



People Plan Richmond Hill Process and Approach

*A Background Document
to the 2009 Richmond Hill
Strategic Plan*

A Plan for
People
A Plan for Change



*Richmond Hill,
where people come
together to build
our community.*



C O N T E N T S

- 1.0 INTRODUCTION
- 2.0 PROCESS AND APPROACH
- 3.0 KEY FINDINGS AND DIRECTIONS
 - 3.1 Who are we?
 - 3.2 Where do we fit?
 - 3.3 What matters to us?
 - 3.4 What trends, challenges and opportunities are we facing?
 - 3.5 Future directions
- 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

L I S T O F F I G U R E S

- Figure 1 Phases of the Strategic Plan development process
- Figure 2 Community involvement through the *People Plan* by consultation method
- Figure 3 Trends, challenges and opportunities facing the Town's future vision

The People Plan Richmond Hill Process and Approach was received by Richmond Hill Council on April 27, 2009.

1.0 Introduction

Developing a vision for Richmond Hill

Richmond Hill's 2009 Strategic Plan, *A Plan for People, A Plan for Change*, describes a collective vision for the future of the Town, as expressed by its residents. How did we get there? Through a comprehensive public consultation and research process called *People Plan Richmond Hill*.

This Background Report provides a summary of the *People Plan* process and the approach used to create the Strategic Plan. It conveys key findings about the Town, its residents and the Richmond Hill business community. Lastly, the Report outlines the trends, opportunities and challenges facing Richmond Hill's future vision and also the directions that must be taken in order to achieve it.



2.0 Process and Approach

Designed for dialogue

People Plan Richmond Hill was designed to consider the needs of the community: *a plan for the people, by the people*. The project's primary purpose was to uncover what matters most to the people of Richmond Hill and it did this by engaging more than 2,000 community members through a variety of consultation methods and processes.

From the outset, the *People Plan* process took measures to avoid the traditional pitfalls of public consultation. One significant challenge was the ability to involve everyone in the community – ethnic groups, seniors and youth – to draw strong conclusions. For *People Plan Richmond Hill*, however, the Town incorporated many new and innovative forums to facilitate a dialogue with many varied segments of the community.

The *People Plan* process also applied a specific consultation practice throughout: appreciative inquiry. This approach focused on attaining positive feedback, which was ultimately conducive to developing outcomes and a vision for the Town.

Appreciative Inquiry is a technique that focuses on a community's achievements rather than its issues. The technique seeks to go beyond participation to foster inspiration at the grass-roots level.

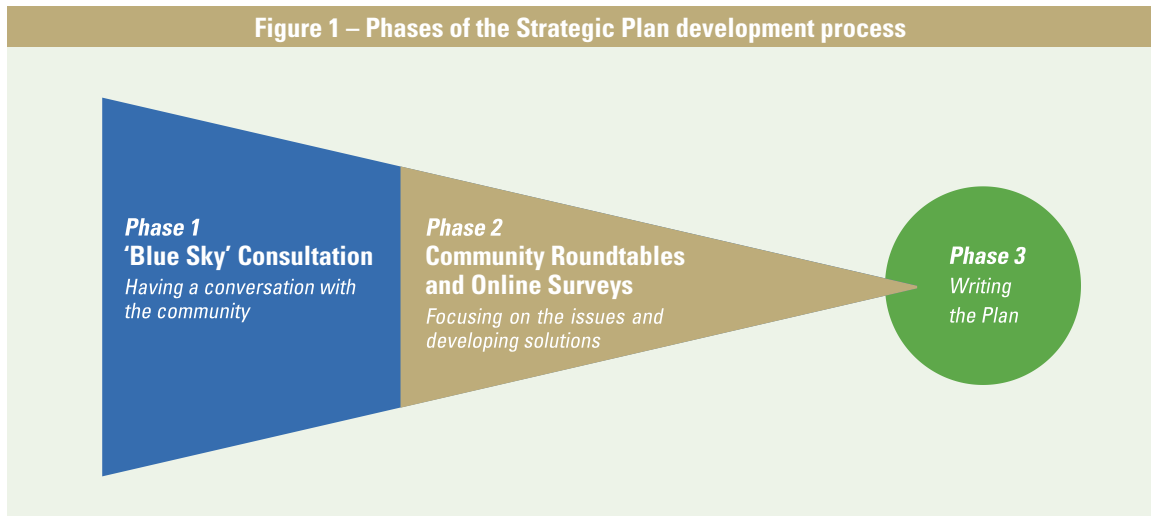
An integrated approach

One unique aspect of the *People Plan Richmond Hill* process was that the Strategic Plan and Official Plan reviews were conducted in a coordinated manner so that the public consultation process would not be fragmented. This resulted in a shared community vision that would be applied to the two documents the Town was preparing:

- **Strategic Plan**, which provides overall direction, communicates the long-term vision of the Town, and provides framework for other documents, such as the Official Plan, Transportation Master Plan, Financial Plan and the Parks Plans; and
- **Official Plan**, a key guiding document that sets out policies regarding how land in the Town will be used both in the present and future.

An open approach

The Strategic Plan portion of the *People Plan* process was broken down into three phases (see Figure 1 below). **Phase One**, the *Blue Sky* Consultation, represented a conversation with the community. It consisted of a series of open-ended discussions wherein the public was invited to speak freely to the Town's strengths and future priorities.



Questions for Phase One – Public Consultation

1. What do you love best about living and/or working in Richmond Hill?
2. Tell me about a time when you found yourself describing Richmond Hill as a great place to live or work – what did you say?
3. If you left and returned in 2012 (or 2027) and found Richmond Hill to be a leading edge community, what things would you see?
4. What is the most distinguishing feature or characteristic of Richmond Hill and how could it be made even better?
5. What is most important for you in a community? What do you value most?

Phase Two, Community Roundtables and Online Surveys, delved deeper into nine central themes that emerged during the Blue Sky Consultation. In this Phase, participants focused on understanding priorities, identifying outcomes and creating strategies for the Town's future vision.

Questions for Phase Two – Community Roundtable Topics

1. Are there any assumptions associated with this topic that we need to consider? Why?
2. Identify desired outcomes (required to understand what the organization is trying to accomplish).
3. Clearly define actions that need to be taken in order to achieve desired outcomes.
4. How do we know when we have achieved an outcome?
5. How do we measure this?
6. What is important to do now? Why?
7. What are the time frames and priorities?

Phase Three, the development of the Plan, was pivotal in bridging the gap between the information gathered during the first two phases of the *People Plan* project and the creation of the final Strategic Plan. A number of things occurred during this Phase: first, staff analyzed the findings of Phases One and Two and composed the Draft Strategic Plan. Next, the Richmond Hill community gave their input on the Draft, which was incorporated into a final, cohesive document: *A Plan for People, A Plan for Change*.



Making contact

The Town utilized a broad range of marketing and outreach forums to ensure the Strategic Plan would reflect “*A plan for the people, by the people.*” Four *People Plan* Ambassadors were hired to spread the word about the project and to get the community involved. Richmond Hill residents, business owners, community groups and organizations enjoyed a wealth of opportunities to learn about and participate in *People Plan Richmond Hill*. From beginning to end, more than 2,000 participants from across the Town contributed to the project!

Branding *People Plan Richmond Hill*

Marketing and branding the *People Plan* process within Richmond Hill was key to widespread participation. A specially designed, easily recognizable logo emblazoned all publications and display materials in circulation. The Town also facilitated awareness through its website (www.richmondhill.ca), numerous newspaper articles, information booths at strategic locations throughout the community and at meetings held with various community groups.

Display Methods

Public display methods acted as silent conveyors of the people’s plan, and the message came through loud and clear. *People Plan Richmond Hill* banners lined the streets of Richmond Hill, while Town outreach events utilized a mobile display and roll-up banners. All advertising featured people engaged in different aspects of the community.

People Plan section of the Town’s Website and Email

The success of *People Plan Richmond Hill* depended on open and honest communication and the *People Plan* component of the Town’s website provided an ideal forum. An email option allowed users to convey their questions and concerns about the project, as well as share the improvements they envisioned for the future. The website also contained an extensive amount of information, including a project overview and opportunities for involvement.

Additional site links included the *People Plan* Talk Blog, which updated users on what project steps and events had occurred and what was coming up.

Newsprint Articles

"*People Plan* has pulse of Town" and "*People Plan* asks for three minutes of your time" were just two headlines from a variety of articles that ran in local newspapers and Richmond Hill staff publications throughout the duration of the *People Plan* project. Print media helped keep members of the community apprised on the process of upcoming events and of past results.

People Plan Facebook Group

The Town tapped into the online social networking phenomenon by creating a *People Plan* group on the Facebook website. This online forum allowed Town staff and members of the public to discuss the project and exchange related information.

People Plan Launch

"I've been waiting 20 years for an opportunity like this!" declared one attendee at the *People Plan* launch event. This public celebration of the project's kick-off included live music and refreshments, as well as a wealth of opportunities to learn more about the initiative and to share insights and thoughts about the Town. It created excitement about the *People Plan* process right from the beginning.

"When it came to meeting the public face-to-face, we learned that participants were thrilled to have the opportunity to shape the future of their Town!" *People Plan* Ambassador



People Plan Summit

This unique two and a half day event brought together individuals from a variety of groups and organizations (including arts and culture, faith, social services, businesses, residential neighbourhoods and others) to address the future of the Town. Strategic questions and group discussions were designed to identify issues, challenges and core strengths of the Town, as well as potential vision statements and benchmarks for success.

PEOPLE PLAN SUMMIT GROUP EXERCISES

Representatives from various community groups and organizations gathered to share their experiences and insight for the future of Richmond Hill. The personal and group tasks for the 50 participants included:

Richmond Hill's Core Strengths: Participants identified five core attributes (characteristics, qualities or conditions) that showcase Richmond Hill at its best.

Opportunity Maps: Working in groups, participants created a list of strategic opportunities that would enhance Richmond Hill if pursued. They then narrowed the list to include only those considered key to realizing benefits for residents, businesses and/or visitors during the next five years.

Vision Statements: All groups developed a vision statement to reflect what participants would like to see in the Town's future. Participants gained inspiration by envisioning the idealized outcome and considering questions like, *What is happening? What helped it come about? What makes this vision exciting to you?*

Issues and Challenges: Groups identified issues and challenges for change within the Town, which Summit facilitators used to create a list of topics for more extensive examination. From this list, participants selected the topics of greatest personal interest and delved further to discuss scope, assumptions, desired outcomes and strategies to achieve those outcomes.

Benchmarks for Success: Participants returned to the future outcomes they had envisioned during the Opportunity Maps and Vision Statements exercises to discuss measuring success. They shared their perspectives on how the Town should track and approach constructive progress.

Open Houses

Three open house events at different locations and times provided informal settings for individuals to meet with members of Council and staff to discuss their thoughts about the Town and its future vision. Attendees expressed their appreciation not only for the Town itself, but also for the forum: “What a wonderful and unique opportunity that allows residents to contribute to the future of Richmond Hill,” exclaimed one participant.

Information Sessions and Other Outreach

In contrast to planned events and venues to attract people and participation, this type of outreach involved meeting individuals in the context of their normal daily routines. Information sessions and other outreach took place at community centres and arenas, Hillcrest Mall, York Central Hospital and the public library, where patrons were approached and given the opportunity to ask questions, provide input and to receive information.

Community Meetings

People Plan staff met with numerous community groups, including the Richmond Hill Soccer Club, Lions Club, Richmond Hill Camera Club, Accessibility Advisory Committee and ratepayers groups, in association with the project. The input gained was twofold in that participants were asked to consider Richmond Hill from both their community group *and* personal perspectives. Special efforts ensured representation from all segments of the community, including seniors and youth. *People Plan* representatives visited three seniors’ homes over a two-day period, for example, and also conducted a presentation and group discussion with the Town’s Youth Action Committee (see also the Youth Contest below).

Youth Contest

Youth are vital to every community. *People Plan Richmond Hill* engaged this segment of Richmond Hill with the *What Makes Richmond Hill Great* Youth Contest. The Town’s youth were invited to write or draw about what they believe makes Richmond Hill a great place to live. The Contest was promoted extensively using classroom presentations, school and community centre posters, news items in the Town’s Bulletin Board pages in *The Liberal* (the Town’s local newspaper), and the *People Plan* section on the Town’s website.

Ethnic Forums

How do you reach out to different cultures? By sharing hospitality. The Mayor invited community leaders from three prevalent ethnic groups in Richmond Hill to take part in a casual discussion over lunch. The discussion was informal, but successfully conveyed many of the strengths and challenges facing the groups, as well as methods by which the Town could better reflect their interests.

Business Community

Richmond Hill's economic success is inextricably linked to its business community. For input from this important demographic, *People Plan Richmond Hill* initiated a targeted email effort to local business, distributed by the Richmond Hill Local Business Directory. The communiqué posed a series of questions, such as why business owners chose to locate in Richmond Hill and what they liked best about having their business in the Town.

People Plan Kits

Community members had the option of contributing to the Strategic Plan development process from the comfort of their own homes, thanks to the availability of *People Plan Kits*. These packages were distributed during each of the various community meetings and were also available on the *People Plan* section of the Town's Website. *People Plan Kits* contained five assignments: the five *Blue Sky* questions, identifying where the participant lives/works, naming favourite places in Richmond Hill, writing/drawing the future of the Town and submitting a picture of the participant's favourite place in the world.

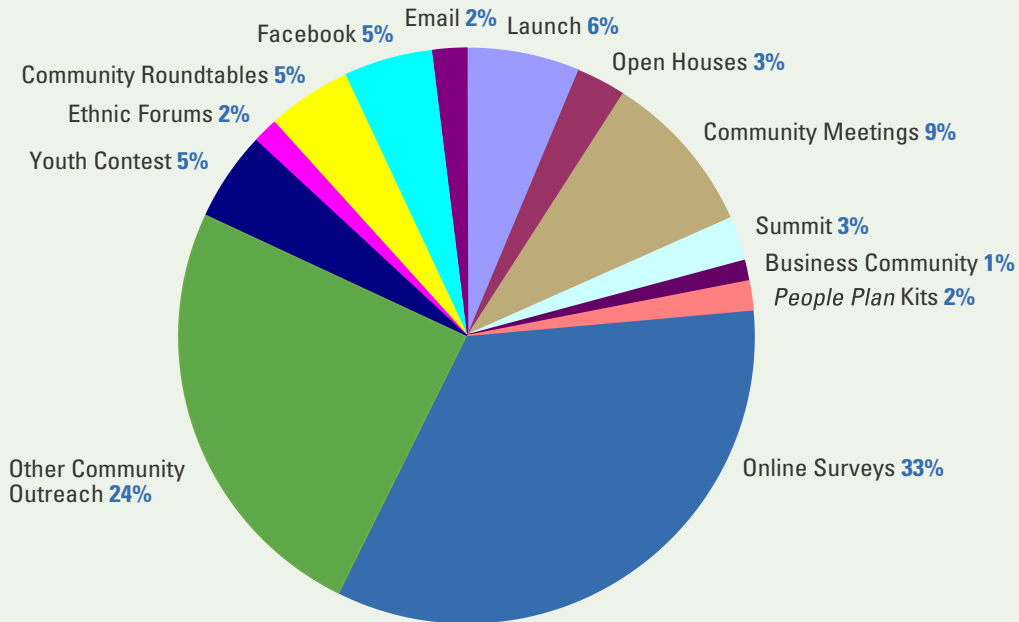


Online Surveys

Some contributions to the *People Plan* project were facilitated by the click of a mouse. Several surveys accessible on the *People Plan* section of the Town's website posed multiple-choice questions to participants and the Phase One surveys focused on isolating the issues considered most important for the community. The Phase Two surveys asked users to identify what actions the Town should take to address these issues.

A breakdown of community involvement during the initial phases of the *People Plan Richmond Hill* project is illustrated below:

Figure 2 – Community involvement through the *People Plan* by consultation method



Community Roundtables

Convening Community Roundtables represented the launch of Phase Two of the consultation process. From the Phase One consultation, nine main themes emerged and the focus for staff now turned to learning more about each theme. Pre-selected participants (including residents, volunteers, community group leaders and field professionals/experts) came together for a series of nine themed roundtables, as outlined below:

COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES

The nine themes that emerged during Phase One consultation were examined in greater detail during nine themed roundtable sessions that marked the beginning of Phase Two:

1. Transportation

Public transit, active transportation (cycling and walking), transportation demand management and roads

2. Active Places, Green Spaces

Places and opportunities for active living and trails

3. Community Values

Fostering a caring, safe, clean community with a strong identity and spirit

4. Environmental Stewardship

Clean air, energy efficiency, waste reduction and the natural environment

5. Arts, Culture, Heritage

Experiencing the creative environment, revitalizing and managing heritage, programming arts and cultural events and activities

6. Complete Communities

Urban form, connectedness and sense of place

7. Multicultural Diversity

Programs for ethnic communities and newcomers, as well as integration and celebration of all cultures

8. Business Opportunities

Supporting businesses, attracting more businesses and maximizing our central location in the Greater Toronto Area

9. Opportunities for all People

Accessibility, affordability and opportunities for people of all ages

The agenda for each roundtable discussion included a context presentation, defining assumptions associated with the topic, identifying desired outcomes, developing strategies to bring about the desired outcomes, identifying benchmarks for success, establishing priorities and the elements of a vision.

What were the most effective ways of hearing from The Town's community?

Some consultation methods are more effective than others. *People Plan Richmond Hill* achieved the greatest success in obtaining public feedback through the following:

People Plan Launch

The Launch, set within a celebratory atmosphere of live music and refreshments, initiated the *People Plan* conversation. This event was multifunctional:

- Media surrounding the event told the public about *People Plan*.
- It was an opportunity to educate the public and to gain the community's insights into the strengths and the types of changes that might be necessary within the Town.
- Each attendee received a *People Plan* kit that provided more information and could be passed along to a friend, family member or neighbour.

People Plan Kits

Although these kits made up less than 2 per cent of consultation involvement by the public, the comprehensiveness of information contained within the completed kits was invaluable.

Online Surveys

More than 33 per cent of individuals who took part in the process did so by filling out an online survey. Significant feedback emerged because participants could provide general comments in addition to multiple-choice responses. Another benefit was the ease and speed of obtaining results.



Information Sessions and Other Community Outreach

This method allowed *People Plan* staff to reach and speak with a large number of people in a relatively short period of time. For example, staff received input from 250 members of the public during a two-day period at an information/discussion booth in a local mall.

The Summit and Community Roundtables

Information gathered from these two events was critical, because the pre-selected participants (including community leaders and those with technical expertise) were well-equipped to speak to specific areas, including the Town's strengths, opportunities, issues and challenges, as well as benchmarks for success. A number of topics were covered in depth by enabling event participants to converse freely with one another.

Ethnic Forums

The success of these events may have been linked to their comfortable, informal settings: a restaurant associated with the related ethnicity. Event participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share lunch and conversation with the Mayor. The discussions included a greater amount of information about cultural inclusiveness and how the Town could best serve its different cultures than any other *People Plan* method.

The *What Makes Richmond Hill Great* Youth Contest

Receiving close to 100 entries from youth aged 6 to 18 for a youth contest is truly something to write about! These descriptive and colourful submissions conveyed how the Town's youth feel about Richmond Hill and its future. Local schools and teachers played a large role in getting the youth to unleash their creativity. In addition, the contest offered prizes as an added incentive, including gift certificates, lunch and tour of a fire hall and lunch with the Mayor.

3.0 Key Findings and Directions

A time for reflection and action

The *People Plan* project was launched in support of an updated Strategic Plan; one that would capture and reflect the community's hopes and expectations for the future of Richmond Hill. The process generated a wealth of information through public consultation events and activities, such as the *People Plan* Launch, Summit and Open Houses, as well as themed Community Roundtables and Online Surveys. This data, considered in tandem with background research results and trend analyses, proved illuminating and invaluable.

This section summarizes the key findings and directions taken from the *People Plan* process, focusing on four important questions:

- 1. Who are we and where do we fit in York Region, the GTA, the Province?**
- 2. What matters to the Town's residents?**
- 3. What are the trends, challenges and opportunities facing the Town?**
- 4. What are the key directions for the Strategic Plan?**

The learning discussed in this section assisted in forming the basis for a community vision, goals and objectives, as expressed in Richmond Hill's new Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan charts the course to see that vision become reality.

3.1 Who are we?

Diverse and dynamic

Defining who the Town is now is an important step in creating a future vision for it. However, the journey is not as straightforward as it is for most individuals who come to realize who they are – their strengths, weaknesses, talents and uniqueness – over time. In the case of a community like Richmond Hill, a few things must be considered: its physical aspect (location, setting and unique places), historical aspect (where we came from) and, most importantly, its human aspect (the people who live here).

Past meets present

For much of Richmond Hill's history, the Municipality has been a small and thriving town located strategically on the important Yonge Street corridor. During the last two decades, however, population growth and development have transformed the Town into one of the fastest growing municipalities in Ontario.

The Town is strategically located at the centre of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), adjacent to major 400 series highways. The community is supported by fairly new municipal infrastructure, but the key physical landmarks that people cherish mainly relate to earlier times. These include the historic Downtown Core and nearby Mill Pond, as well as the Oak Ridges Moraine greenspace that characterizes most of the northern part of the Town.

Faith and ethnicity

Richmond Hill is now a mosaic of cultures, languages and faiths; in recent years, people from all around the world have settled here. Although English is still the dominant first language, non-English languages are common and can be heard throughout the Town, including Chinese, Italian, Korean, Persian and Russian. The Town's faith composition also reflects the origins of people who have moved to Richmond Hill. Today, Buddhism, Greek Orthodox, Hindu and Muslim have joined the range of faiths observed in Richmond Hill.



Age, education and affluence

Richmond Hill is a young, family oriented community. This is apparent in the larger households, the bustling schools and the abundance of family oriented programs and services offered. The population, now relatively young, is predicted to change over the next two decades, during which time the Town's senior population is expected to double.

Richmond Hill has a well-educated population, with the highest proportion of residents having post-secondary education of any community in Canada. This is a direct result of the immigrant population in Richmond Hill, many of whom came to Canada with a high level of post-secondary education. Correspondingly, residents' occupations reflect this high level of education, with many occupying high-level jobs in the business, finance, administration, management, science and sales and service fields.

Generally considered an affluent community, Richmond Hill's household income data seems to portray widespread economic prosperity. However, a growing affordability gap is challenging the Town's perception of itself. Many residents in Richmond Hill – as many as one in eight – have low incomes. And, while most recent immigrants have a higher level of education than those who were born here, close to one-third of these individuals are struggling with low incomes.

Housing

Rapid population growth and larger households have shaped the types of housing common in Richmond Hill. Large, single detached homes are the most prevalent type of housing in the Town; in many neighbourhoods, these houses dominate to the exclusion of other housing types. Interestingly, Richmond Hill also has a significant proportion of apartments – more than most municipalities in York Region. In fact, the Town has the highest population density in York Region, exceeding most of the GTA municipalities besides Toronto. Some neighbourhoods in Richmond Hill have more dense dwelling units, while others (primarily in Oak Ridges) have more open space.

Most of the Town's residents are homeowners, though, the combination of high housing costs and the limited mix of housing have caused close to 30 per cent of the Town's population to experience housing affordability issues. These issues are greater for people living on their own and for single parents, as the existing housing stock is primarily suited to larger families.

Mobility

Residents in Richmond Hill are heavily dependant on their automobiles to move about their daily lives. As the population of Richmond Hill and the surrounding York Region has grown, so, too, has traffic congestion. Yet, while car usage and congestion is becoming more prevalent, the use of public transit is, on the whole, growing.

Approximately one-quarter of Richmond Hill residents also work in Richmond Hill, while the majority travel outside the Town – in some cases, great distances away – to their places of employment. This phenomenon is due, in part, to the ratio of total jobs to total population in Richmond Hill, which is low.

Local economy

Strategically located in the centre of the GTA, Richmond Hill is well-situated within the economic market of Southern Ontario. The Town's local economy is expanding, largely driven by small businesses. At the same time, Richmond Hill has become the location of choice for a number of major employers and it hosts the corporate headquarters of more than 40 businesses, such as Black and Decker Canada Inc., Epson Canada Ltd., Levis Strauss & Co. Inc., Lexmark Canada, Mazda Canada and Suzuki Canada Inc.

Richmond Hill's businesses represent a diverse range of industries. The major businesses, primarily located in employment lands along Highway 404, include a mix of manufacturing, professional/scientific/technical and wholesale trade. In particular, the Town is a leader in the professional/scientific/technical and wholesale trade industries. The mix of business types helps provide stability during changing economic conditions.



3.2 Where do we fit?

A central community, set apart

Richmond Hill is one of the 29 municipalities within the GTA, an important political and economic region in Ontario and Canada. Being part of the GTA means that the future vision of the Town will be influenced by what is happening around it, such as immigration settlement patterns and plans for regional transit.

Statistically speaking, Richmond Hill has more similarities than differences, as compared to its neighbours in York Region and the GTA. For example, most of the cities and towns in the 905 region around Toronto are also growing rapidly, have young, family oriented communities with significant ethnic populations and are car-dependant in that residents travel to other municipalities to access employment and shopping.

Looking past the statistics and into the community, however, reveals that Richmond Hill possesses unique characteristics that distinguish the Town from many others, such as:

- a strategic location in the middle of the GTA;
- well-established public transit corridors along Yonge Street and Highway 7 that will be the first in the 905 municipalities to be fully serviced by modern rapid transit;
- an extensive greenspace system, including significant lands on the Oak Ridges Moraine; and
- many celebrations with its ethnic communities.



3.3 What matters to us?

Shared values, shared vision

“What matters?” is a very subjective question. Yet, as *People Plan Richmond Hill* listened to the responses, it became clear that what matters within the Town is somewhat the same throughout the community. Many things, expressed repeatedly and sometimes very strongly, matter to the future vision of Richmond Hill. These 10 broad statements summarize the themes heard about what *does* matter:

Families, children, youth and seniors are vital parts of our community

All of these groups represent foundational components of Richmond Hill. Children and youth hold the power to make a difference, now and into the future. They may take the lead in bringing different ethnic communities together, for example, or act as environmental stewards. The earlier youth become involved in the community, the greater the likelihood that they will contribute positively to the community throughout their lives.

Seniors also have a lot to offer; opportunities to be involved and active are paramount to their ability to contribute. At the same time, the Town needs to be a place where families thrive, even through changing circumstances. A lack of housing options, for instance, should not force community members (e.g. young adults, young families, single parents, empty nesters) to move outside Richmond Hill.

People from different ethnic background are welcome here

International newcomers enrich the community by introducing other residents to multicultural experiences, such as cuisine, art and cultural celebrations. This exposure is highly valued by the whole community. The Town can assist newcomers to integrate and become involved by offering community programs and services that are culturally sensitive.

A more affordable and accessible community is important

Living within the Town, accessing programs or even getting from one location to the next is often taken for granted. For some, however, it is impossible. High housing costs and a lack of appropriate housing should not force residents to look outside Richmond Hill when family circumstances change. As well, financial constraints should not prevent individuals, families or children from taking part in local programs. Lastly, the Town should enable seniors and those restricted by disabilities to get involved by working towards a barrier-free community.

Opportunities for people to be involved and active are integral

Involvement at the local neighbourhood level is important to connect members of the community. Many residents need and want to become more active and involved. Offering both organized opportunities that people can use for a lifetime, as well as flexible, drop-in type activities that accommodate hectic schedules, is key. Encouraging children and youth to be involved and active promotes health, develops self-esteem and prepares them for taking part in other opportunities, such as environmental stewardship, arts or heritage. Offering a wider range of volunteer opportunities for residents to contribute their talents would encourage broader participation, too. At the same time, Richmond Hill needs to understand and eliminate any barriers – physical, language and otherwise – that are preventing seniors and ethnic communities from becoming more active and involved.

Stewardship of the Town's green spaces and environment-friendly practices

The Town's existing greenspaces are highly valued and need to be protected and nurtured. Richmond Hill's community footprint will impact the health of future generations. The Town must take responsibility now for its environmental impact by minimizing energy usage, producing less waste, constructing greener buildings, greening existing communities with trees and natural landscaping and encouraging local food production and consumption.

Strong, safe neighbourhoods and places for people to gather

The more people are involved locally, the safer and cleaner the Town will be and the greater the sense of community spirit that will be conveyed. Residents want to get involved in their neighbourhoods, but often do not see opportunities to do so. The Town must promote both physical and social connections and plan communities, so that individuals can easily access local destinations (e.g. trails that allow people to walk to get a coffee or bag of milk). More opportunities and places for people to connect (like schools, which could open after hours as a resource for the community) would also help build stronger neighbourhoods.



A community that is conducive for people to live, work and play here

People want Richmond Hill to be a more self-contained community, a place where people can live, work and play all within the Town. A mix of housing types is important, so that residents can remain in town through successive life stages (e.g. from single professional to one- or two-parent family to retiree). Suitable employment opportunities in Richmond Hill are also desirable, as they would enable people to work close to where they reside; a significant benefit to shorter commuting times is more time for family and community involvement. Local amenities, such as shopping, entertainment, programs and services, add to the community mix, reducing the need for residents to leave Richmond Hill to meet day-to-day needs. And, finally, attractive buildings and streetscapes are important for the Town, as they create spaces where people want to gather and spend their leisure time.

The ability to walk, bike or use transit to get around in our community

Residents want to leave their cars at home and use rapid transit, their feet or their bicycle to go about their daily lives. The majority would rather go to work on effective public transit than spend long hours commuting in a car. A safe trail system in an attractive setting that leads them where they want to go would also reduce car dependency and increase activity in local neighbourhoods.

More businesses and jobs in Richmond Hill to allow people to work close to where they live

Correcting the disparity between employment opportunities in the community and the skills and education of the Town's residents would alleviate many long commutes. Richmond Hill is a great place for businesses to locate, but there is a perception that many outside of the Town are unaware of what it has to offer. Supporting a competitive business environment will help attract and retain commerce. In addition, the Town's immediate development plans will be important; improving transit, adding attractive mixed-use development along main streets and revitalizing the Downtown Core will all help attract new business.

Richmond Hill's heritage, diversity, creativity and identity are worth celebrating

Richmond Hill has a rich history and heritage. These historical roots should be retained and, at the same time, integrated with the richness of today's multicultural community. People, as well as places, are important to its identity as a Town. Fostering an environment for the exchange of innovation, creativity, cultural ideas, heritage and the arts will help community spirit grow.

3.4 What trends, challenges and opportunities are we facing?

Looking ahead

The world around Richmond Hill will be very different 25 years from now. Even today things are changing rapidly – even more rapidly than many believed possible. New policy directions, the world economy and the health of the environment are just some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration as a future vision for Richmond Hill is created.

Key trends, challenges and opportunities and what they mean for the Town's future are discussed in this section. The figure below identifies the prevalent trends and challenges that Richmond Hill is facing. Notes are provided to explore how specific issues may affect the Town:

Trends, Challenges and Opportunities

Increasing multicultural diversity

Canada as a nation was built on immigration. This trend will continue, although the origins of immigrants are changing. As part of the GTA, a popular settlement destination for many new Canadians, Richmond Hill can expect to see an increased immigrant population from different countries.

Aging population

Across Canada, seniors are living longer and their interests are changing. Richmond Hill's senior population will double to one-fifth of its overall population in the next two decades.

Health impacts from obesity and sedentary lifestyles

The current generation may be the first that does not live longer than their parents. The design of suburban neighbourhoods, coupled with the time constraints most individuals face, are limiting opportunities for Richmond Hill residents to be active.

Growing affordability gap

Canada has a growing affordability gap, as fewer people have adequate income to meet their financial commitments. The number of people in Richmond Hill with low income has increased significantly and is predicted to continue rising. This has broad implications; the Town will need to encourage different housing types and more affordable programs.

Accessibility

Legislation in Ontario requires municipalities and businesses to improve accessibility for those with disabilities. This will affect how buildings and communities are constructed and how Town services are offered.

Quality of life

Quality of life has become a significant consideration for people and businesses when choosing a municipality in which to live. Investing in services that bring life to a community, including culture, arts and recreation, is increasingly important.

Intensification

Ontario's *Places to Grow* legislation requires many municipalities to increase intensification to combat urban sprawl. Richmond Hill is one such municipality and its intensification will especially be focused along the Yonge Street and Highway 7 corridors.

Regional transit

The new Regional Transportation Plan released by Metrolinx proposes an effective and efficient transit system in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton areas. The plan includes a major regional multimodal transportation hub in the south end of Richmond Hill, as well as rapid transit along Yonge Street and Highway 7. Both initiatives will increase transportation options and change the urban character of these areas.



Infrastructure deficit

Towns and cities across Canada are facing an infrastructure deficit whereby municipal infrastructure – such as water and sewage lines, roadways and bridges – are decaying faster than municipalities can afford to replace them. In Richmond Hill, responsible fiscal management has lessened the impact.

Economic cycles and shifts

Richmond Hill and its residents are not immune to the effects of economic cycles. After years of rapid growth, today's unsteady world economy is affecting housing prices and businesses here and may result in slower economic growth in the near future. Ontario's economy is shedding manufacturing jobs, while knowledge-based industries, such as high-tech and life sciences, are increasing. Richmond Hill's economic development strategy will need to adjust as businesses and the resident workforce are affected.

Peak oil prices

There will be increased pressure on gas and oil prices over the next two decades if the worldwide oil supply drops as predicted. This will affect the Town's residents' mobility, which is presently dominated by personal automobiles.

Technological shifts

Rapidly advancing technology is affecting many aspects of municipal operations and communications. The high education level of its residents presents an opportunity for the Town to interact and improve communication through the use of technology.

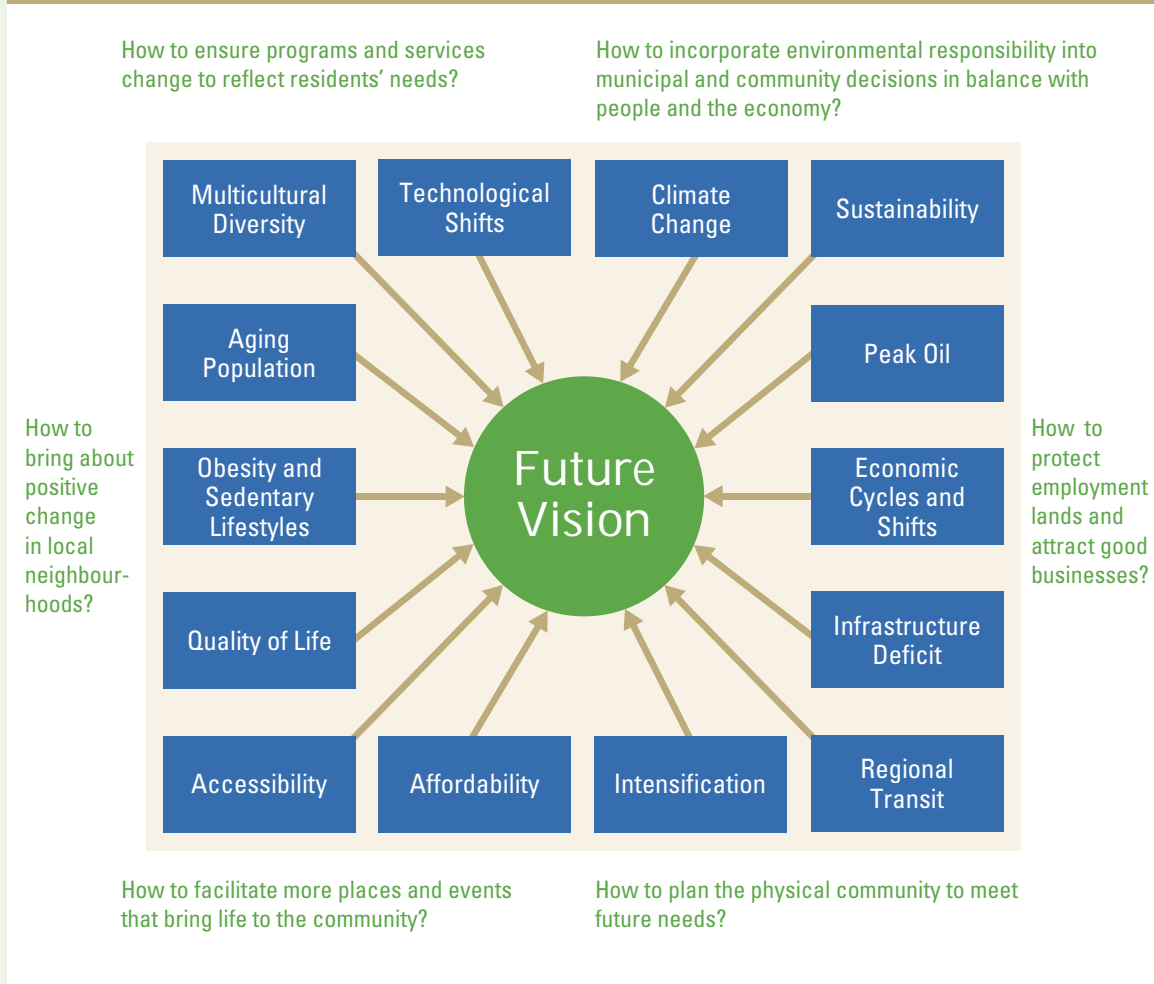
Sustainability

Canada's gas tax funding to municipalities requires that they prepare and implement community sustainability plans. There is increasing public demand for municipalities to incorporate people, the environment and the economy in all its decisions.

Climate change and other environmental issues

Environmental issues, such as climate change have risen to the top of the public agenda. The effects of climate change are being seen in many areas of municipal operations; municipalities like Richmond Hill must seriously evaluate the environmental impact of its operations and also consider appropriate responses to environmental change.

Figure 3 – Trends, challenges and opportunities facing the Town’s future vision



3.5 Future Directions

Toward a future vision

Taking into consideration the key findings of the *People Plan* project – who the Town is, where it fits, what matters and the trends, challenges and opportunities facing Richmond Hill – the following directions emerge as integral to achieving Richmond Hill’s future vision. While these directions are broad, the Strategic Plan they inspire is focused on meaningful actions and strategies in support of the Town’s future community vision.

Invest in our people

The people of Richmond Hill are the Town’s greatest asset and nurturing them is a priority.

Recognize our environmental and social responsibility

The Town’s role and mandate demands that action be taken in the name of social and environmental responsibility.

Celebrate our identity and place

Recognize the past, look to the future. The Town needs to express and celebrate the diversity and creativity of the people and places that make up Richmond Hill.

Live, work and play in our community

Richmond Hill’s community is continually evolving; the Town must be a strong advocate to ensure that it consistently meets the needs of residents and businesses.

Cultivate strong neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods are where community begins. Facilitating local involvement and capacity is key to a strong Richmond Hill community.

Support a competitive economy

Providing and promoting a strong local economy attracts and supports a range of businesses which, in turn, contribute to Richmond Hill residents and communities.

Connect to our community and beyond

The Town must continue to take leadership in communicating who it is and what it has to offer, not only to its residents, but also to a global audience.

4.0 Conclusions

What was initially conceived of as “a plan for the people, by the people” of Richmond Hill was realized through the *People Plan Richmond Hill* project. From this multifaceted initiative and the input of more than 2,000 respondents emerged seven key future directions for the Town:

- 1. Invest in our people**
- 2. Recognize our environmental and social responsibility**
- 3. Celebrate our identity and place**
- 4. Live, work and play in our community**
- 5. Cultivate strong neighbourhoods**
- 6. Support a competitive economy**
- 7. Connect to our community and beyond**

These future directions, in turn, guide the goals, outcomes and strategies of the Town’s new 2009 Strategic Plan: *A Plan for People, a Plan for Change*. Achieving a future vision, like the development of the Plan itself, will be a collaborative effort.



Richmond Hill, where people come together to build our community.

Goal One

Stronger Connections in Richmond Hill

Connections make everything work; stronger connections make everything work better.

Realizing our vision of Richmond Hill as a place *where people come together to build our community* will depend on people becoming more connected with each other and with our Town. This will mean fostering stronger social networks by finding common ground, keeping lines of communication open and building stronger links and relationships. It also means developing stronger connections on the ground, such as physical networks, like roadways and transit, as well as environmental networks.

Goal Two

Better Choice in Richmond Hill

Better choice is not the same as more choice. Better choice means having better quality options to achieve our community vision for Richmond Hill.

Better choice for housing reflects a range of affordability and neighbourhoods. Better choice for transportation involves transit and roadways, as well as opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians. Better choice for employment includes diversity in our economic base. We also need better choice in the way we remain active, healthy and contribute to our Town.

Goal Three

A More Vibrant Richmond Hill

Some of the best places to live and do business are dynamic and diverse. They have a unique sense of place and identity. They are vibrant.

A more vibrant Richmond Hill will be an exciting destination in which to live, work or visit. Its unique identity derives from a rich heritage and promising future. It will have a sense of community built on strong connections and choice. It will be a place where people celebrate natural and cultural diversity, foster creativity, exchange ideas and appreciate the arts.

Goal Four

Wise Management of Resources in Richmond Hill

Wise management means making decisions about how we consider and use our resources in Richmond Hill for this generation and those to follow.

We need to be even more responsible – and less wasteful – in our usage of the resources we have, including people, time, money and the environment that supports us. Wise management entails reducing commute times and increasing access. It means continuing to be financially responsible. It involves better choices for greening our community and creating more energy efficient homes and businesses. It also includes stronger connections between our community and the food we eat, the goods we consume and the waste we produce.

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*Richmond Hill,
where people come
together to build
our community.*

Photography Credits:

All pictures in the People Plan Richmond Hill Process and Approach are of places and people in Richmond Hill. Pictures have been provided by David West and Ash O'Malley.



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to build our community.*

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