

## Committee of the Whole (1) Report

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**DATE:** Tuesday, September 14, 2021

**WARD:** 5

**TITLE: THORNHILL SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PROGRAM – ACTION PLAN**

**FROM:**

Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager, Planning and Growth Management

**ACTION:** DECISION

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**Purpose**

To seek endorsement of the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program Action Plan (herein referred as SNAP Action Plan or Action Plan), including the planning and implementation of the Integrated Action Areas and identified Signature Projects, where feasible.

**Report Highlights**

- The City of Vaughan and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority staff, along with local residents and stakeholders from the Thornhill community, co-developed the Action Plan for the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.
- The Action Plan identifies three Integrated Action Areas that represent key themes to be addressed through the delivery of the Signature Projects and provides guiding direction for future initiatives.
- Four Signature Projects have been identified for Thornhill that align with planned capital projects and the implementation of these projects will demonstrate how diverse, community-wide objectives can be achieved.
- A “High-Level Resilience Strategy for Thornhill” was developed as a supplementary study and recommends 24 climate adaptation strategies that will be incorporated into future Thornhill initiatives.

## **Recommendations**

1. That the Action Plan for the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program be endorsed; and
2. That City staff be directed to seek external funding to implement unfunded projects identified in the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program Action Plan.

## **Background**

### ***Council supports the first Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program***

On May 14, 2019, Council passed a Member's Resolution to support the City's commitment to a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) project in partnership with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) focused on the Thornhill neighbourhood.

At the May 5, 2021 Committee of the Whole (Working Session) meeting, City and TRCA staff provided a joint presentation to update the Mayor and Members of Council on the progress of the Thornhill SNAP. The presentation provided an overview of the TRCA's SNAP Program, background on how the Thornhill neighbourhood was selected as Vaughan's first SNAP, and how the City worked with local residents and stakeholders to develop themes to guide the action planning process.

The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan was created using a three-phased action planning process that promoted multi-stakeholder engagement throughout all phases. Local knowledge and input were integral to identifying important community characteristics that contributed to the final Action Plan's concepts and recommendations.

### ***Community engagement shaped the development of the Action Plan***

A critical component of any SNAP project success involves taking a highly collaborative approach to foster a sense of ownership among the neighbourhood's stakeholders and community members. There were extensive community engagement activities throughout the action planning process to gain an understanding of the past and present conditions of the Thornhill 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

- 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 including 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

Over 1450 comments were received and over 300 residents were engaged during the engagement activities that informed the development of the Action Plan. Some of the main themes that emerged from the community engagement are as follows:

- The need for increased access and connectivity through the creation of connected trail systems utilizing multi-use pathways across the neighbourhood
- Residents expressed a sense of isolation and disconnection; encourage community building and connections through physical improvements, events, and programming
- Add native plants, trees, pollinator gardens and other wildlife features to increase biodiversity
- Increase educational function within parks by creating learning spaces and adding educational and wayfinding signage where feasible
- Incorporate art and colour in parks and along streets to create areas that are unique destinations
- The recognition of many opportunities to retrofit homes and commercial buildings and properties, and there is significant interest to participate in programs that will help residents improve their properties

### **Previous Reports/Authority**

Previous reports considered by City Council regarding the Plan can be found at the following links:

[Council meeting extract, May 14, 2019](#) – A Member’s Resolution was passed by Council in May 2019 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.

[Council meeting extract, May 5, 2021](#) – Council received a progress update on the Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program.

## **Analysis and Options**

### ***The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan is a comprehensive plan for neighbourhood resilience and revitalization***

The Action Plan integrates local community interests, sustainability objectives and climate adaptation strategies under the overarching theme of “historically rich, culturally diverse, green and connected”. When implemented, the proposed actions, projects and programs will achieve the following neighbourhood vision:

*A green, walkable and bikeable neighbourhood that is prepared for extreme weather events and provides connected amenities and where nature thrives around sustainable homes and buildings. A neighbourhood where public spaces are interesting places for residents to meet each other while staying active and neighbours celebrate together and support each other.*

An executive summary of the Action Plan is appended as Attachment 1. To access the full report: <https://trca.ca/conservation/sustainable-neighbourhoods/snap-neighbourhood-projects/thornhill-snap/>

### ***Three Integrated Action Areas were developed to identify key themes***

The Action Plan is centered on three Integrated Action Areas that were developed in consideration of neighbourhood technical objectives for sustainability and resilience, planned capital projects and the community’s overall vision that was expressed through public engagement. The implementation of these Integrated Action Areas will also address multiple goals and objectives outlined in the City’s master sustainability plan, Green Directions Vaughan 2019 (GDV). They are as follows:

- 1. Connected People, Places and Ecosystems** – Identifies active transportation, trails, green infrastructure, parks and open space elements and recommendations for connecting the community to green spaces and programming. This Action Area addresses Objective 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3, and 4.1 in GDV.
- 2. Residential Retrofits** – Provides support to homeowners who are interested in retrofitting their homes to make single family residential properties in Thornhill

more efficient and resilient to extreme climate events. This Action Area addresses Objective 1.2 in GDV.

- 3. Greening and Humanization of Commercial and Institutional Properties and Multi-Unit Residential Buildings** – Brings together property owners, not-for-profits, and businesses to implement property-specific initiatives to encourage community connections, natural heritage improvements, and promote sustainable and resilient buildings. This Action Area addresses Objective 1.2 and 2.1 in GDV.

### **The four Signature Projects identified innovative projects to be implemented**

Four Signature Projects have been identified in the Action Plan that will address the Integrated Action Area's key themes. These Signature Projects align with planned capital projects or City initiatives and are intended to be innovative projects that have been developed based on input from the community and technical staff from the City and TRCA. Implementation of Signature Projects will be phased, with some elements being implemented in the shorter term through the City's capital infrastructure budget, while other elements will require joint fundraising efforts from the City, TRCA and community partners.

#### **1. Gallanough Park Redevelopment**

Gallanough Park was identified as a Signature Project based on feedback from the community combined with the City's existing capital project to construct a stormwater management facility in the park to alleviate localized flooding. Park redevelopment recommendations for Gallanough Park include adapting and enhancing existing park functions to create a well-connected space that provides comfortable, safe, and continuous experience while enhancing wildlife habitat to increase biodiversity. Feedback from the community helped focus some key recommendations for the park including:

- Improved playground and additional activity areas with accessible options that appeal to multi-age and multi-sensory experiences
- Extended trail network to improve connectivity with neighbouring institutions
- Wayfinding and interpretive signage to promote connection within and beyond the park
- Wildlife enhancements in the form of tree plantings and pollinator gardens to allow residents an opportunity to connect with nature
- Revitalized facilities and programming for the Gallanough Resource Centre and the John Arnold House

A concept plan for Gallanough Park is appended as Attachment 2. Recommendations include the addition of 495m<sup>2</sup> of pollinator habitat, 1200m<sup>2</sup> of trees planted, and a total of 355m of trail added to the Park. All of the recommendations in the concept plan are not intended to be integrated immediately into the approved capital project for the Stormwater Management Improvements Gallanough Park and Surrounding Area Project. Rather, the intent is to consider the additional elements in future capital project review and to fundraise for these elements separately where needed.

## **2. York Hill District Park Redevelopment**

York Hill District Park was identified as a Signature Project because of the planned capital project to renovate the Garnet A. Williams Community Centre (GAWCC) and redevelop the York Hill District Park. Feedback from the community helped focus some key recommendations for the park including:

- Expanded and improved multi-use pathways to improve access and connectivity throughout the park as well as to neighbouring institutions
- Wayfinding and interpretive signage to promote connection within and beyond the park
- Activity options for all ages and increased educational learning through the creation of a series of activity zones throughout the park
- Creation of a park focal feature that can serve as a non-permitted community gathering place, as well as for organized events
- Introduction of urban agriculture through the addition of community gardens, fruit trees, and a farmer's market
- Improved seating and shade through the planting of trees and increased accessible seating options

A concept plan for York Hill District Park is appended as Attachment 3. Recommendations include the addition of 4800m<sup>2</sup> of pollinator habitat, 3360m<sup>2</sup> of trees planted, and a total of 615m of trail added to the Park. All of the recommendations in the concept plan are not intended to be integrated immediately into the already approved capital project for the York Hill Park Redevelopment Project. The intent is to consider the additional elements in future capital project review and to fundraise for these elements separately where needed.

### **3. Complete Streets Project**

The Complete Streets project identifies active transportation improvements and opportunities for three collector roads (Atkinson Avenue, Hilda Avenue and Centre Street) that run through the Thornhill neighbourhood. These collector roads were identified based on input from the community and alignment with the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. The Complete Streets concept was used to guide engagement discussions to ensure that feedback encompassed all street users while also considering the key themes identified in the Integrated Action Areas. Feedback from the community helped focus some key recommendations including:

- Pedestrian improvements focusing on safety and amenities to make the pedestrian experience more enjoyable
- Improvement of quality of street life, including more seating and rest areas and more trees or physical structures to provide shade
- Cycling improvements focusing on safety and increased signage to improve education on how to properly use cycling infrastructure
- Greening of streets with the addition of street trees and planting beds or rain gardens
- Celebration of art, history, and cultural heritage through the incorporation of art and colour where possible

A concept plan for the Complete Streets project is appended as Attachment 4. Recommendations include the addition of five bicycle repair stations, five bicycle racks, twenty-one rest areas, five wayfinding opportunities, seven art installations, thirteen pollinator gardens, and two potential pedestrian connections. These recommendations have not yet been included in any existing capital projects but are intended to be considered as a part of future projects in Thornhill. Additional elements will be fundraised for separately where needed.

### **4. Thornhill Home Retrofit Program**

A pilot Home Retrofit Program (Program) for the Thornhill neighbourhood incorporates key themes from the Residential Retrofits Integrated Action Area. The Program will offer a support service and educational activities to help homeowners decide on the best way to retrofit their homes across multiple sustainability themes (e.g., energy, water, stormwater management, eco-landscaping). This Program will also leverage existing incentive programs and continue the City's efforts to plan for a Local Improvement Charges (LIC) financing program for energy retrofits. The Program plans to offer:

- In-person home visits to Thornhill SNAP residents to educate homeowners on home retrofit opportunities that will increase energy savings
- A concierge service that will provide homeowners a “one-stop shop” to help homeowners arrange energy audits, source contractors, secure building permits and oversee work
- An online resource library including workshops and webinars to connect homeowners with information and tools to increase knowledge for a range of retrofit interests

City staff are currently seeking funding options and exploring resident interest in this Program.

***The High-Level Resilience Strategy for Thornhill was developed as a supplementary study***

The High-Level Resilience Strategy for Thornhill was completed as a supplementary study to identify climate change vulnerabilities for the Thornhill neighbourhood.

The climate change vulnerability assessment evaluated the specific community risks posed by climate change. The vulnerability assessment was informed by community engagement and technical analysis to:

- determine the community’s likelihood of exposure to changing climate conditions
- assess neighbourhood characteristics to identify their sensitivity to climate change
- assess the community’s current ability to adapt to the effects of climate change

Twenty-four climate adaptation recommendations are outlined in the Action Plan to address the key vulnerabilities for the Thornhill neighbourhood that were identified through this assessment.

***Implementing the Action Plan and Monitoring Progress***

To facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan, the SNAP team has outlined a preliminary implementation framework that identifies potential partnerships and collaboration opportunities over the next ten years. This implementation framework serves as a high-level guide to identify project leads, estimated timelines and potential funding sources. It will also be a living document that will be updated with additional details as projects are developed and implemented. Immediate next steps to implement the Action Plan include:



- Establish working groups for each of the Signature Projects (ongoing). These working groups will be comprised of technical staff and community stakeholders and will refine project plans, develop partnerships, assist with fundraising efforts, and provide ongoing input through the implementation phases of each Signature Project. Working groups members would include City staff from Public Works Portfolio (Parks, Forestry and Horticultural Operations and Environmental Services), Infrastructure Development Portfolio (Infrastructure Delivery, Infrastructure Planning & Corporate Asset Management, and Parks Planning and Development) and City Manager's Office (Economic and Cultural Development and Corporate and Strategic Communications)
- Support the ongoing design and implementation of the Gallanough Park Redevelopment and the York Hill District Park Redevelopment Signature Projects (2022-2023). For additional elements identified in the concept plans that are not already funded by the relevant capital projects, the SNAP team will work closely with the implementation working groups to identify funding opportunities, potential synergies with future capital projects, and any potential community groups that may want to be involved to design and construct these elements where feasible
- Consider the Complete Streets Concept Plan and recommended elements when reviewing future capital works projects that will be implemented in the Thornhill neighbourhood
- Develop an online progress tracking dashboard to allow TRCA and the City to monitor Action Plan project progress and outcomes (Q4 2022). This dashboard is intended to be interactive by allowing for community engagement by providing a platform for residents to input their own actions undertaken on private property
- Implement quick start projects to build community interest and excitement (Q4 2021). Current quick start projects include: public tree planting and pollinator garden planting events planned for the fall of 2021, free Home Energy Retrofit Orientation workshops offered to Thornhill residents and free webinars for business owners to explore retrofit options
- The Thornhill SNAP team will work with staff from the Economic Development department to identify partnership and sponsorship opportunities to fund elements of the Action Plan. Corporate and Strategic Communications staff will provide promotional support for the implementation of Action Plan projects where needed

Through the working group committee meetings, City staff will have the opportunity to identify projects (elements) that they should be able to prioritize and include in their work programs for implementation.

### **Financial Impact**

This project does not impact the 2021 approved operating or capital budgets. The City has identified existing budgets and has attained grants to support select Action Plan recommendations. To date, the following funding has been received/committed to facilitate the Action Plan:

- 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 Thornhill Home Retrofit Program
- 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
- A commitment from the City for 3 years of funding at \$25,000 per annum for demonstration projects under Capital Project PL-9575-20
- A grant of \$5,000 from York Region's Greening Action Partnership Fund to implement a quick start tree planting project at Rosedale Park North
- A grant of \$5,000 from TD Friends of the Environment to implement a quick start project at Oakbank Pond including a pollinator planting and educational signage

The larger capital infrastructure project budgets are not included in this summary. Any additional capital infrastructure projects/budgets as a result of the Action Plan will be brought forward through the annual budget approval process.

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. 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.

## **Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations**

Through the completion of the City's first SNAP project, we are joining other municipalities in York Region that have committed to a collaborative, neighbourhood-based approach for advancing urban renewal in older urban areas. The neighbourhood mapping exercise that was completed as a part of the Thornhill SNAP planning process also identified other neighbourhoods in the City that may be suitable for future SNAP projects. The 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 SNAP initiative created by the TRCA is a tangible approach to translate the City's master sustainability plan, Green Directions Vaughan 2019, into a neighbourhood scale. The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan has been co-developed by the Thornhill community, City staff from multiple departments and TRCA to improve the local environment, build resiliency to climate change and encourage positive behaviour changes among residents. The Action Plan is based on technical objectives, planned municipal projects and resident priorities and it provides recommendations for sustainability actions on both private property and in the public realm. Implementation of Integrated Action Areas and Signature Projects in the short term and over the next five to ten years will make Thornhill more sustainable and livable.

**For more information**, please contact Monica Choy, Sustainability Coordinator, ext. 8941.

## **Attachments**

1. Thornhill SNAP Action Plan Executive Summary
2. Thornhill SNAP Gallanough Park Concept Plan
3. Thornhill SNAP York Hill District Park Concept Plan
4. Thornhill SNAP Complete Streets Concept Plan

## **Prepared by**

Monica Choy, Sustainability Coordinator, ext. 8941.

Ruth Rendon, Senior Environmental Planner, ext. 8104.

Christina Bruce, Director, Policy Planning and Special Programs, ext. 8231

**Approved by**



Haiqing Xu, Deputy City Manager  
Planning and Growth Management

**Reviewed by**



Nick Spensieri, City Manager