

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 13, 2025

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: GREENSPACE STRATEGIC PLAN

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council endorsement of the Greenspace Strategic Plan that will provide the basis for the City's planning, design, acquisition and implementation of parks and greenspaces.

Report Highlights

- The Greenspace Strategic Plan is a broad and comprehensive document which will identify and prioritize strategic initiatives, defining the future direction while developing the philosophy, policies, guidelines, and recommended strategic actions for the provision of City-wide and local greenspaces and parks.
- The Plan is developed in partnership with the community through extensive consultation with key stakeholders, industry leaders, community groups and Indigenous groups through three phases of engagement.
- The Greenspace Strategic Plan includes a current state analysis of parkland, benchmark study, alignment with City and provincial policy planning documents, measurement methodology and planning framework, a roadmap for acquiring and developing new parks, financial analysis, policy and strategic action recommendations.
- The Greenspace Strategic Plan sets a vision informed through eight goals, and results in recommending 29 strategic actions.
- Policy recommendations have been incorporated into the Vaughan Official Plan 2025 and align with messaging pertaining to the Community Spaces Plan and Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces Study.

Recommendations

1. THAT the Greenspace Strategic Plan be approved, in principle.
2. THAT the implementation of recommendations and strategic actions in the Greenspace Strategic Plan be subject to the reconciliation and impact assessment of other completed or ongoing City of Vaughan Official Plan, Master Plans and Secondary Plans.

Background

Parks and greenspaces are essential to people's health and well-being – they help residents live active lives, connect with nature, and with each other.

City parks and greenspaces promote healthier lifestyles, encourage physical activity through a variety of outdoor facilities, support stress reduction and social interaction, all of which are critical for improving overall personal health and well-being. Parks and greenspaces also act as tools for ecology as they help preserve important natural landscapes and wildlife habitat within urban settings and greatly assist the City by improving climate resiliency.

Research confirms that parks and greenspaces are indispensable contributors to Vaughan's prosperity, acting as economic catalysts that help the City attract investments, retain talent, and boost property values. These areas serve as vibrant hubs for tourism, supporting local businesses, accommodations, and restaurants, which assist in fostering continuous economic growth to enhance Vaughan's overall vibrancy.

Recent changes to provincial legislation reduce the City's ability to achieve traditional parkland and greenspace provision targets, requiring that a new approach be considered.

With changing legislation affecting parkland dedication, along with continued increasing growth rates, Vaughan is transitioning from a traditional suburban model to an intensified city with a forecasted population of 575,900 by 2051. It is critical that Vaughan continues to plan, build, implement and enhance its system of parks and greenspaces to meet the needs of a growing population and to provide equitable access to parks and greenspace for our residents and visitors.

The Greenspace Strategic Plan, launched in June 2023, is a broad and comprehensive document which will identify and prioritize strategic initiatives, defining the future direction while developing the philosophy, policies, guidelines, and recommended strategic actions for the provision of City-wide and local greenspaces and parks.

In June 2023, the Facilities and Parks Delivery department, retained consultant O2 Planning & Design through a public procurement process to lead development of the City's Greenspace Strategic Plan. The direction to develop the Greenspace Strategic

Plan are identified as part of the recommendations of the Land Acquisition Strategy 2020 and the Parkland Dedication Guidelines 2022.

The final Study is appended as Attachment 1.

Previous Reports/Authority

[Land Acquisition Strategy 2020](#), Item 2, Report No. 45, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session) which was adopted without amendment by Council on October 20, 2021.

[Parkland Dedication Guideline 2022](#), Item 1, Report No. 8, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session) which was adopted as amended by Council on February 15, 2022.

[Parkland Dedication By-Law Update](#), Item 27, Report No. 27, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session) which was adopted without amendment by Council on June 28, 2022.

[Parkland Dedication By-Law 168-2022](#)

[Urban Forestry Management Plan and Woodland Management Strategy](#), Item 2, Report No. 9, of the Committee of the Whole (Working Session) which was adopted without amendment by Council on March 26, 2024.

Analysis and Options

The purpose of the Greenspace Strategic Plan is to evaluate the current state of city-wide local parks and greenspaces and provide strategies and recommendations to guide future planning, design, implementation and enhancement of Vaughan's parks and greenspaces.

Development of the Greenspace Strategic Plan is based upon a thorough review of municipal best practices, evidence-based research, and comprehensive community and stakeholder consultation.

The Greenspace Strategic Plan is informed by a provincial and city-wide policy framework and considers provincial legislative changes (e.g., Bill 23, *More Homes Built Faster Act*, 2022) and builds on the vision and direction established by city-wide plans (i.e., Vaughan Official Plan) to provide a diversity of parks and greenspace that contribute to a high quality of life for residents and add to the city's natural heritage network.

The development of the Greenspace Strategic Plan centres on several objectives:

- Defining and identifying 'greenspaces' while providing a planning framework for the predictable design, programming, lifecycle, updated typologies and tools to support greenspace planning.
- Assessing parkland gaps and needs to determine the City's greenspace requirements to meet targets set through the study.
- Identifying an implementation strategy along with tools to leverage opportunities to enhance the greenspace system and meet City-wide and departmental objectives.
- Recommending measurable performance indicators and reporting requirements to monitor implementation and determine effectiveness and success of the Plan.
- Developing a financial strategy which identifies funding opportunities, guidelines, policies and tools.
- Developing a policy framework which supports recommendations relating to greenspace development.

The Greenspace Strategic Plan establishes a roadmap for the acquisition and expansion of Vaughan's greenspace and parkland for the next 30 years.

The Greenspace Strategic Plan reflects the values of its residents and prioritizes parkland particularly within Vaughan's new community areas, Strategic Growth Areas (e.g. Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, Weston and Hwy 7, Yonge and Steeles) and existing neighbourhoods.

Vision and Goals

The vision below establishes long term direction for Vaughan and describes the desired future state of the City's parks and greenspaces. Embodied by the values and priorities of residents, community groups and stakeholders, the statement highlights the City's commitment to celebrating greenspaces as valued community and ecological assets:

Our greenspaces are an essential asset to the City that supports our economic prosperity, the celebration of culture, and the physical and mental health and well-being of our residents. We are responsible for our greenspace system to provide ecological habitats, support climate resilience and function as green infrastructure.

Building on the vision, the Greenspace Strategic Plan is guided by eight goals, each of which provides direction for and implementation of the Plan.

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| • Parkland expansion | • Increased tree canopy |
| • Equitable access | • Adaptable space |
| • Diverse greenspace experiences | • Climate resilience |
| • Celebrate culture | • Sustainable funding |

Engagement Overview

The goal of the engagement strategy is to develop a shared and inspirational vision on the future of Vaughan's greenspaces by listening and learning about what matters to the community and how greenspaces are used.

A variety of methods were used to engage a wide and diverse audience that was convenient and easy to access. Multiple communication channels and engagement tactics were used to reach out to residents, community organizations, Indigenous partners, ratepayer groups, and other interested parties. Phases of engagement include:

- Phase 1: "Where we are and where we need to go" – Fall 2023
- Phase 2: "How we're going to get there" – Spring 2024
- Phase 3: "Confirming the plan" – Fall 2024
- Phase 4: "Celebrating the plan" – Planned for Summer 2025

In Phase 1, the City engaged residents to gather their ideas and insights on Vaughan's greenspaces. Key findings showed a desire for more passive and active recreation opportunities, greater connectivity between parks, and a desire for more parkland near growth and intensification areas. Feedback collected contributed to the development of the city-wide greenspace vision and priorities.

During Phase 1, a Stakeholder Advisory Group was established to provide a platform for residents and interested parties (including representatives from Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Building Industry and Land Development Association) to stay informed, review project materials, and offer feedback to the City of Vaughan throughout the process. The Stakeholder Advisory Group, comprised of volunteer representatives of Vaughan, was created to provide a forum for residents, stakeholders and interest groups to receive updates, review materials and information, and provide feedback to the City of Vaughan throughout the project.

On May 30, 2024, the project team hosted a virtual Park Forum which brought together three park professionals with expertise in greenspace advocacy, design, operations, and management. The conversation explored how emerging trends in greenspace typologies, placemaking, and programming can support municipalities' goals of improving community health, increasing access and inclusion, and ensuring livable and sustainable public spaces amid urban growth.

To engage youth in the Greenspace Strategic Plan, high school students were identified as a key demographic to gather feedback from, as older youth and teens are traditionally underrepresented in planning and engagement projects. Local high schools were contacted to gauge interest and eight schools participated in the activity. Students provided valuable insights through a workbook activity, which focused on the importance of greenspace and explored barriers and opportunities from their perspective.

In Phase 2, the City sought feedback on the Greenspace Strategic Plans emerging vision and goals, understanding the needs and preferences of Vaughan residents, and how greenspace should be provided and distributed in the City. Feedback collected contributed to defining park typologies and setting targets to ensure all residents have access to greenspace.

In Phase 3, the project team shared key components of the Greenspace Strategic Plan and solicited feedback on improving connectivity, growing the greenspace network and diversifying greenspace experiences. During this phase of engagement, the project team continued discussions with the Stakeholder Advisory Group and dialogue with the Building Industry and Land Development Association to ensure transparency while developing a well-informed final Greenspace Strategic Plan.

Engagement results, including tactics and methods used to reach the Vaughan community, are incorporated into ‘What we Heard’ reports, available on the project website: vaughan.ca/GreenspacePlan.

Through the collaboration with the community, stakeholders and technical staff, key concepts and tools emerged to define a shared vision for greenspaces and park can be delivered to our residents.

“Circuit 51”

An emerging goal of the Greenspace Strategic Plan is a network that could make the key greenspace assets within the City accessible through a growing and evolving “circuitry” of parks and open space that connect local and regional amenities. “Circuit 51” aspires to transform the way people think about parks and open space which will in turn transform their choices and lifestyles. The concept of “Circuit 51” (refer to Attachment No.1, Chapter 6) reinforces a connected network of greenspace composed of Vaughan’s complex natural and cultural heritage network and greenspace system and presents a powerful analogy for a system that can grow from the circuitry of green infrastructure and community amenities.

The Destination Park: Park Typology Update

Vaughan has a diverse range of parks with each ranging in size, function, amenities and uses. Currently five park types are identified in the Vaughan Official Plan: Regional Park, District Park, Neighbourhood Park, Urban Park and Public Square. This helps inform the City in making decisions on where new parks should be located, or where existing ones need to be expanded, as well as design and maintenance. This helps ensure that Vaughan’s park system is responsive to the needs of its residents.

In response to increased intensification and reductions in parkland dedication during the development process, the City of Vaughan will need modern and adaptable park typologies to meet the needs of its residents. In addition to the five typologies, the Greenspace Strategic Plan proposes the Destination Park as new sixth park typology which will provide unique experiences, amenities and attractions designed to draw visitors from a broader geographic area (e.g., North Maple Regional Park).

Below are the proposed revisions to park typologies:

Park Typology	Current	Proposed
Destination Park (<i>new</i>)	N/A	Varies
Regional Park	> 15 ha	> 15 ha
District Park	> 5 ha	> 5 ha
Neighbourhood Park	0.75 ha to 5 ha	0.75 ha to 5 ha
Urban Park	> 1 ha	0.75 ha to 5 ha
Public Square	0.2 ha to 1 ha	0.2 ha to 0.75 ha

Parkland Provision Targets

Approximately 60% of Vaughan's future growth is expected to occur in Strategic Growth Areas such as Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and primary centres where higher densities, a mix of uses and amenities will be concentrated. Established and growing neighbourhoods are expected to accommodate lower density residential development which require different demand on servicing.

The difference in scale, form, and intensity of growth across Vaughan also requires updated provision ratios that reflect this context. The Greenspace Strategic Plan is proposing the following parkland provision targets:

- Maintain 2.0 ha of active parkland per 1,000 people to achieve 1.6 ha per 1,000 by 2051.
- 0.3 ha of active parkland per 1,000 people for the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre and primary centres.
- All residents living in an urban area are within 500m (5-minute walk) of parkland or greenspace by 2051.
- All residents are within 2.5 km of a District Park.

Acquisition Priority Areas

The Greenspace Strategic Plan includes a range of criteria to develop Parkland Acquisition Priority Areas based on an evidence-based approach driven by a variety of socio-economic, environmental and spatial data points (refer to Attachment No.1, Chapter 5). The toolset and methodology will be informed by future urban changes in the City of Vaughan and refined with time to ensure a robust approach to future land acquisitions and assembly.

Building on this evidence-based approach, nine geospatial factors that serve to identify key gaps in park provision, were identified:

- 2051 Population Density
- 2051 Park per Person
- Park Catchment Gaps
- Transit Access
- High Youth Population
- High Senior Population
- Low Income Areas
- District Park Catchments
- Impervious Surfaces

Key priority areas for parkland acquisition are derived from the above factors to help target strategic acquisitions within forecasted emerging gaps in parkland provision (refer to Attachment No.1, Chapter 5). Recognizing that the model developed to determining acquisition priority areas is based on a number of indicators and key assumptions, it will be critical to update the model on an annual basis based on emerging demographic trends and datasets, land costs, parkland credits, parkland conveyances, development densities, and changes in legislation.

Policy Recommendations

A key deliverable of the Greenspace Strategic Plan is providing recommended policy language to be incorporated into the 2025 Vaughan Official Plan currently underway and future policy documents. The Greenspace Strategic Plans policy framework supports recommendations relating to greenspace planning and development, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of addressing gaps, needs and provisions, as well as enhance policy tools to support implementation of the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

The project team coordinated with the [Community Spaces Plan](#), [Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces](#), and [Urban Forestry Management Plan](#) project teams, to ensure alignment across all four plans.

Strategic Actions

Achieving the Greenspace Strategic Plans vision and goals will be largely realized through private development, civic investment and strategic partnerships across City departments, as well as with government agencies and community groups. There are 29 strategic actions grouped under four themes: acquisition, data, policy, service level and partnerships (refer to Attachment No.1, Chapter 8).

The strategic actions have been categorized into short, medium and long-term. Short-term actions should be completed within the next five years, medium-term actions over the next six to ten years and long-term actions beyond ten years. These actions should evolve and be refined over time as the City implements the Greenspace Strategic Plan.

Financial Impact

Achieving the parkland provision goals hinges on the City's ability to continue to ensure adequate funding and programmable parkland continues to be secured, while ensuring that parkland credits are provided only where they meet parkland needs consistent with this strategy.

Determining parkland dedication credit starts with the principle that the most effective parkland is City-owned land that has no encumbrances. City-owned land that has no encumbrances allows the City to develop and program the parkland necessary to accommodate the needs of residents today and the future.

However, acquiring parkland necessary to keep up with population growth will be challenging, especially as the City shifts towards a higher-density multi-unit form of

development that often provides payment-in-lieu or creditable Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces.

The risk in continuing to provide credits to Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces in the absence of a robust policy over time, poses a risk to erode the City's ability to continue to collect and fund healthy payment-in-lieu reserves to address citywide parkland acquisitions.

It is important that the City also explore other methods for purchasing and collecting parkland including community benefits charges, property taxes, provincial funding, grants, leveraging City-owned lands, and donations to achieve its parkland service targets. The City will also need to ensure that the deployment of payment-in-lieu funding is strategic in nature and coordinated as informed by the work completed through the Greenspace Strategic Plan in identifying key forecasted gaps. A recommended approach for leveraging against future needs is to develop a formal city-wide land banking policy and guidelines to proactively acquire land that may be used for parkland or may be exchanged for parkland particularly within Urban Areas guided by the updated Land Acquisition criteria. Staff resourcing will be required to effectively manage and track parkland assets, development conveyance, agreements and credits, update policies and procedures, seek partnership opportunities, and continue conducting public outreach beyond the scope of this study.

Furthermore, in light of Council's direction to reduce Development Charges, and to adjust for potential gaps in funding, a review of developer obligations as part of the Local Service Policy will be undertaken as part of the Development Charge Review currently underway. Staff will consider options where Development Charge credits are not extended or eligible such as Privately Owned Publicly Accessible Spaces, strata parks where approved, and local parks.

Operational Impact

The City will need to keep pace with the maintenance of operations in alignment with the increase in use of parks. As additional parks and amenities are constructed, adequate resourcing and operation expenditures will be required to maintain service levels. In particular, parks in the Strategic Growth Areas are also expected to trigger a need to seek an incremental increase in operational funding per square metre of park compared to parks in low density areas.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The Greenspace Strategic Plan considers the York Region Official Plan and various provincial legislative changes such as Bill 23 *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*. Although Bill 23 is in effect, implementation regarding collection of payment-in-lieu and parkland conveyance remains uncertain in the absence of forthcoming regulations which will not come into force until such time as confirmed by the Provincial Government. Changes are anticipated to include acceptance of developer proposed parkland (including encumbrances), payment-in-lieu reporting requirements and exemptions related to attainable housing. Impact to the Greenspace Strategic Plan

recommendations and provision forecasting will be reviewed once future regulations or future legislative changes are introduced by the Province.

Conclusion

The Greenspace Strategic Plan represents a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to enhancing the city's parks and greenspaces. Through extensive community and stakeholder engagement, evidence-based research, and alignment with provincial and city-wide policies, the Greenspace Strategic Plan outlines a clear vision and actionable goals to ensure Vaughan's greenspaces contribute to the well-being of its residents and the city's natural heritage. The engagement process has been pivotal in shaping the Greenspace Strategic Plan, with phases designed to gather insights, explore ideas, and participate in its development.

The introduction of the "Circuit 51" concept and updated park typologies, including the new Destination Park, reflect Vaughan's commitment to innovative and adaptable greenspace planning. The plan emphasizes equitable access and addressing climate resilience all aimed at creating a connected network of parks and open spaces that support community health and ecological sustainability. As Vaughan continues to grow, the Greenspace Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for strategic parkland acquisition, prioritizing areas based on socio-economic and environmental factors.

The Greenspace Strategic Plan is a testament to Vaughan's dedication to creating vibrant, accessible, and sustainable greenspaces that enhance the quality of life for all residents. By implementing the strategies and actions outlined in the Greenspace Strategic Plan, Vaughan is poised to become a leader in greenspace planning and development, fostering a healthier, more connected, and resilient community.

For more information, please contact: Stefan Tzianetas, Director, Facilities and Parks Delivery, ext. 8196.

Attachments

1. Vaughan Greenspace Strategic Plan 2025
2. Appendix 1 - Strategy Design and Current State Analysis
3. Appendix 2 - Principle Framework
4. Appendix 3 - Greenspace Measurement Methodology
5. Appendix 4 - Greenspace Planning Framework
6. Appendix 5 - Financial Analysis
7. Appendix 6 - Policy Framework

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