

Section I – Items for the Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Meeting #8/20, Friday, November 20, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PROGRAM (SNAP) –
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

KEY ISSUE

Strategic directions for the Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) and endorsement of the neighbourhood selection process for identifying future SNAP neighbourhood projects.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has delivered the nationally recognized Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Program (SNAP) in partnership with nine local and regional municipalities and community collaborators since 2009;

WHEREAS SNAP supports municipal policy and program directions which are adopting a neighbourhood based approach and delivers on multiple municipal and TRCA priorities including local climate action, green infrastructure revitalization and strengthened community resilience;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the report outlining strategic directions for SNAP be received;

AND FURTHER THAT TRCA’s Board of Directors endorse the neighbourhood selection process as the framework for identifying future SNAP neighbourhood projects.

BACKGROUND

SNAP is a neighbourhood model for sustainable urban renewal and climate action and was developed to help municipalities overcome the challenges of retrofitting and renewing older neighbourhoods. SNAP’s collaborative approach aligns municipal priorities with local needs and interests to improve efficiencies, draw strong community support and build trusted implementation partnerships for initiatives in public and private realms. Working with local stakeholders, SNAP neighbourhood projects address a broad range of sustainability objectives by advancing strategies for:

- Home retrofits (*e.g. tree planting, local flood protection, rainwater harvesting*);
- Infrastructure renewal (*e.g. integration of environmental and social outcomes into parks, stormwater management facilities, roads*);
- Multi-unit residential, commercial and institutional revitalization (*e.g. sustainable landscaping, urban agriculture, building retrofits*); and
- Community resilience and leadership capacity (*e.g. neighbour connections, skills building, emergency preparedness*).

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SNAP has been developed through three strategic phases:

1. Piloting neighbourhood action planning model projects (2009-2012).
2. Implementation, rigorous monitoring and lessons (2012-2016 and ongoing).
3. Testing scaling strategies, streamlining, growing the network (2016-2020).

Key SNAP accomplishments were reported to the Board of Directors in April 2020.

At Board of Directors Meeting #3/20, held on April 24, 2020, Resolution #A34/20 was approved in part as follows:

...AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to report back to the Board of Directors before year end on the next phase of the SNAP Program and proposed opportunities to expand the program to inform municipal budgeting discussions.

The purpose of this report is to outline strategic directions to guide the next phase of work. These directions are consistent with emerging trends in municipal policy and practice and respond to municipal and TRCA priorities and community interest.

Emerging Municipal Policy and Practice Supports Neighbourhood Approach

There is growing recognition of the benefits of the neighbourhood approach and neighbourhood-based service delivery, as indicated in recent municipal policy documents and project partnerships:

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) granted TRCA and nine interested municipalities a Transition 2050 grant under the Municipal Climate Innovation Program, for the purposes of applying, refining and mainstreaming TRCA's neighbourhood and business zone models as effective strategies for the low carbon transition;
- Peel Community Climate Partnership (PCCP) workplans identify SNAP as an implementation mechanism for low carbon communities, flood resiliency and green infrastructure/heat stress;
- City of Brampton's 2040 Vision includes a specific Vision and recommended actions for revitalizing "Neighbourhoods", and the City has launched a "Nurturing Neighbourhoods" Program in partnership with TRCA, CVC and the Region of Peel;
- William Osler Hospital, Peel Public Health and the former Central West Local Health Integration Network launched the Healthy Communities Initiative, identifying SNAP as a pilot for revitalizing the built environment for health outcomes, including diabetes and cardio-vascular diseases;
- City of Toronto's Transform TO strategy identifies mobilization of low carbon communities as a key strategy and Toronto's First Resilience Strategy identifies People and Neighbourhoods as a focus area, including neighbourhood resilience pilots as a priority action area;
- Region of York's Community and Health Services Department is taking a place-based approach to the development of Community Safety and Well-being Plans, including pilot locations within South-Central Richmond Hill and South-Central Markham;
- Municipal Energy Plans (e.g. Vaughan, Markham, Caledon, Brampton) cite SNAP as an implementation mechanism; and
- FCM recognized TRCA and its nine participating municipalities for SNAP as part of its 2020 Sustainable Communities Awards, under the Visionary Award category, noting its effectiveness at delivering environmental projects with long term social and economic impact.

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Municipalities and TRCA are embracing a number of trends and best practices while addressing strategic corporate priorities. SNAP's collaborative, integrative approach has already been operationalizing some of these ideas, and therefore is well-positioned to support a number of program objectives. These emerging trends and priorities include:

- Retrofitting green infrastructure for climate resilience and sustainability;
- Integrated asset management, planning and implementation;
- Providing community and public realm benefits in association with infrastructure projects;
- Delivering co-benefits as part of climate action; and
- Implementing strategies for social mobilization and local capacity building to address climate action and prepare for extreme weather.

Growing Community Interest in SNAP

A number of local community leaders, particularly from the City of Toronto, have approached TRCA requesting SNAPs in their neighbourhoods. Many have led successful environmental and climate action initiatives but need help to deepen their engagement and tackle bigger projects. These leaders believe SNAP's collaborative, multi-objective approach and TRCA's associated expertise could help fill this gap. TRCA staff recognize this interest as an opportunity to expand the impact of SNAP by collaborating with these local leaders, but also respect the need to follow a transparent criteria and process to identify future SNAP neighbourhoods.

Strategic Directions for SNAP

The next phase of SNAP will focus on institutionalizing the neighbourhood program and scaling its impact. "Institutionalizing" refers to actions that can be taken to further integrate the program within ongoing operations of TRCA and its municipal partners, in order to improve efficiencies and effectiveness in program delivery. "Scaling its impact" refers to strategies that will enable TRCA to expand the network of SNAP neighbourhoods and increase the implementation activity.

Five strategies have been identified to guide the next phase of work:

1. **Transparent neighbourhood selection process to identify future SNAPs** – The neighbourhood selection process provides a transparent method for identifying future SNAP neighbourhoods that align with municipal and TRCA priorities for urban renewal and climate action, and wherever possible, with areas of local community interest. This process formalizes and is consistent with SNAP's original strategic neighbourhood selection approach, which ensured municipalities had local program interests that enabled them to participate and which leveraged planned implementation projects to achieve greater impacts.

The neighbourhood selection process follows three steps, each involving input and participation by multiple municipal and TRCA departments:

- 1) Neighbourhood Screening – mapping at the municipal scale to identify "areas of interest", based on alignment of multiple municipal and TRCA priorities for urban renewal, watershed management and climate action.
- 2) Candidate Neighbourhood Selection – review and discussion of each of the "areas of interest" by municipal and TRCA staff to understand the issues, timing, opportunities, feasibility and the potential benefits of an integrated, collaborative approach, as the basis for recommending a future SNAP neighbourhood(s).

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- 3) Neighbourhood Project Confirmation and Boundary Refinement – consultation with local community leaders and senior program directors to confirm their support and desired role in the project, as well as potential considerations for study area boundaries, approach, funding, roles and final commitments by all key stakeholders (e.g. municipal and TRCA departments who may be financially contributing or pursuing joint funding applications, community organizations, major landowners or other agencies as may be involved in the specific neighbourhood project management team).

This neighbourhood selection process was piloted in the City of Vaughan, with input from the Region of York, as the basis for identifying the Thornhill SNAP as the first SNAP in Vaughan. In Peel Region, the process was piloted in the City of Brampton, as the basis for identifying Bramalea, as Brampton's third SNAP neighbourhood. The process was also piloted in the City of Toronto, in cooperation with Toronto Transportation and Toronto Water's green streets mapping analysis and Toronto's multi-departmental neighbourhood resilience pilot working group, with Rexdale being identified as the next SNAP neighbourhood in Toronto.

The neighbourhood screening process has revealed exciting opportunities for collaboration and led to early identification of project enhancements which could be incorporated into workplanning, budgets and grant applications. It has enabled existing capital project budgets to be leveraged as matching funds for new grant applications and has allowed departments advance notice to better align their annual work programs to take advantage of synergies. It has expedited the neighbourhood action planning process which can build on the data collected as part of the screening. Furthermore, this tool has served as a reference when reviewing potential capacity to support community leaders who are expressing interest in local neighbourhoods.

2. **Piloting a TRCA-community partnership model** - With the emergence of capable community groups interested in SNAP, TRCA has identified the potential to support more SNAPS by partnering with these groups, where they have the necessary capacity to play critical roles. These arrangements would allow TRCA to limit its contribution to niche roles where we can add the most value, while applying our successful sustainable neighbourhood action planning process. TRCA's success at SNAP is largely related to strategies inherent in its neighbourhood model and the niche roles it plays as a partnership-broker who can forge collaboration among non-traditional partners, an integrated planner who can facilitate the identification of inspiring projects and a backbone organization who continues to support neighbourhood partners from planning through implementation. In most SNAP neighbourhood projects, TRCA has played a significant role in leading the community engagement and various aspects of implementation. However, our ability to take on new SNAP neighbourhoods has been limited to staff capacity. In these community-driven SNAPS, the expectation would be that the community group will lead much of the community engagement, which is the most time-consuming, yet fundamental, aspect of success. Depending on the resulting action plan, TRCA may identify potential projects it can support further in implementation.

In the past year, TRCA has been approached by three different community leaders in Toronto, interested in having a SNAP. These include: Markland Wood, The Beach and

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The Pocket. With the objective of piloting a TRCA-community partnership model for leading a SNAP, the following selection criteria were identified and applied:

- Evidence of community leadership capacity
- Evidence of broad neighbourhood support for the project
- Small, manageably sized neighbourhood area
- Simple-medium complexity of neighbourhood issues
- Presence of neighbourhood priorities of the municipality and TRCA, as informed by the Neighbourhood Screening and Selection Process.

Based on these criteria The Pocket was identified as the best candidate for this pilot. The Pocket is located near Danforth and Greenwood area with links to the Don Watershed and Lake Ontario waterfront.

TRCA is regularly approached by municipalities, conservation authorities and community organizations beyond our jurisdiction, who are seeking advice on how they can apply SNAP. Demonstrating the transferability of SNAP to other regions can be beneficial in appealing to provincial or national government programs and attracting the private sector to a larger network of SNAP markets. It will continue to be our preference and priority to serve municipalities within our own jurisdiction, and opportunities that arise beyond our jurisdiction will be considered case by case, strictly on a fee for service basis and where benefits will accrue to TRCA.

3. **Partnerships to increase implementation activity** – Each SNAP neighbourhood action plan generates numerous project opportunities, however the rate of implementation is often limited to available TRCA and municipal staff capacity to advise or support local project leaders or to directly lead and fundraise for the projects themselves. There are opportunities to align implementation partnerships to facilitate more implementation activity.

Internally at TRCA, many departments have contributed to successful SNAP implementation initiatives, and there may be further opportunity to align internal resources for greater impact (e.g. planting programs or green infrastructure revitalization on properties secured through SNAP, community engagement in environmental learning, testing of innovative sustainable technologies in SNAP neighbourhoods etc.). The neighbourhood screening process is one tool that will assist in identifying multi-departmental interests in an area and aligning workplans and budgets.

Non-traditional, external players are increasingly playing a vital role in delivering these social innovation initiatives, by bringing unique expertise, providing valuable local connections and filling gaps that cannot or need not be filled by government in a timely fashion. These players include: registered and non-registered community organizations, local volunteers, social enterprise or philanthropic private sector businesses offering in-kind services. Working within TRCA's Procurement Policy to ensure transparency and fairness, TRCA needs to continue to find ways to facilitate such partnership agreements and associated remuneration or honoraria, as may be necessary.

4. **Criteria to guide neighbourhood investment horizon** - SNAP neighbourhood projects began with the intention of a 3-5 year commitment to launch initial projects and TRCA's ongoing involvement in the pilot neighbourhoods has considered a number of factors, in consultation with municipal staff and other members of the project management team.

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The long term commitment of SNAP has been a noted factor of its success. It has become clear that longer term horizons (5-8 years) are often needed to fully realize significant project objectives, such as infrastructure that is planned on longer cycles, or to enable partners the time to take action once relationships have been established. In consultation with project management teams, the following criteria will be used to guide TRCA's decision regarding when to leave a neighbourhood and direct attention elsewhere:

- Once reasonable progress toward achievement of action plan targets has been initiated; or, until
 - Strategic catalyst projects are launched; or
 - Capacity has been built in local groups to lead continued action; or
 - Opportunity for important demonstration of innovative solutions is complete; or
 - Necessary municipal partner support ceases to exist.
5. **Formalize funding model with regional and local municipalities** – The current SNAP funding model consists of regional and local municipal contributions and grants from a variety of public and private sources. While this is a reasonable model, TRCA and its Regional and local municipal partners will need to build support for growth if there is a genuine interest in expanding the SNAP.

There may be opportunities to identify cost sharing arrangements across several benefitting municipal departments. At present, regional capital contributions come from water revenue, and this funding is used by TRCA to leverage other special grants that support the broader objectives which SNAP delivers. The neighbourhood screening and selection process is proving to be an effective tool at aligning SNAP with future planned infrastructure renewal projects and identifying synergies among these and other program interests. This longer-term outlook may enable budget planning across multiple departments, particularly for local municipalities where, to date, it appears local municipal contributions to SNAP are often dependent on grant funding. In addition to benefitting water management programs, infrastructure renewal project synergies and other municipal sources, there may be opportunities to explore multi-year investments from senior governments or private sources through partnerships with groups, such as CivicAction.

Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategy set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 4 – Create complete communities that integrate nature and the built environment

FINANCIAL DETAILS

SNAP operates on a full costing and recovery basis. Its core funding is derived from municipal capital support from the regions of Peel and York, and the City of Toronto. TRCA is also in discussion with Durham Region municipalities in our jurisdiction and will provide a report back to the Board on future opportunities for SNAPs in Durham Region. By leveraging these municipal budgets, SNAP has attracted additional public and private funding of over \$3 million dollars over the past 10 years and has helped establish cost sharing arrangements with other partners. This Program has supported neighbourhood-scale efforts toward achieving TRCA's watershed objectives and strategic goals shared with our municipal partners, such as community resiliency, ecosystem restoration and healthy communities. SNAP's power is that it addresses multiple municipal objectives and supports many core objectives of conservation authorities.

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TRCA is exploring with its municipal partners, and others, funding approaches to support the growth and long-term financial sustainability of this program to ensure even greater impact. The SNAP funding model is expected to continue to consist of a combination of sources but needs to be less grant dependent for covering core staff complement. Regional and local municipal contributions will remain at the heart of this funding model, reflective of the municipal benefits derived from SNAP projects. This municipal funding is critical in leveraging other funding sources, which may come from senior levels of government, private sector and other grants. SNAP projects address many priorities of provincial and federal governments, including climate action, aging infrastructure renewal, aging population, community health, safety and well-being, among others, some of which are subjects of new federal funding streams. Progressive companies are increasingly considering Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors when assessing financial investments. SNAP action plans could play a valuable role in identifying synergies between local businesses and their communities and will continue to expand markets for green technologies. Grants will continue to support work that is advancing emerging issues and trends,

As noted in Strategy 5 of this report, there are opportunities to explore a variety of funding mechanisms within municipalities. Recognizing the trend toward integrated project delivery, which SNAP exemplifies, there may also be a need for traditional silo-based funding models to evolve to keep pace.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

The following SNAP projects are underway or planned for 2021:

Planning and Advisory Services

- Finalize Thornhill SNAP Action Plan, Vaughan
- Finalize Bramalea SNAP Action Plan, in Brampton
- Develop Rexdale SNAP and Neighbourhood Resilience Model, Toronto
- Develop The Pocket SNAP Action Plan, Toronto, piloting a TRCA-community group partnership model.

Sustainable Neighbourhood Implementation and Facilitation

- Bramalea SNAP Tower Revitalization Project
- Burnhamthorpe SNAP Tower Revitalization Project
- West Bolton SNAP Green Home Makeover demonstration, DePave and Heritage Hills Parkette revitalization plantings celebration, Jaffray's Creek erosion remediation and Caven Church community amenity space implementation and Trail programming
- Thornhill SNAP residential retrofit program

Knowledge Sharing

- Complete Transition 2050 Project Report and recommendations for refining and mainstreaming the neighbourhood and business zone models as strategies for low carbon mobilization, including discussion of funding models

Scaling and Future SNAPs

- Apply Neighbourhood Screening Processes in Mississauga in 2021 with the goal of identifying a program of future SNAPs
- Explore the application of a neighbourhood screening process in Markham and Richmond Hill, including potential alignment of priorities with York Region Community

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and Health Services Division's place-based Community Safety and Well-being Planning pilot areas.

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