

Committee of the Whole (Working Session) Report

DATE: Wednesday, May 5, 2021

WARD(S): 5

TITLE: THORNHILL SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PROGRAM – PROGRESS UPDATE

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: FOR INFORMATION

Purpose

To update Council on the progress of the City of Vaughan's first Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) in the Thornhill neighbourhood. The extensive community engagement conducted to gain input on how the community envisions their neighbourhood is presented along with the next steps required to complete the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan.

Report Highlights

- The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) neighbourhood mapping screening exercise, including planned City capital infrastructure projects, was used to select the Thornhill community as a suitable SNAP neighbourhood.
- Extensive community engagement during the SNAP action planning process was critical to obtain an understanding of the Thornhill neighbourhood, and how the community envisions their neighbourhood in the future.
- Three integrated action areas and four signature projects were identified through the community engagement phase.
- A draft SNAP Action Plan is being developed between the City of Vaughan and TRCA staff with input received from the community and will be presented at a future Committee of the Whole meeting.

Recommendations

1. That Council receive the staff report as a progress update on the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.
2. That Council receive the Thornhill SNAP presentation (Attachment 1).

Background

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) aligns with City initiatives

Council on May 14, 2019, passed a Member's Resolution to support the City's commitment to a SNAP project in partnership with the TRCA. The SNAP includes selecting a neighbourhood with overlapping sustainability and climate change vulnerability priorities and options for urban renewal projects. And then developing sustainability goals, targets, actions and an implementation and monitoring strategy for the neighbourhood. A SNAP project would implement various elements of the City of Vaughan's 2018-2022 Term of Council Strategic Plan by aligning with Green Directions Vaughan, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan and Active Together Master Plan. It also implements objectives and targets mandated by the Regional Municipality of York (York Region).

The SNAP was developed by the TRCA with the objective to make older neighbourhoods more sustainable and accelerate the implementation of environmental improvements and urban renewal at the neighborhood scale. The success of SNAP is rooted in direct engagement with residents and stakeholders to align municipal priorities with local needs and interests. Engaging residents, businesses, community groups and institutions builds positive partnerships and local capacity for the design and implementation of the project.

SNAP looks at maximizing the impact of infrastructure projects beyond the departmental scope of work and by considering other department's projects. Through departmental collaboration to meet multiple goals and objectives, SNAP adds significant ecological function and social benefits through innovation in design and public engagement.

A neighbourhood screening exercise selected the Thornhill neighbourhood

The TRCA developed a mapping framework to organize priorities into a comprehensive set of service area themes reflecting sustainable community attributes. Data layers obtained for the framework represent current available data for planned projects and known neighbourhood climate change vulnerabilities across departments and organizations.

The Thornhill SNAP neighbourhood located in Ward 5 (Blocks 1 and 2) is bounded by Bathurst Street and Yonge Street, Steeles Avenue West, and Highway 407 (Attachment 2: Thornhill SNAP Draft Action Plan Map). This neighbourhood was selected for the SNAP project because of its overlapping priorities for needed urban renewal. It is a flood vulnerable area, 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 and has a high concentration of seniors and areas of concentrated social disadvantage.

In addition, 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. The SNAP takes an integrated approach to overcome urban challenges and addresses a broad range of sustainability objectives with locally tailored solutions. A SNAP Action Plan (the 'Action Plan') is being developed for the Thornhill neighbourhood to improve the local environment, build resiliency to climate change, and encourage positive behaviour changes among residents.

The City and TRCA were successful in obtaining funding up to \$152,100 from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to undertake the Thornhill SNAP, 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.

The SNAP action planning process used a three phased approach

The Thornhill SNAP action planning process used a phased approach that promoted multi-stakeholder engagement at various stages. Local knowledge and input were integral to revealing important community characteristics, not apparent in the neighbourhood's built form, that contribute to local culture and values. The action planning process was undertaken in three phases outlined below:

Phase 1 – Scoping issues, stakeholders, and interests

The objective of Phase 1 was to conduct background research to help the project team generate an understanding of the baseline scientific and socio-economic characteristics of the neighbourhood. The overall SNAP community engagement strategy was also customized during this phase to align with the timing of local planned initiatives and other key milestones.

Phase 2 – Defining vision, motivational themes, and action planning concept areas

The objective of Phase 2 was to develop a neighbourhood vision and identify motivating themes, discover perceived risks, and identify climate change vulnerabilities and assets. This exploration was used to develop integrated action areas and associated design principles, identify potential signature projects, and prepare a draft Action Plan map.

Phase 3 – Develop the Action Plan

In the final phase of the action planning process, the objective is to confirm and finalize the Action Plan, identify relevant climate adaptation strategies, develop preliminary design concepts for each of the signature projects, and identify a number of quick start projects that could be used to build excitement and continue momentum for the SNAP.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports considered by City Council regarding the Thornhill SNAP project can be found at the following links:

[Council meeting extract, May 14, 2019](#) – Council passed a Member’s Resolution 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.

Analysis and Options

Community input identified motivating themes and integrated action areas

The Thornhill SNAP is being managed by the City (10 departments) and TRCA (4 divisions) as a highly collaborative approach that brings together municipal objectives with community priorities. This collaboration includes working with local residents, institutions, non-profit organizations, and other local stakeholders such as the Springfarm Ratepayers Association that actively participated throughout the engagement process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of the community engagement was redesigned as virtual workshops and online meetings.

The City and TRCA engaged the Thornhill community through facilitated community engagement events to gain an understanding of the past and present conditions of the

neighbourhood and how the community envisions their neighbourhood in the future. The following engagement techniques and activities were utilized to gather community input:

- “SNAP into Action” survey
- One day co-planning workshop
- Meetings with the local ward Councillor Shefman
- One-on-one meetings with local stakeholders such as the Springfarm Ratepayers Association, the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill, Thornhill Heritage Foundation, Windfall Ecology Centre, etc.
- Meetings with representatives from Indigenous Peoples such Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation and Hiawatha First Nation
- Two virtual open house sessions
- Online Action Plan map engagement
- Three virtual co-design workshops for the signature projects

The Thornhill SNAP Sustainability Framework has been developed to identify overarching core and complementary themes. These themes have contributed to the design of the three integrated action areas that respond to the neighbourhood’s technical issues and vision expressed through public engagement. Each integrated action area identifies design principles, sustainability solutions and actions for integration and implementation into future projects. The three integrated action areas are as follows:

1. Connected People, Places and Ecosystems, which includes an active transportation, trails, green infrastructure, parks and open spaces elements and recommendations for community connections, programming, and greening.
2. Residential Retrofit, which will support programming for homeowners to assist them with the identification and implementation of actions to make single family residential properties more efficient and resilient to extreme climate events.
3. Greening of Institutional, Commercial and Multi-unit Residential sectors, which will encourage community connections, natural heritage improvements, and sustainable and resilient buildings.

Signature projects identified as a result of the data collected

Four signature projects were selected, based on residents’ preferences and municipal priorities. These signature projects are supported by technical staff from the City and TRCA and align with planned municipal initiatives, while also integrating local community interests. These projects will demonstrate how traditional capital infrastructure projects can be re-imagined to maximize sustainability and resiliency

objectives along with addressing strategic targets set by the City, York Region and TRCA.

The proposed four signature projects are identified as follows:

1. Gallanough Park Redevelopment

Gallanough Park is located at 21 Springfield Way and is connected to several important community institutions including the Gallanough Resource Centre, the John Arnold Historic House, and Thornhill Public School. A planned capital infrastructure project to retrofit the stormwater management facility in the park and park improvements have been budgeted. This presents an opportunity to integrate community interests to redevelop the park infrastructure and amenities, while improving the ecological integrity.

2. York Hill Park Redevelopment

York Hill District Park is located at 330 York Hill Boulevard and is connected to Garnet A. Williams Community Centre and adjacent to two elementary schools. The Garnet A. Williams Community Centre is being retrofitted to improve both interior and exterior features of the site. This work will tie into the redevelopment plan that is being developed for the overall park including recreational improvements and nature-based education areas.

3. Complete Streets Project

The Complete Streets Project has been proposed to leverage active transportation improvements recommended in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan for Atkinson Avenue, Hilda Avenue and Centre Street. This project focuses on creating safe, inviting, and vibrant streets and streetscapes through active transportation techniques, while also helping to manage stormwater sustainably and improve the urban forest.

4. Thornhill Home Retrofit Program

Vaughan's City-wide home energy retrofit program will be launched in the Thornhill neighbourhood, pending confirmation of details of the funding from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The home retrofit program will use the local improvement charges financing tool to extend financing to homeowners that complete eligible retrofits, and the homeowners then pay back the loan on their property tax bill. A proposed initial launch of the retrofit program will provide owners of detached dwellings with educational tools and support to improve energy efficiency in their homes. Other opportunities such as eco-landscaping, flood prevention measures and water efficiency will also be explored with the

homeowners as part of the SNAP collaboration. As part of the design of the retrofit program launch, the City will partner with the TRCA to provide local marketing of the retrofit program in the Thornhill neighbourhood.

Attachment 2: Thornhill SNAP Draft Action Plan Map provides an illustration of the Thornhill SNAP neighbourhood with the conceptual signature projects. As these signature projects align with planned municipal initiatives and capital infrastructure projects, they are intended to be innovative projects that will serve to demonstrate how multiple benefits and diverse, community-wide objectives can be achieved.

Attachment 3: Thornhill SNAP Signature Projects - Community Engagement Summaries provides summaries of the community feedback received during the virtual workshops that were completed for the Gallanough Park, York Hill Park, and Complete Streets signature projects. The community input received during these workshops will be used to develop the signature project concept designs. The community will have an opportunity to review the draft signature projects and provide comments that will be integrated into the final Action Plan. The Thornhill Home Retrofit Program is also being developed as a fourth signature project at this time.

Information collected will be used to develop the Action Plan

The Action Plan will present a series of climate adaptation strategies that have been developed to address the unique character, resources, and climate change vulnerabilities of the Thornhill neighbourhood. The Action Plan will also reflect the culmination of technical analyses, robust community, and stakeholder engagement, and planned capital infrastructure projects. When implemented, the proposed actions, projects and programs will help achieve the vision for the community. The Action Plan will address any comments received from Council and community engagement input received for the proposed signature projects. The final Action Plan will be presented to Council for endorsement in the fall of 2021.

Financial Impact

This report will have no incremental impact to the current 2021 approved operating or capital budgets. The City has identified existing budgets and has attained grants to support the development of the Action Plan. The larger capital infrastructure project budgets are not included in this summary. Any incremental capital infrastructure projects/budgets as a result of this program will be brought forward through the annual budget approval process. To date, the following funding has been received/committed to facilitate the SNAP project:

- A grant of up to \$152,100 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 grant of \$10,000 from Enbridge for the Residential Retrofit Program design
- A budget of \$124,000 from the Stormwater Management Improvements in Gallanough Park and Surrounding Area Project Budget (Capital Project EN-1879-12) was allocated for engagement for the Thornhill SNAP
- The City has committed to 3 years of funding at \$25,000 per annum for demonstration projects under Capital Project PL-9575-20

Fundraising will be needed to fund the implementation of additional SNAP project components that are not included in the existing scope and budgets for each of the individual capital infrastructure projects such as the additional tree plantings, trail development and recreational amenities (e.g. benches, shade structures). Fundraising will be explored in collaboration with TRCA, property owners and other external stakeholders. The SNAP Team will also work with the City's Municipal Partnership Office in the Economic and Cultural Development department on the fundraising initiatives.

Staff will continue to apply for funding opportunities for specific components as they arise as the SNAP project can be put forth for consideration when prioritizing projects across the City. For example, Clark Avenue improvements received over \$2M from the Ontario Municipal Commuter Cycling Program and the York Region Pedestrian and Cycling Municipal Partnership Program. This project can leverage the prioritization of the Complete Streets project.

In addition, City staff are exploring various grant opportunities to implement the quick start projects, such as tree and pollinator plantings. City staff have applied to the TD Friends of the Environment Fund for a \$5,000 grant for a pollinator planting and education signage. A decision is expected in the summer of 2021.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

The TRCA's SNAP is a collaborative, neighbourhood-based approach for advancing urban renewal and climate change action in older urban areas. TRCA has nine other SNAP neighbourhoods in the municipalities of Toronto, Markham, Brampton, Mississauga, Caledon, and Richmond Hill, in varying stages of completion. Through the implementation of the SNAP project, the City of Vaughan is meeting various York Region objectives for instance the canopy targets outlined in the York Region Forest Management Plan and projected road improvement identified in the York Region Road Improvements (10 year plan).

The TRCA is also working to identify opportunities for expanding successful solutions from the SNAP neighbourhoods to other communities. The neighbourhood mapping screening exercise completed in Vaughan identified other neighbourhoods in the City that have overlapping priorities and may be suitable for future SNAP projects including neighbourhoods in Maple and Woodbridge. The SNAP and action planning process that has been successfully used in the Thornhill SNAP can be translated to these other neighbourhoods to build an overall sustainable and resilient City.

Conclusion

The City, in partnership with the TRCA, engaged the Thornhill community through extensive community consultation activities to gather input on how they envision their future neighbourhood. As a result of the extensive input received, the integrated project ideas were created and include design principles, sustainability solutions and actions for implementation. Four signature projects were also identified to be designed by City and TRCA staff with input received by the community. The information and input gathered throughout the action planning process will be used to develop the finalized Action Plan.

For more information, please contact: Ruth Rendon, Senior Environmental Planner, ext. 8104

Attachments

1. Thornhill SNAP Presentation
2. Thornhill SNAP Draft Action Plan Map
3. Thornhill SNAP Signature Projects Community Engagement Summaries

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