects, the park offers a prime location for Green Guardians programming, including volunteer-led litter management initiatives, tree planting events and biodiversity-focused activities.

ACTION

Establish a volunteer group to support conservation and gardening efforts at the North Maple Regional Park.

TIMELINE

2028

PROCLAMATIONS



National Flower Day – March 21



World Water Day – March 22



World Earth Day – April 22



Arbor Day – April 25



Compost Awareness Week – May 1 to May 7



World Migratory Bird Day – May 11



Provincial Action Against Litter Day – May 13



Recreation and Parks Month – June



Peace Tree Day – June 1



UN World Environment Day – June 5



National Pollinator Week – June 20 to June 26



Flight of the Monarch Day – Aug. 20



National Forest Week – Sept. 19 to Sept. 25



World Cleanup Day – Sept. 20



Waste Reduction Week – Oct. 17 to Oct. 23



Imagine A Day Without Water – Oct. 20



CONCLUSION

The Green Guardians program is a testament to Vaughan's commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement. By focusing on the pillars of Engage, Educate and Expand, the program enhances the City's green initiatives and fosters a sense of ownership and pride among residents. The integration of successful practices from other municipalities, coupled with the introduction of new and innovative programs, ensures that Vaughan remains at the forefront of environmental sustainability.

Over the next four years, the Green Guardians program will continue to build on its successes, leveraging community involvement and strategic partnerships to create a more vibrant and sustainable city. By expanding existing initiatives and introducing new programs, the City empowers both residents and businesses to actively contribute to preserving and enhancing Vaughan's natural environment.

To ensure each initiative meets the community's needs, feedback will be gathered on a program-by-program basis. Along with its growth, the City of Vaughan is committed to creating a greener, healthier and more connected community. The Green Guardians program is not just a plan; it is a call to action for every resident to contribute to a legacy of environmental stewardship that will benefit generations to come.







FOUR-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION

ENGAGE

Deepen the connection with the community by actively involving residents in community-led initiatives such as cleanups, creation of pollinator beds and planting events.

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.

EXPAND

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

ROADMAP (2025 TO 2029)

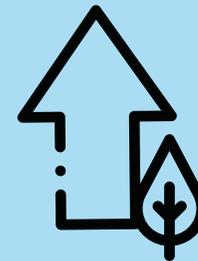
- Strengthen community connections
- Empower local leaders and volunteers



- Promote sustainability



- Expand outreach to drive program growth
- Increase inclusivity and resilience



PROGRAM	ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Communities in Bloom	Collaborate with the CiB community to learn from best practices and innovative approaches to beautification. Explore opportunities to become recognized as a CiB participating member.	2025-2026
Community Planting Fund	Create online portfolios highlighting the impact of approved projects on the City of Vaughan’s website and through social media campaigns, to inspire participation, increase engagement and foster community connections. Broaden outreach efforts to engage and promote the Community Planting Fund to diverse cultural and environmental groups. Consider expanding the funding availability to include food and herb gardens, outdoor learning spaces and sensory gardens.	2025 2027 2028
Adopt-a-Park	Refresh the Adopt-a-Park program to include a minimum number of stewardship activities required per year and renewal of membership annually.	2026
Curb Appeal	Introduce a digital interactive map showcasing gardens that have been recognized under the Curb Appeal program.	2026
Vaughan Gardeners	Organize annual workshops and informational videos covering topics such as growing and preserving, seed saving and educating on invasive species.	2026
Community Cleanup	Partner with schools and community organizations to drive program growth and increase awareness around the negative impacts of litter on the environment, encouraging environmental stewardship. Develop educational resources and learning sessions at Vaughan Public Libraries and community centers focused on litter reduction, recycling and the positive impact of cleanups, raising awareness and encouraging sustainable practices.	2026-2027
Grow with Vaughan	Introduce multi-year discounts and early-bird rates to incentivize and increase participation. Explore opportunities to recognize local sponsors on the City’s website.	2026-2027

PROGRAM	ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Vaughan Healthy Yards	Offer educational resources such as a guide to planting and garden designs to residents about how to develop and maintain healthy yards and the benefits of eco-friendly practices on the environment through social media campaigns. Launch seasonal pre-order campaign list for rain barrels and composters for pickup.	2026-2028
20-Minute Makeover	Increase participation rates by enhancing outreach efforts targeting large corporations and businesses.	2027
National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day	Engage with community associations to identify opportunities to plant monarch gardens.	2027
Tree and Bench Dedication	Explore tree and bench sponsorship opportunities for local businesses.	2028
Vaughan Green Helpers	Establish a volunteer group to support conservation and gardening efforts at the North Maple Regional Park.	2028
Corporate and Community Tree Planting	Explore opportunities to increase participation from corporations and community groups for tree planting initiatives, through increased program marketing and partnerships.	2029

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