

Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program

THORNHILL SNAP NEIGHBOURHOOD



Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan

Historically rich, culturally diverse, green and connected

Action Plan Executive Summary

September, 2021

In collaboration with:



The Thornhill SNAP

Historically rich, culturally diverse, green and connected

The Thornhill Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) is a comprehensive Action Plan for neighbourhood resilience and revitalization that integrates local community interests, sustainability objectives and climate adaptation strategies under the overarching theme of historically rich, culturally diverse, green and connected.

The Thornhill neighbourhood was selected as the City of Vaughan’s first SNAP project through a neighbourhood screening process that was led by the Toronto and Region

Conservation Authority (TRCA), multiple City of Vaughan departments, and the Regional Municipality of York (York Region).

The screening process identified key technical priorities for the Thornhill neighbourhood (Box 1; Figure 1) that makes this area suited for a SNAP project:

- Thornhill has the highest number of flood calls in the City.
- Portions of the neighbourhood have the highest energy consumption rates in the City.
- One of the areas in York Region with the highest indoor and outdoor water consumption rates.
- An aging population combined with urban growth pressures.
- Aging park infrastructure with a series of planned City capital projects to revitalize these parks.
- Opportunities to connect with nature through enhancement of natural heritage features and improving greenspace connections.
- Opportunities for active transportation by promoting the use of newly installed dedicated cycle tracks along four collector roads in the neighbourhood.
- Opportunities to improve community connections and address the community’s concerns about isolation through programming and revitalization projects.

Box 1: Neighbourhood Profile	
Study Area	
860 ha	
Land Use	
58% medium-low density residential 2% high density residential 9% commercial, institutional 7% recreational, open space 5% roads 5% meadow 4.5% forest 8% golf course 1.5% other	
Demographics (Based on 2020 EnviroNics data)	
Population: 29,253 Median age: 60 Number of households: 9,995 Most common home languages: English, Russian, Mandarin, Korean, Persian Private dwellings: 58% Apartments: 34%	
Transportation	
Percentage of residents who travel to work by: Car: 70% Public transportation: 20% Walking: 4% Cycling: 0.5%	

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In addition to the screening exercise and baseline analysis described above, TRCA's Ontario Climate Consortium staff completed a climate change vulnerability assessment for the Thornhill SNAP ([High Level Resilience Strategy for Thornhill](#)). This assessment provided insight into the specific community risks posed by climate change and provided 24 resilience strategies for Thornhill. Key adaptation opportunities include:

- enhanced knowledge and awareness of climate change risks
- improved access to greenspace
- improved street tree canopy cover
- improved active transportation and public transit
- improved sense of community

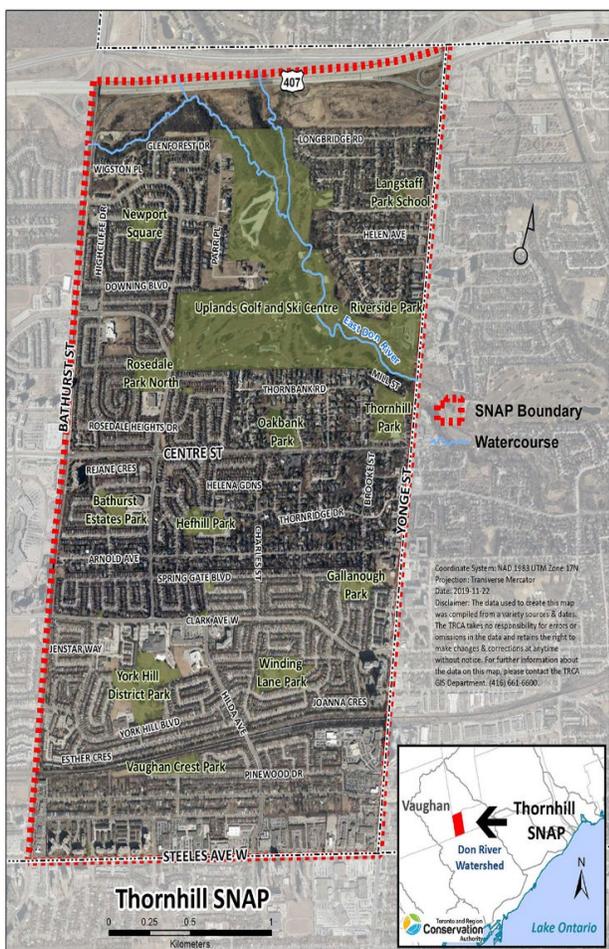


Figure 1. Thornhill SNAP Boundary

Box 2: Who's Involved?

Lead Partners

- TRCA
- City of Vaughan

Local Groups

- Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation
- Shoresh
- Holy Trinity Anglican Church
- United Jewish Association Federation of Greater Toronto
- SpringFarm Ratepayers Association
- The Society for Preservation of Historic Thornhill
- Thornhill Heritage Foundation
- Windfall Ecology Centre
- Gallanough Resource Centre
- Developing and Nurturing Independence (DANI)
- Reena
- Blessed Scalabrini Catholic Elementary School
- Kayla's Children Centre
- Thornhill Public School

Indigenous Peoples

- Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations
- Curve Lake First Nations
- Hiawatha First Nation

How We Got Here

Box 3: How We're Listening

Research Tools

- SNAP into Action Survey
- One-on-one stakeholder meetings

Feedback Sessions

- Co-visioning workshop
- Indigenous communities engagement
- Virtual open house sessions
- Action Plan map online commenting period
- Virtual signature project workshops

The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan was developed using a highly collaborative approach that brought together municipal and TRCA technical objectives with community priorities. The project was managed by key partners, including eleven departments from the City of Vaughan and four divisions from TRCA, through a Project Management Team. The community also participated actively in the development of the plan through a robust engagement process that included innovative visioning activities (Box 2; Box 3).

Action Planning Process

The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan was developed following a phased model that promoted multi-stakeholder engagement at various stages (Figure 2). Local input was integral to identifying important community characteristics that contribute to local culture and values. Robust public engagement combined with technical analyses helped inform the recommended priority actions that are outlined in the Action Plan.

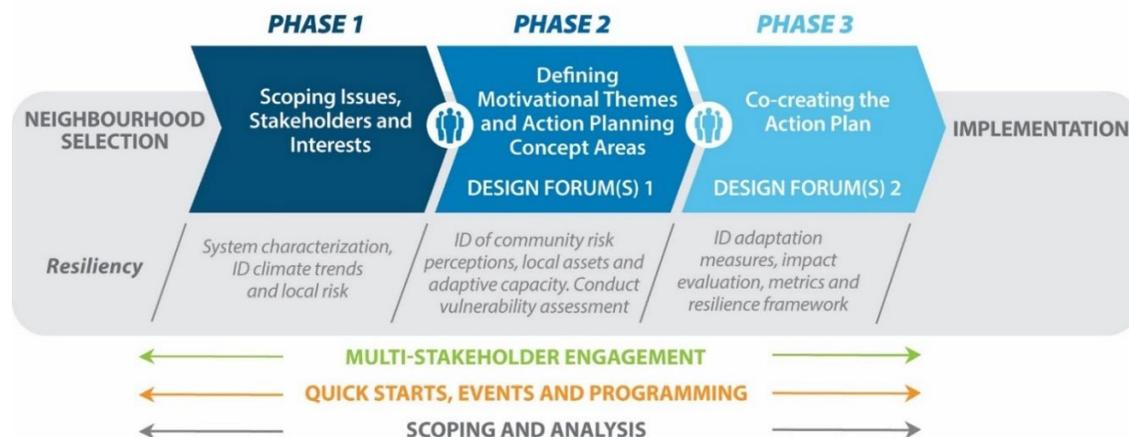


Figure 2. SNAP Action Planning Process

Phase 1 – Scoping issues, stakeholders and interests

Background research was conducted to understand the baseline scientific and socio-economic characteristics of the neighbourhood. One-on-one meetings were conducted with community leaders, organizations and not-for-profits to gain insight into their unique perspective on the neighbourhood needs. Technical meetings were also conducted with City, York Region and TRCA staff from multiple departments to assess technical challenges and opportunities within the neighbourhood.

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

A neighbourhood vision and motivational themes were identified through community engagement. Perceived risks and climate change vulnerabilities were discovered. The feedback and analysis, along with further community engagement, resulted in the development of the integrated action areas and a draft Action Plan map. Engagement activities in this phase included surveys, meetings with local organizations, and a full day visioning planning workshop.

Phase 3 – Co-creating the Action Plan

The final phase of the action planning process involves finalizing the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan, identifying climate adaptation strategies, developing concept drawings for each of the signature projects, and identify quick start projects. Engagement activities involving visioning workshops for each of the signature projects were performed on virtual platforms in this phase due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Workshops brought together technical City and TRCA staff with residents to brainstorm ideas and recommendations for the signature projects.

A Closer Look at the Thornhill SNAP

The Thornhill SNAP Action Plan is centered on **three Integrated Action Areas** that will each be implemented through a series of initiatives. The Integrated Action Areas were developed in consideration of neighbourhood technical issues and objectives, planned capital projects and motivating themes from the community. These action areas will serve to provide guiding direction for initiatives that are implemented as part of the Action Plan moving forward.

In addition, **four Signature Projects** have been identified for the Thornhill SNAP. These are innovative pilot projects that have been developed based on input from the community and technical City and TRCA staff. These projects will leverage planned capital budgets to achieve innovative elements and to maximize environmental and socio-economic benefits. Some elements of the Signature Projects will be implemented in the shorter term through the City's capital infrastructure budgets, while others will require joint fundraising efforts from the City, TRCA and community partners.

This Action Plan reflects the culmination of technical analyses, robust community and stakeholder engagement, and planned capital works (Figure 3). When implemented, the proposed actions will help 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.

THORNHILL SNAP NEIGHBOURHOOD

Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program



Connected Places, People & Ecosystems

Series of initiatives, including an **Active Transportation Plan** for improved pedestrian and cycling options, a **Green Infrastructure Plan** to add more trees and habitat across the neighbourhood and improve stormwater management, as well as initiatives related to the **Revitalization of Parks and Open Spaces** as interesting destinations with diverse amenities that respond to current community priorities. Inclusion of educational and cultural programming and events to encourage community connections.

Residential Retrofits

Provision of supports and programming for homeowners to assist them with identification and implementation of actions to make their homes and their properties more efficient and more resilient to extreme climate events.

Greening and Humanization of Commercial and Institutional (CI) Properties and Multi-Unit Residential Buildings (MURBs)

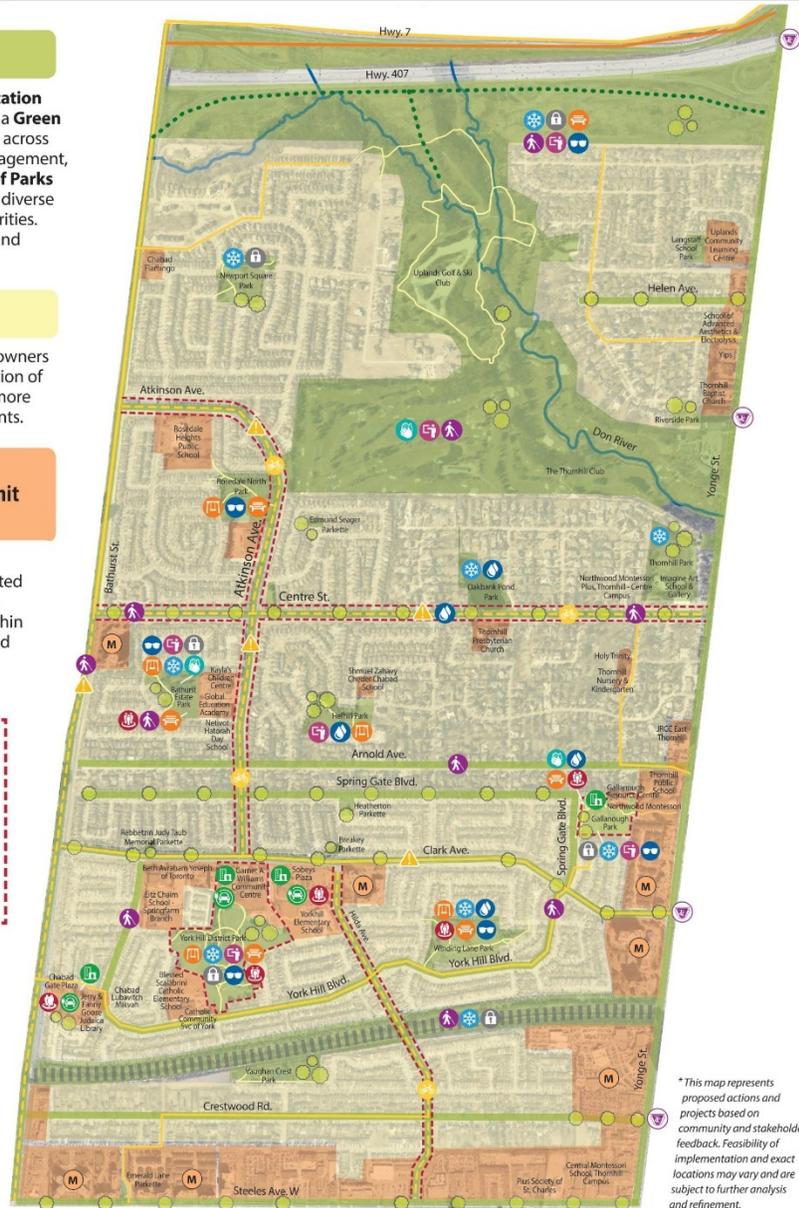
Focus on creating more sustainable and resilient buildings, parking lots and outdoor spaces associated with MUR, institutional and commercial properties within the community. Development of spaces within these properties that celebrate culture and history and that allow the community to gather and connect.

PUBLIC REALM SIGNATURE PROJECTS

Innovative projects that will demonstrate how multiple co-benefits and diverse, neighbourhood-wide objectives can be achieved on the site.



In collaboration with City of Vaughan



*This map represents proposed actions and projects based on community and stakeholder feedback. Feasibility of implementation and exact locations may vary and are subject to further analysis and refinement.

EXISTING/PROPOSED FEATURES	PROPOSED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS
Water Course	Community Gathering Destination
Existing Trails/Pathways	Improved Walkability & Accessibility
Existing Cycling Routes	Programming
Proposed Cycling Routes	Playground Improvements
Proposed Subway Stations	Multi-season Recreation
Proposed 407 Transitway	Safety Considerations
Proposed Vaughan Super Trail	Art, History, & Cultural Celebration
Railway	Seating
Multi-unit Residential Buildings	Shade
	Traffic Improvements (Calm, reduction)
	Stormwater & Drainage Management
	Green Parking Lots & EV Charging
	Resilient/Sustainable Buildings
	Trees, Flowers, Habitat, Ecolandscaping



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For further information about this Action Plan, please visit trca.ca/snap-thornhill

Figure 3. SNAP Action Plan Map

Integrated Action Areas

1. Connected Places, People and Ecosystems

This action area focuses on building and enhancing physical, social and ecological connections within the community. The following four components should be considered when planning and designing projects under this action area:

- Green Infrastructure Planning – an inventory of green infrastructure opportunities should be identified for the Thornhill neighbourhood to inform future development of public and private spaces
- Active Transportation Planning – active transportation and multi-modal transportation improvements should be included where possible to encourage cycling and increase accessibility
- Parks and Open Space Planning – parks and open space improvements should be included in the 12 parks and 4 parkettes where needed and identified by the community
- Educational, Cultural and Community Programming – cultural and community programming will foster community connections and help residents develop a deep sense of belonging and pride in their neighbourhood

2. Residential Retrofits

Through the engagement process, residents expressed significant interest in programs to help them retrofit their homes. This neighbourhood also has one of the highest energy consumption rates in the City and mainly consists of aging single family, semi-detached and row houses. This provides an excellent opportunity for retrofits that will improve energy efficiency and achieve greenhouse gas emission reductions. Residential retrofit programs could also target changes to improve water efficiency and consumption rates and address risks associated with heat stress and flooding.

3. Greening and Humanization of Commercial and Institutional Properties and Multi-Unit Residential Buildings (MURBs)

This action area will focus on private and publicly owned buildings to implement property-specific initiatives to support various sustainability objectives while addressing owner and tenant priorities. With 15 institutional buildings and 18 MURBs in the Thornhill neighbourhood, there is a significant opportunity to retrofit aging infrastructure to achieve energy and water efficiencies, encourage active transportation, and achieve ecological integrity and sustainable stormwater management.

Signature Projects

Gallanough Park Redevelopment

Gallanough Park (Park) is a community park that is a candidate for redevelopment in the City's 2018 Parks Redevelopment Strategy. The existing park currently includes playground equipment, an outdoor gazebo, swings and walking trails and is connected to a number of important community institutions. These connections provide an ideal opportunity to make Gallanough Park into a vibrant and exciting community gathering space. The Park was identified as a signature project based on feedback received from the community combined with the City's capital plans to construct a stormwater management facility in the park to alleviate urban flooding.

Revitalization recommendations feature an abundance of activities and experiences for residents by adapting and enhancing park functions (Figure 4). The goal is to create well-connected and cohesive spaces while providing comfortable and safe experiences and enhanced habitat for wildlife.



Figure 4. Gallanough Park Redevelopment Concept Drawing

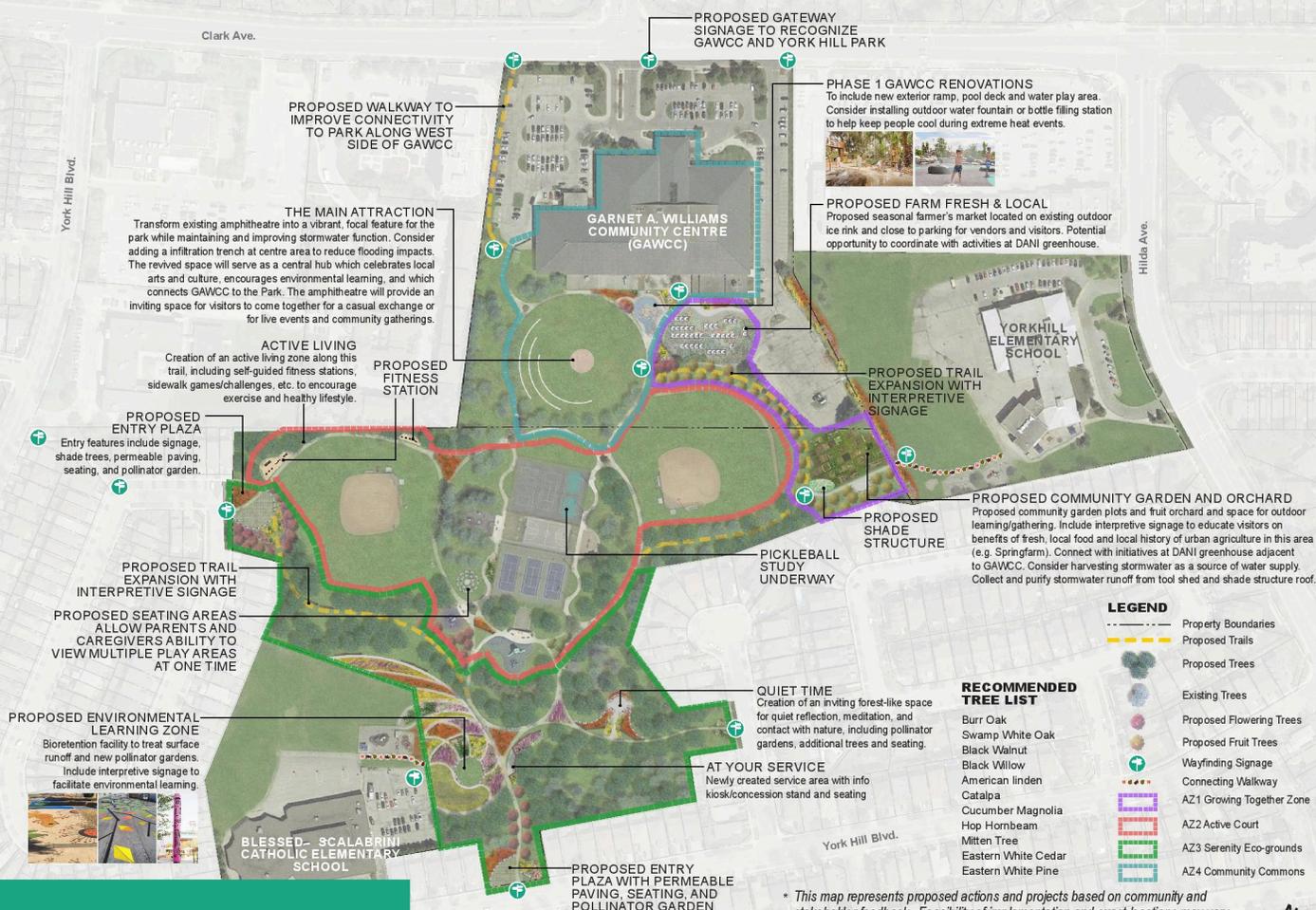


York Hill District Park Redevelopment

York Hill District Park (Park) is adjacent to the Garnet A. Williams Community Centre (GAWCC) and includes 3 playground areas, 2 baseball diamonds, a small gazebo, swings, tennis and basketball courts, an outdoor skating ring and a series of multi-purpose trails. The Park was identified as a signature project based on feedback received from the community combined with the City's capital plans for renovations at GAWCC and the availability of capital funding through Parks Infrastructure Planning and Development department to develop a revitalization plan for the Park (Figure 5).

The community's vision focused on the following main ideas:

- Access and connectivity including expanded and improved multi-use pathways
- Activity options for all ages and increased educational learning
- Creation of a park focal feature
- Introduction of urban agriculture and local food opportunities
- Increased number of trees and shade opportunities and resting areas



YORK HILL DISTRICT PARK

Figure 5. York Hill District Park Redevelopment Concept Design

* This map represents proposed actions and projects based on community and stakeholder feedback. Feasibility of implementation and exact locations may vary and are subject to further analysis and refinement, budgetary considerations, and continued community input during design development and implementation.
 * Proposed elements within school property will be subject to further discussions with the School Board.

Complete Streets Project

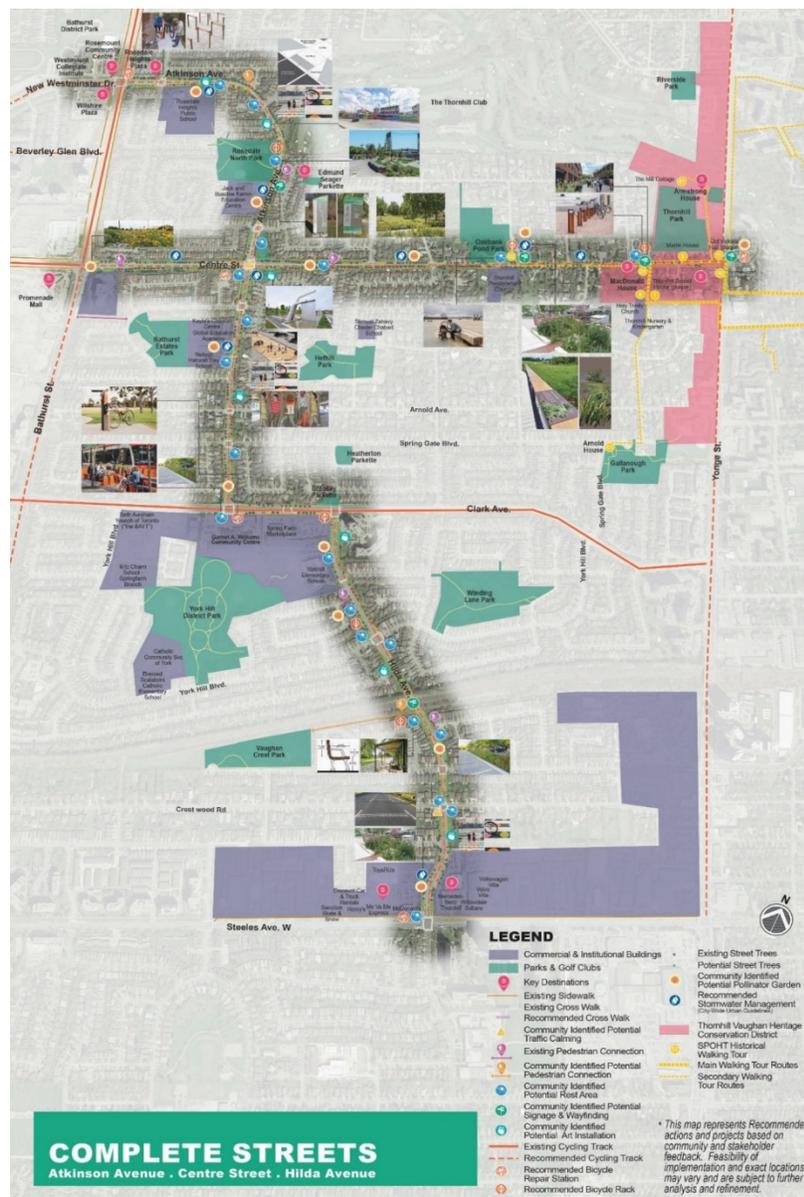


Figure 6. Complete Streets Project Concept Design

The Thornhill SNAP Complete Streets project identifies areas of opportunity on 3 collector roads in the Thornhill SNAP neighbourhood. These roads were identified based on input from the community and their alignment with the City of Vaughan’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. Sidewalks exist on both sides of the selected roads, but pedestrian connections between sidewalks, mid-block crossings, community amenities and open spaces need to be strengthened. In addition, community feedback indicated numerous suggestions for these streets, including improved walkability and traffic flow, reduction in pedestrian/cyclist crossing distances and times at intersections, midblock crossings, reduction in traffic congestion, implementation of cycling facilities, beautification and planting additional street trees.

The Complete Streets concept was utilized to help guide engagement discussions to ensure that feedback encompassed all potential street users including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and motorists while considering the broader SNAP guiding principles recommended by the community. The objective of the Complete Streets project is to create safe, inviting and vibrant streets and streetscapes that will attract both residents and visitors of all ages and abilities alike, while addressing the sustainability objectives identified for the community, including urban forest and habitat improvement and sustainable stormwater management. More specific recommendations for each user group can be found in the Action Plan (Figure 6).

Thornhill Home Retrofit Program



A pilot Home Retrofit Program was designed tailored to the Thornhill neighbourhood based on interest expressed during the SNAP public engagement activities. The design concept incorporates design principles from the Residential Retrofits Integrated Action Area. The program will offer support services and educational activities to help homeowners decide on key actions to be implemented at their homes

and to make the retrofit process as straightforward as possible. As per the guiding principles, the program will support actions across multiple sustainability and resilience themes (i.e., energy, water, stormwater management, eco-landscaping and flood prevention) and social themes such as aging in place. In addition, the proposed activities will help homeowners access existing incentive programs and continue the City's efforts to plan for a Local Improvement Charges financing program for energy retrofits.

The following program elements are proposed to include: in-person home visits, a concierge service for residents, online workshops and webinars, online resource library, community workshops, a discovery centre trailer, and a home demonstration project (Figure 7).

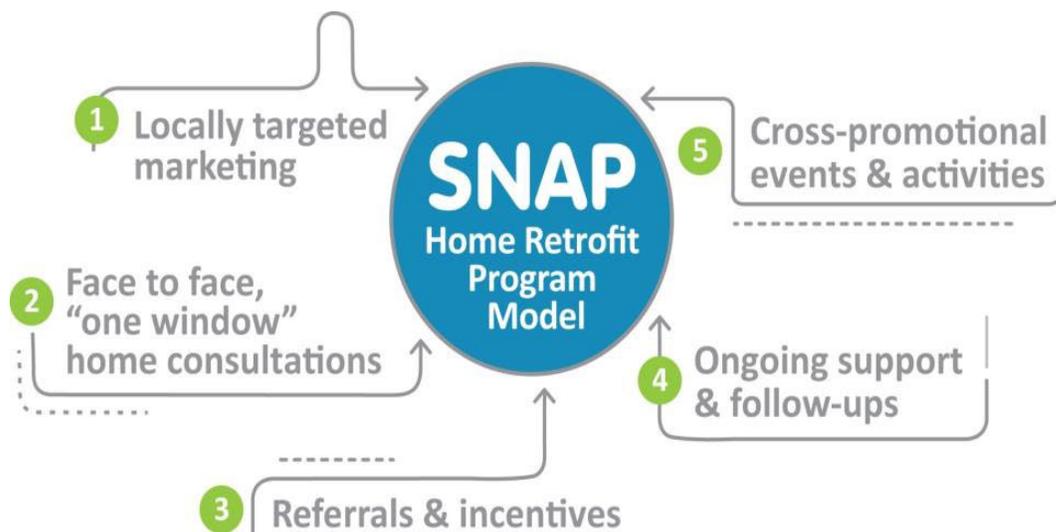


Figure 7. SNAP Home Retrofit Program Model

Box 4: Key Outcomes

Energy and climate

- Reduced greenhouse gas generation to support the City's Climate Emergency target of reducing per capita emissions to 2-3 tonnes eCO₂ by 2030
- Implement deep energy retrofits in 230 homes by 2031
- Improved neighbourhood resiliency to extreme climate events

Stormwater management and water efficiency

- Reduced number of flood calls
- Increasing total area with stormwater quantity and quality controls
- Reduced inflow and infiltration into the sanitary system

Ecosystem integrity

- Increased canopy cover to support York Region's recommended cover range for the City of Vaughan
- Increased natural cover and improved habitat quality, biological diversity and pollinator health
- Improved stewardship of local natural areas and the urban forest

Health and well-being

- Improved physical and mental health for Thornhill residents through physical retrofits and programming to promote improved air quality, active living, connection with nature, social interaction and access to fresh local food

Livable places and community connections

- Improved quality of life for all residents through the creation of engaging, meaningful opportunities and unique spaces that encourage community cohesion, inclusion, sense of belonging and civic pride

Culture, heritage and education

- Improved access to the arts through installations and cultural events
- Improved appreciation and celebration of the distinct historical and Indigenous heritage
- Improved education of environmental issues

Access and mobility

- Increased use of sustainable modes of transportation through the improvement of active and EV transportation infrastructure and through education and programming

Next Steps

The SNAP team will continue working with multiple City departments and other stakeholder groups to move the identified Signature Projects through their planned phased designs. A preliminary implementation framework has been created which serves as a high-level guide to identify actions, lead roles, potential project partners, estimated timeframes, and potential funding sources (see Table 8 in the Action Plan). This framework is a living document and will be updated with additional details as projects are prioritized and engagement with stakeholders advances towards the implementation stage.

Immediate next steps for the Thornhill SNAP include:

1. **Implementation Committees and Working Groups.** Establish implementation committees/working groups for each of the signature projects and other major initiatives. These committees will refine project and program plans, develop partnerships, gather widespread support, assist with fundraising efforts and provide ongoing input throughout the implementation of these projects.
2. **Thornhill Home Retrofit Program.** Finalize detailed design, including program offerings, schedule, delivery partners, and marketing strategy for the Home Retrofit Program. The content and schedule will be partially dependent on City of Vaughan receiving federal funding to develop and administer the Local Improvement Charges program as outlined earlier in this report.
3. **Gallanough Stormwater Management Facility and Park Redevelopment.** Construction of the Gallanough stormwater facility is slated to begin late fall 2021. Detailed design for park redevelopment will take place after the construction of the stormwater facility is completed, ensuring SNAP design principles and community design concepts are incorporated.
4. **Garnet A. Williams Community Centre Retrofits and York Hill Park Redevelopment.** Proceed as planned with tendering for implementation of Garnet A. Williams Community Centre renovations and York Hill Park improvements. Initiate detailed design for park redevelopment, ensuring SNAP guiding principles and community design concepts are incorporated.
5. **Progress Tracking Dashboard.** Develop a monitoring dashboard that will track progress on SNAP project indicators towards the achievement of neighbourhood goals and will also allow community members to input actions undertaken in private property.
6. **Implement “Quick Start” Projects.** Initiate quick start projects in the short term including tree planting and pollinator garden planting events to provide community engagement opportunities and help maintain momentum and excitement for the SNAP.
7. **Council Endorsement.** Secure City of Vaughan Council endorsement for the Thornhill SNAP Action Plan in the fall of 2021.