

Item for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, February 28, 2024

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: TRCA'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES UPDATE

KEY ISSUE

To provide an update on the work of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Sustainable Communities' Business Unit and to request input from RWA members on the best practices, issues, and opportunities around the maintenance of green infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS TRCA delivers programs and services that foster and enable a climate resilient society;

AND WHEREAS TRCA's Sustainable Communities Business Unit offers services in this area that may be of interest to TRCA's Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA);

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the staff report on TRCA's Sustainable Communities' work be received;

AND THAT RWA members support Sustainable Communities work where feasible and appropriate;

AND FURTHER THAT RWA members be encouraged to provide input to TRCA staff on best practices, issues and opportunities around the maintenance of green infrastructure in urbanized settings.

BACKGROUND

TRCA's Sustainable Communities Business Unit seeks to foster and enable a climate resilient society by working with government, industry, and residential stakeholders. This is achieved by employing proven models designed to deepen engagement and empower local leaders to address climate action, while also tackling other sustainability challenges.

Collaboration, multi-objective delivery and a long-term perspective are three critical strategies that underlie the success of TRCA's Sustainable Communities programs and services. TRCA's role is that of a partnership-broker, who brings traditional and non-traditional stakeholders together, and a facilitator of integrated planning, project development and implementation.

Within the context of a broad agenda related to advancing sustainability within TRCA watersheds, TRCA delivers two flagship Sustainable Communities programs:

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Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) and Partners in Project Green (PPG).

SNAP, launched in 2009, is a neighbourhood model for sustainable urban renewal and climate action. TRCA developed SNAP to help municipalities overcome the challenges of retrofitting older neighbourhoods and the success of the SNAP program is rooted in a collaborative approach that aligns municipal priorities with local interests. SNAP improves efficiencies, draws strong community support, and builds trusted implementation partnerships for initiatives in public and private realms. Today, there is a network of 16 SNAP neighbourhoods across eleven municipalities in Ontario. For more information, visit: <https://trca.ca/conservation/sustainable-neighbourhoods/>.

PPG represents the culmination of more than two decades of partnership between the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA) and TRCA. PPG was launched in 2008 with a vision of building a community of leaders advancing environmental action and economic prosperity across the GTAA. PPG is a network of public, private and not-for-profit partners addressing global goals on carbon emissions reduction, water stewardship, waste reduction and environmental engagement, in the local context. For more information, visit: <https://partnersinprojectgreen.com>. Applied in a growing network of neighbourhoods and with hundreds of local companies across TRCA's jurisdiction, these efforts have resulted in significant quantifiable GHG reductions and many other co-benefits such as materials waste reduction, materials re-use, local food production and sequestration.

RATIONALE

About the PPG Program

Partners in Project Green is a member-based program, and is business led and business driven. PPG is governed by a sub-committee of the TRCA Board, the PPG Executive Management Committee. Target areas include Energy Performance and Low Carbon Transportation, Water Stewardship, and Waste Management. PPG also offers many different events throughout the year, which can be seen here: <https://partnersinprojectgreen.com/events/>

An overview of programs offered through PPG can be found below.

Energy Programs	Description
Energy Leaders Consortium	A group of 19 large and SME energy users working together to reduce costs and GHG emissions.
GreenBiz Caledon Climate Partnership	This includes capacity building workshops on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, saving energy, and installing eco-friendly landscaping to reduce your climate change risks, site walk-through assessments to identify energy and carbon reduction opportunities and customized support.
Mississauga Climate	The Mississauga Climate Leaders Program (MCLP) aims to support local private and public sector leaders committed to

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Leaders Program	measuring and reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and leading Mississauga towards a net zero future. This program includes site walk-through assessments and capacity building workshops.
Futureproof Your Fleet	Funded through the NRCan, this program builds awareness of various low and no emission technologies available to reduce emissions from medium and heavy-duty vehicles. A series of 7 events will run from January 2024 – March 2025, and a resource hub and social media campaign will be launched.
Building a Climate Resilient Business Kit	A suite of resources intended to help businesses across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) understand their climate change risks, how to evaluate and prioritize them, and learn about potential strategies to address them.

Water Programs	Description
Sustainable Salt Resource Hub	An online resource hub generating salt use awareness and providing tools to help businesses follow best practices. PPG works with the Salt Responsibility Working Group (Peel Region) to support promotion and outreach.
Toronto Inner Harbour Floatables Strategy	A partnership between TRCA, the Toronto Remedial Action Plan, the University of Toronto Trash Team, PortsToronto, and several City of Toronto divisions, with support from Swim Drink Fish, the Harbourfront Centre and the Waterfront Business Improvement Area. The goal of the Floatables Strategy is to improve water quality and aesthetics of the Toronto Inner Harbour through the management of floatable debris.
Corporate Flood and Heat Risk	The Corporate Flood and Heat Risk area focuses on publicly available resources on Green Infrastructure (GI) and Low Impact Development (LID) techniques as sustainable solutions to reduce stormwater runoff, mitigate flood risk, enhance vegetative cover & biodiversity, and reduce impacts of flood and heat risks. Sustainable Landscaping Plans and Flood Risk Preparedness Assessments, along with financial incentives to implement projects, are identified in the plan and assessment.

Waste Programs	Description
Circular Economy Leaders Consortium	A group of industry professionals seeking to improve facility waste management and circular economy initiatives.

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Materials Exchange Program	Facilitating the exchange of material between businesses and non-profit organizations to divert waste from landfill, support local communities, and move towards a circular economy.
Recycling Collection Drive	An employee engagement campaign typically run during Waste Reduction Week in October that supports organizations to collect textile and electronic waste, helping to divert waste from landfill and engage employees about sustainability.

About the SNAP Program

Through the SNAP Program, TRCA partners with multiple municipal divisions and local communities to co-develop and co-implement Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plans and Climate Resilience Strategies for strategic urbanized geographical areas within our watersheds. These areas are selected through a rigorous technical process in which urban renewal and environmental priorities are mapped across entire municipalities, in conjunction with climate vulnerabilities.

The SNAP program applies both a top down and bottom-up approach to bring together both TRCA and municipal technical objectives, along with residents' day to day priorities for their community and their life. Robust public and multidisciplinary staff engagement is both foundational and fundamental to SNAP's work.

SNAP establishes targets and tracks progress across diverse sustainability themes, including:

- Sustainable stormwater management
- Flood risk reduction and heat stress management
- Water efficiency
- Waste management
- GHG reduction
- Urban forest and habitat enhancement
- Skills training and jobs
- Health and wellbeing
- Other customized to each neighbourhood

The SNAP program addresses all land uses within the selected neighbourhoods.

Typical SNAP action Areas include:

1. **Home Retrofit Programs:** SNAP helps homeowners make their homes more sustainable and resilient to climate risks (addressing multiple objectives from the list above).
2. **Public infrastructure renewal:** SNAP re-imagines traditional public infrastructure projects to maximize their sustainability and climate resilience impact. For example, road reconstruction projects are reimagined into green/ complete streets; park renewal projects are re-imagined adding raingardens, shade, nature-based

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education, and public art.

3. **Revitalization of Multi-unit Residential, Commercial and Institutional Properties:** SNAP helps property owners design and implement indoor and outdoor retrofits, while supporting their communities.
4. **Programing for Community Resilience:** SNAP develops and implements community programs such as resident and NGO capacity building (through our participant to leader model); skills training and paid internship opportunities in the green economy; community connections; urban agriculture and emergency preparedness.

To ensure implementation of SNAP Neighbourhood Action Plans and Resilience Strategies, TRCA's SNAP program develops and facilitates implementation partnerships with all sectors. On a typical year, SNAP works with around 100 implementation partners and collaborators towards the achievement of neighbourhood goals.

For Discussion: Green Infrastructure Maintenance within the SNAP Neighbourhoods

SNAP has been the recipient of multiple national and international awards. It has been recognized as a highly successful program across North America and Europe. However, there are a number of challenges that still need to be overcome to achieve our ambitious sustainability and climate resilience goals.

One of those challenges is maintenance of green infrastructure implemented within the SNAP (and other urban) neighbourhoods. Our municipal partners and many private property owners have come to understand the important benefits of green infrastructure (i.e. such as Low Impact Development (LID) for Stormwater Management, pollinator gardens, etc.). Significant progress has been made in getting the required approvals and funding towards the implementation of these projects within the SNAP neighbourhoods.

So far, SNAP has been able to find solutions to maintain most of these projects, on a one-by-one basis. However, as the network of green infrastructure projects across all land uses continues to grow, a streamlined program or solution for its maintenance will need to be developed, to guarantee the health and aesthetics of the system through efficient use of limited resources. Many members of the RWA have experience or exposure to these issues through their diverse roles that are reflected in RWA composition.

We are seeking advice from RWA on solutions for maintenance of green infrastructure (especially LIDs and pollinator gardens) across public and private land. This can include but is not limited to input and advice on guidance and best practices based on specific project, program or site examples and experiences.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

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Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

2.2 Collaboration to advance a green transition

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.4 Inspired communities take environmental action

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Key Areas of focus of Sustainable Communities in 2024 will be:

- In partnership with municipalities, industry, and NGOs, explore the development of a tower focused program with the aim to deeply decarbonize multi-unit residential and commercial towers and enhance climate resiliency of these buildings, lands, and communities.
- Design the new generation of home retrofit programs across all municipalities (with an emphasis on decarbonization) and exploration of District Energy opportunities.
- Develop streamlined solutions for maintenance of green infrastructure projects.
- Accelerate the transition of public and private fleets to low carbon technologies.

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