ADVANCING ADAPTATION

Implementation Through Collaboration

RICHMOND HILL

The Advancing Adaptation Project led by ICLEI Canada

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The Advancing Adaptation Project, led by ICLEI Canada, aimed to increase climate change resilience in Ontario municipalities by supporting adaptation planning, building local adaptation capacity, and supporting the implementation of adaptation initiatives in the Great Lakes watershed. As part of this project, 11 Ontario municipalities designed and delivered community-engaged climate change adaptation actions within their communities between June 2021 and December 2022. 11 case studies were developed to showcase the process, experience, and learnings from each implementation action. Visit ICLEI Canada’s Advancing Adaptation Webpage for more information on the project, to explore all case studies, and to learn more about other resources that were developed through the Advancing Adaptation Project.

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icleicanada.org/project/advancing-adaptation/
Introduction

The inclusion and integration of climate change adaptation features as part of the revitalization design of a municipal park in the City of Richmond Hill provided the opportunity to demonstrate, engage, and increase community awareness about climate resiliency. The new rain garden and naturalized planting zones increased the resiliency of this area from the impacts of flooding and provided the opportunity for community engagement and participation in climate change adaptation actions within the City. The new rain gardens will act as a demonstration site to inspire residents to take on similar initiatives on their property. As part of this project, a climate change workshop offered community members an opportunity to share what next steps could be taken in terms of education, engagement, participation, and support for climate change actions such as rain gardens.

Project Overview

The City of Richmond Hill is undertaking a revitalization of Minthorn Park, a small park situated within the Oak Ridges Moraine, an environmentally sensitive geological landform that stretches across much of southern Ontario. The area around Minthorn Park is currently experiencing stormwater management challenges that impact the health of a nearby Provincially Significant Wetland further to the east.

The Minthorn Park Revitalization Project includes a new playground, shade structure, pathway, and lighting. The updated park will also feature new climate adaptation initiatives, including a rain garden and naturalized planting zones to assist with stormwater management. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2023 pending council approval.

The Approach

Understanding and Assessing Impacts

In 2018-2019, the City completed a Climate Change Risk Assessment, in partnership with the Ontario Climate Consortium, which identified flooding from intense rainfalls, heat stress from heat waves, dangerous road conditions, power outages, damage to trees, pipes, roads and buildings from more frequent ice storms, freeze-thaw cycles, and windstorms as the top impacts in Richmond Hill. Climate data for this assessment was derived from the York Region Climate Trends Report. This risk assessment led to the development of two guiding documents for the City: the corporate Climate Change Framework and the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

The actions chosen for this project aim to help address climate change and flooding. Rain gardens are an adaptation measure the City, community members, and residents can use to manage the increased overland stormwater flow and encourage water to infiltrate back into the natural environment.

Implementation

The City collected feedback from residents on the park revitalization via two rounds of public engagement. The first focused on the park design. During the summer of 2022, residents were invited to comment on the proposed designs for the park via an online form on the City’s website. The second round of public engagement sought community feedback on education and outreach resources and identifying opportunities to use the park as a rain garden demonstration site.

This second round of engagement took place in October 2022 which invited interested community members to attend a Rain Gardens and Climate Change Workshop. The workshop was designed to facilitate a two-way conversation between the City and residents. The workshop was an opportunity for the City to share information about rain gardens and how they can be used to help adapt to our changing climate. It was also an opportunity for participants to generate ideas for (a) inspiring action through a rain garden demonstration site at Minthorn Park and (b) developing meaningful educational resources and outreach programs linked to the site.

Significant effort was put into the preparation of the community workshop. The City team worked with Kennedy Consulting to plan for the fall workshop details.

Objectives for the workshop included:

- To share information about rain gardens and their important connection to climate change
- To generate ideas about how to inspire action through a rain garden demonstration site at Minthorn Park
- To receive feedback and ongoing participation to develop a rain garden engagement program
Workshop Facilitation Planning Considerations:

- Use interactive and engaging activities and tools to focus in on the scope of the workshop (e.g., dot-mocracy, menti board, mini polls, short videos, etc.)
- Create mini-presentations with targeted questions focused on climate change impacts in Richmond Hill, what’s happening at Minthorn Park, and inspirational examples from within the community.
- Provide incentives/prizes to entice participants to attend
- Use clear, simple language to broaden perspective and normalize climate change conversations
- Acknowledge and celebrate the collaborative approach to climate action
- Include visuals to help broaden perspectives of what climate action can look like

Partnerships

- 3,371 local residents informed and invited to provide feedback
- 1 virtual Community Workshop with 14 attendees.
- The workshop engagement process was planned, facilitated and recorded by Kennedy Consulting. Community groups brought up opportunities to align efforts with Richmond Hill programming. All participants engaged in open discussion, with targeted questions, and dialogue was encouraged by the facilitator.
- Organizations that were engaged included the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), Ontario Streams, Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF), Windfall Ecology Centre, and Richmond Hill Horticultural Society (RHHS).

Challenges

- Restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic limited public engagement to virtual consultation, which may have presented challenges for some residents. However, the City is planning a community-based focused group for continued public engagement in 2023.
- The actual construction of the rain garden and naturalized planting zones is planned for 2023, outside of this project’s timeframe.
- Utilizing out-of-the-box thinking for engaging a more diverse cross-section of the community in the workshops was challenging and therefore workshop attendance was not as high as it could have been. While it would have been nice to get more participants, the expected number of participants was reached.

Engagement

The City promoted the workshop via its website and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), a billboard located near the park, a mail-out campaign, email notification to City Council, emails sent to interested individuals and community groups (as identified by members of the City’s Sustainability Section), and at the Richmond Hill Blooms event.

During the workshop, participants discussed how the City can use a rain garden demonstration site at Minthorn Park to inspire local action and further rain garden awareness, education, and implementation in Richmond Hill. Participants used the online platform Mentimeter to capture and share their ideas in writing.

Funding

Funding provided by the Canada Ontario Agreement was delivered through ICLEI Canada’s Advancing Adaptation project, which provided $15,000 to Richmond Hill. Funding was allocated towards the community workshop facilitator, engagement mailout, promotion of workshop, content editing, and design of the climate change presentation panel as well as two interpretative signs that will be installed at the park. The City contributed funds towards the park design, project coordination, and stakeholder engagement.

School kids learn more about the environment than their parents generally know. Think about how to enlist them and their teachers in promotion.

- Workshop Participant
Ideas for Future Projects

Although a far-reaching mailout was conducted as well as several other notification methods used, additional efforts such as the following could also be used:

- Provide small honorariums such as gift cards to value people’s time
- Pair with another popular or targeted community event that may already be happening
- Provide community champions with an incentive to help spread the message such as advertising, free attendance, honorarium, etc.
- Use communication strategies that speak directly to the values, needs, and concerns of the individuals you would like to participate.
- Communicate the desired outcome(s) including if there will be ongoing engagement opportunities
- Connect with existing youth and senior groups
- If in person, consider providing child care (games and a supervisor) during the event, assist with transportation to the event, providing local and sustainable food.

Positive Successes

- The project aligned with corporate and community actions on climate change and served to increase internal knowledge on how to incorporate climate change adaptation into City projects.
- The rain garden and naturalized planting zones, as well as the associated signs installed at Minthorn Park will serve as a demonstration site to inspire local action to construct more rain gardens and reduce the risk of flooding that is increasing due to climate change.
- The rain garden and naturalized planting zones in the park will improve the flood resilience of the area.
- An initial engagement of a group of community climate change champions has begun the building of community collaboration in addressing flood resilience. The ideas that came out of the workshop will provide next steps for action.

Indicators

- 6 residents provided feedback on 1st round of consultation
- 14 members of the public participated in the workshop including Ontario Streams, TRCA, RHHS
- Identified 13 ways the City and the community can use Minthorn Park as a demonstration site to increase adaptive behaviours and improve resiliency
- Identified 16 resource ideas that would create further awareness and education on rain gardens. This project is a jumping off point for a longer term project, where in 2023 Richmond Hill will coordinate a community focus group and develop educational resources for community members to use the park as a demonstration site.

Co-Benefits

The project implemented by Richmond Hill primarily took action on the climate change impacts of flooding. Additionally, the project also worked towards multi-solving the following issues:

- GHG mitigation
- Education and awareness of climate change and climate action
- Stormwater management
- Extreme heat
- Air quality improvement
- Aesthetic improvement
- Increasing biodiversity

Adding Resilience With Rain Gardens

Typical plants in southern Ontario rain gardens

As climate change triggers more extreme weather, rain gardens are increasingly seen as an effective tool for helping manage the impacts of climate change and urbanization. They naturally absorb rainwater, filter pollutants, and provide a cooling effect.

The Minthorn Park rain gardens and other naturalized plantings will help keep increased runoff from entering city infrastructure and causing downstream erosion in our rivers, while also protecting a nearby system of ecologically sensitive wetlands.

Rain gardens and other low-maintenance naturalized plantings that don’t require frequent mowing provide other benefits by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, making parks quieter and keeping their air cleaner. These eco-friendly features also nourish flowers, grasses and shrubs that in turn nurture our native bees, birds and other wildlife.

Rainwater and stormwater collects

Plants take up water and grow providing a healthy habitat

Water filters through soil and pollutants are removed

Groundwater is recharged

Interpretive signage will be installed to inform and educate the public as they use the park.

RichmondHill.ca/RainGarden

If we could persuade a significant number of homeowners to adopt what works in Minthorn [Park], it could make a real difference to Richmond Hill’s environmental footprint.

- Workshop Participant
Key Learnings

• Utilize the expertise of external consultants. These can help move projects like this one forward and take it to the next level. Examples of this include graphic design work for presentation panels and interpretative sign, and open dialogue that is possible when it is encouraged by a professional facilitator.
• Capitalize on other projects similar in scope or location to further objectives and garner more interest in the project.
• Internal stakeholder collaboration is important. Soliciting feedback from different departments helps to facilitate buy-in for the project and encourages further participation and implementation.
• Identify potential conflicts or controversial issues in advance (e.g., by-law conflicts, mosquitoes breeding areas, etc.) and be ready to ease those concerns.
• Project timing needs to factor in considerations for design and construction schedules, planting season, and plant growth. A fully functioning rain garden may take several years to establish.

Next Steps

The thoughts and ideas generously shared by participants during the workshop will help City staff identify three to five key ideas to explore further and consider for implementation in time for the park opening. Participant feedback will also enable the City to establish a focus group composed of community champions that will provide input on education and outreach deliverables. Construction on Minthorn Park will begin in 2023 pending Council approval. Work to promote rain garden adoption will continue indefinitely.

COPY THIS!

This project has many elements that could be replicated in other communities but here are two easily replicable actions:

• Engagement Workshop Preparation
• Adding Resilience with Rain Gardens

Drone footage of a park in Richmond Hill