

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, May 5, 2026

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PROGRAM
UPDATE

FROM:

Vince Musacchio, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Infrastructure Development

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To provide an update on the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program and seek approval to select a new neighbourhood to implement the program.

Report Highlights

- The Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program is a program of the TRCA that is designed to achieve sustainable urban renewal and climate resilience in existing, older neighbourhoods.
- Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Programs improve placemaking, contribute to a healthy environment, and promote climate resilience and community cohesion, as demonstrated with the successful Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.
- The purpose and goals of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program have been substantially delivered, and staff recommend identifying a new neighbourhood in Vaughan to deliver a second Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.

Recommendations

1. That Council authorize staff to update the screening work previously undertaken to identify a new neighbourhood for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.

Background

Since 2018, the City has collaborated with Toronto and Region Conservation Authority on creating and implementing a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program for Thornhill.

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program is a program of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) that is designed to achieve sustainable urban renewal and climate resilience in existing, older neighbourhoods. Through the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program, TRCA collaborates with municipalities, local community stakeholders and residents to co-develop and co-implement a neighborhood action plan in strategic locations. The action plans are designed to achieve sustainability and resilience objectives by identifying programming and projects that address both municipal and TRCA objectives, together with residents' priorities and wishes for their community.

Beginning with a neighbourhood selection process in 2018, Thornhill (Blocks 1 and 2) in Ward 5 was identified as an area suited for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program. Key priorities of this neighbourhood, at the time, included flood vulnerability, high energy use, high water use, urban heat stress, areas of social disadvantage and multiple City capital projects with overlapping timelines. The Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program launched in 2019, with Council endorsement, followed by deep community, stakeholder and staff engagement to co-create an action plan. Implementation of the Action Plan began in 2021 and will continue to the end of 2026.

The Thornhill Action Plan integrates local community interests, sustainability objectives and climate adaptation strategies under the overarching theme of 'historically rich, culturally diverse, green and connected'. The action plan supports a future where:

- the neighbourhood public and private spaces are well connected and rich with nature, activity, culture, history and art
- people of all ages and abilities feel comfortable, safe and engaged
- the built environment is created or retrofitted with health and sustainability in mind
- community connections grow and prosper

Over the last five years, with funding from the City, TRCA and external grants, the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program team has worked to foster and deliver events, education, programming, environmental restoration, climate resilience, property enhancements and social connections in the following three action areas:

1. Connected People, Places and Ecosystems
2. Residential Retrofits

3. Greening and Humanization of Multi-unit Residential Buildings, Institutional and Commercial Properties

Previous Reports/Authority

[Member's Resolution – Sustainable Neighbourhood Retrofit Action Plan – May 7, 2019.](#)

[Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program – Action Plan – Sept, 14, 2021](#)

Analysis and Options

The Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program has been successful in improving placemaking, contributing to a healthy environment, and promoting climate resilience and community cohesion.

The Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program addresses environmental and socio-economic priorities and supports numerous municipal and TRCA plans and strategies. To measure impact and success over time, a framework of long-term goals was developed based on the following themes:

- energy and climate – reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved resilience
- stormwater management and water efficiency – improved stormwater quality and quantity, reduced water consumption
- ecosystem integrity – increased canopy cover and community stewardship
- waste management – reduced waste
- health and well-being – increased programming to improve physical and mental health
- livable places and community connections – increased overall sense of community cohesion and inclusion
- culture, heritage and education – increased awareness of local culture, history, and Indigenous heritage
- access and mobility – increased engagement in active transportation, increased connectivity

A summary of the goals and success metrics in alignment with the themes above can be found in Attachment 1.

A high-level overview of success metrics from the Thornhill neighbourhood is listed below:

- hosted 70 community events with over 1180 participants (workshops, educational sessions, larger social events)
- collaborated with 50 community partners and funders
- established a network of over 20 active community champions
- planted nine gardens including a total of 4479 trees, shrubs and wildflowers
- enhanced eight public spaces and four private spaces (one commercial, one institutional, and two multi-unit residential buildings)
- delivered 27 home consultations with 36 retrofit actions completed by homeowners
- installed over 15 interpretive signs

The following paragraphs describe a few examples that demonstrate the success of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.

Gallanough Park Signature Project: This project was an example of collaboration among City departments – sharing information, resources and funding– to leverage planned capital works and bring in additional resources to maximize community benefits. Deliverables included:

- more seating, lighting, extended walking paths, and fitness equipment in the park
- two interpretive signs related to the Don River Watershed and the underground stormwater management facility
- three pollinator gardens
- games tables for the Gallanough Resource Library patio

Thornhill Community Champion Network: This is one of the key programs for building community connections and creating a legacy of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program. It was established in 2024 with the objective of developing individuals into community leaders by providing mentorship, skills training and opportunities to build their capacity over time. Deliverables, to date, include:

- two champion-led initiatives – a Music and Art in the Park event and an educational pollinator mini-magazine with free seeds
- skills training in garden and tree maintenance, and plant identification
- two community litter cleanups
- several social outings

Climate Ready Homes Program: This program is designed to offer coaching and financial support to residents looking to make efficiency and resilience improvements to their homes and properties. Program elements include:

- community educational workshops
- free 60-minute home consultations where homeowners have a chance to discuss topics including energy and water efficiency, eco-landscaping, waste management and climate resilience, specific to their priorities
- a Home Retrofit Pilot for residents interested in implementing home improvements. Residents are given free coaching (interpretation of energy audit results, prioritizing actions based on budget, etc.) and financial rebates up to \$3,800 for implementation.

J.E.H MacDonald House: Not originally identified as a key project, the MacDonald House property at 121 Centre Street turned into a significant location through a strong relationship with the Thornhill Historical Society. This project is an example of what can be accomplished through collaboration with dedicated community groups. Most notably, the project included the installation of a Group of Seven interpretive easel which now anchors Thornhill as a key stop along a broader Group of Seven touring route, that is promoted both through Destination Ontario as well the Moments of Algoma Group of Seven Touring Route. Other initiatives at the property included:

- relocating an Ontario Heritage Trust plaque to the property from Oakbank Pond
- planting three heritage apple trees to recreate the historical orchard that once grew on the property
- providing Parks, Forestry and Horticulture staff training on the care of fruit trees
- planting trees and shrubs
- hosting several art and culture events

A detailed summary of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program, along with implementation projects, achievements and testimonials can be found in Attachment 2.

Staff recommend updating the screening work originally undertaken in 2018 to identify a new neighbourhood for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.

The purpose and goals of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program have been substantially delivered, and the project has increased overall resilience and cohesion, creating a more sustainable neighbourhood. In future years, there may be opportunities to implement outstanding recommendations from the Thornhill Action Plan through operational or capital works, the Community Champion Network or partnerships with community groups and stakeholders.

City staff have received overall positive feedback from community partners, residents and other departments about the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program. Key City departments have been engaged regarding their experiences and suggestions for improvements were solicited; this feedback will be incorporated into action planning for a new neighbourhood.

The following list summarizes the feedback received from key City departments about the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program:

- introduces the opportunity for enhancement over several years (versus a short-term project)
- helps educate and inform residents about capital project deliverables and implications
- brings overall awareness to the context of a neighbourhood, creating synergies and breaking down departmental silos
- helps implement improvements outside state-of-good-repair
- strengthens grant funding applications
- validates funding investments

The City has a current contract with TRCA, ending in June 2027 with an optional 4-year extension, and committed budget until the end of 2026. Utilizing this contract and budget, staff will update the screening work originally undertaken in 2018 to identify a new neighbourhood for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program. The work will include acquiring updated Geographical Information Systems, conducting a multiple hits analysis and undertaking deep-dive discussions with City technical staff to finalize neighbourhood selection.

Staff will submit a report to a future Committee of the Whole meeting to present findings of the screening exercise and update Council on the selected neighbourhood.

Financial Impact

Choosing a new neighbourhood for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program will not require any additional funds. Staff will utilize the current contract with TRCA and 2026 capital budget (PL-9575-20) to undertake the neighbourhood screening work.

Operational Impact

Work to revisit the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program screening tool and choose a new neighborhood will require input from City staff. Neighbourhood screening will require updated Geographical Information System datasets, primarily working with the Corporate Asset Management team and Planning Geographical Information

Systems team. Once the screening work and multiple hits analysis is complete, technical staff across all portfolios will be engaged to finalize the neighbourhood selection.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Through the completion of the City's first Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program, Vaughan joined other local municipalities that have committed to a collaborative, neighbourhood-based approach for advancing urban renewal in older urban areas. There is now a network of 21 Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program neighborhoods across the Greater Toronto Area; additionally TRCA consulted on a similar neighbourhood project in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

The Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program has succeeded in making Thornhill a more resilient, engaged and sustainable neighbourhood. The project is an example of collaboration between departments to maximize community benefits, creating inspired and engaged community leaders, and developing trusting partnerships with community to revitalize public spaces and make meaningful connections. Choosing a new neighbourhood for a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program in Vaughan will allow another neighbourhood to receive lasting community benefits and climate resilience.

Staff will come back to a future Committee of the Whole meeting to present findings of the screening exercise and update Council on the selected neighbourhood.

For more information, please contact: Alanna MacKenzie, Sustainability Specialist, extension 8941.

Attachments

1. Attachment 1 – Thornhill SNAP Success Metrics, 2026
2. Attachment 2 – Thornhill SNAP summary, 2025

Prepared by

Alanna MacKenzie, Sustainability Specialist, extension 8941

Fausto Fillipetto, Senior Manager, Policy Planning and Sustainability, extension 8699

Christina Bruce, Director, Policy Planning and Special Programs, extension 8231