



**MEMORANDUM**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Arvin Prasad, Commissioner of Development Services  
Morgan Jones, Commissioner of Community Services

Prepared by: Patrick Wong, Senior Planner, Natural Heritage  
Nory Takata, Parks Planner

Date: September 17, 2024

**Re: 2024 Application to the Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Fund by Friends of the Rouge Watershed**

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. That the memorandum dated September 17, 2024, and titled “2024 Application to the Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Fund by Friends of the Rouge Watershed” be received; and,
2. That the City of Markham supports the Friends of the Rouge Watershed’s application to the Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Fund, named “Volunteers Reforesting City of Markham Parklands to Reduce Climate Change, Flooding and Pollution, and Conserve Biodiversity” in the City of Markham; and,
3. That the City of Markham acknowledges that the Friends of the Rouge Watershed is applying for a funding opportunity from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ Growing Canada’s Community Canopies initiative for “Volunteers Reforesting City of Markham Parklands to Reduce Climate Change, Flooding and Pollution, and Conserve Biodiversity”, in partnership with the City of Markham. The City of Markham also recognizes that the lifetime contribution from the Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Initiative will not exceed \$10 million for tree planting within our municipality, inclusive of a maximum contribution of \$1 million for infrastructure activity costs, and that if approved this project will be counted towards that limit; and further,
4. That staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to recommend that Council provide a municipal resolution in support of the Friends of the Rouge Watershed’s (“FRW”) funding application to the Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Fund administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The funding application will support FRW’s planting of 12,000 trees, shrubs and wildflowers per year in Markham for the next three years in support of the natural heritage objectives of the Official Plan and the City’s 30% tree canopy target.

**BACKGROUND:**

Friends of the Rouge Watershed

The Friends of the Rouge Watershed is a registered non-profit charity organization formed in 1991 to raise awareness around the Rouge Park and primarily conducts ecological restoration and tree planting work within the Rouge River Watershed. FRW has been undertaking planting projects over many years and contributed towards the enhancement of Markham’s natural areas including Bob Hunter Memorial Park, Milne Dam Conservation Park, Campbell Park, Austin Drive Park, Tomlinson Park, Cedar Grove Park and Swan Lake Park. In 2024, FRW is on track to plant and maintain over 12,000 trees and shrubs in Markham and the Rouge River Watershed.

Growing Canada’s Community Canopies Fund

The Growing Canada’s Community Canopies (GCCC) Fund is a \$291 million initiative, funded by the Government of Canada and delivered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, that supports tree planting across Canada. GCCC aims to plant at least 1.2 million new trees by 2031 to help increase environmental benefits such as carbon sequestration, enhanced biodiversity and better climate resilience and well-being.

Municipal support is required for not-for-profit organizations seeking to apply to the GCCC fund. FRW’s request for municipal support is attached as Appendix A.

**DISCUSSION:**

Overview of Project Proposal and Benefits

The FRW’s application to the GCCC fund is for three years of funding (2025 to 2027) and is summarized below.

<b>Project Deliverables</b>
Planting of approximately 10,000 native trees and 2,000 shrubs and wildflowers per year, for 3 years (2025 to 2027). This results in approximately 4 hectares (9.9 acres) of habitat restoration per year.
<b>Project Locations</b>
Naturalized areas located within the following parks: Milne Dam Conservation Park, John Baird Woods Park, James Parrott Park and Little Rouge Creek valleylands. Planting locations

will not conflict with manicured areas intended for recreational use or programmed recreational use. Additional planting sites may need to be identified for future years and will be coordinated based on planting progress at the four identified park sites.
<b>Amount to be requested from GCCC</b>
Cash: \$90,000/year for 3 years. Total = \$270,000
<b>Amount to be secured by FRW from Other Sources</b>
Cash: \$259,400/year for 3 years. Total = \$778,200
In-kind: \$135,000/year for 3 years. Total = \$405,000
<b>Total Project Value (2025 to 2027)</b>
\$1,453,200

FRW has over 30 years of experience in successfully completing reforestation projects. Each planting site will be prepared for tree planting by mowing, tilling or ploughing. Native plants are purchased from local nurseries and, where required, protected from herbivores through spiral tree guards and deer exclusion fences. To support tree survival, weeding, mulching and watering will be undertaken through the summer months. Tree planting will be completed by a combination of public volunteers and FRW staff. FRW engages over a thousand volunteers every year which is expected to continue through the duration of this project.

The GCCC application process places a strong emphasis on thorough project planning to facilitate overall project success. In accordance with the application requirements, FRW will be required to prepare a reforestation/planting plan and a maintenance plan for the planting projects. FRW is well-positioned to meet these requirements with their tree maintenance programs as noted above. The GCCC program also withholds a small portion of the funding subject to a final monitoring report to ensure an appropriate survival rate is achieved which will be the responsibility of FRW to complete.

FRW will be leveraging GCCC funding to secure additional external funding and in-kind support. This presents an opportunity to attract a significant investment, estimated at \$1.45 M over the next three years, into the City’s natural areas and to support the City’s continued commitment to protect and conserve the natural environment. The funding is also expected to support capacity building of the FRW to accelerate their positive impact to the health and well-being of the natural environment across the City and the broader Rouge River watershed.

Planting Sites have been reviewed by staff and are aligned with the City’s Reforestation Plans and Official Plan

City staff have completed site visits to the proposed planting sites and have confirmed that FRW’s planting projects align with and complement the City’s planned reforestation projects in 2025. All planting sites are existing natural areas where reforestation would help to restore forest cover, enhance ecological corridors and create wildlife habitat. Planting sites do not overlap with manicured areas intended for recreational use. Forest habitats provide ecological services to the

broader community including carbon sequestration, water and air purification, mitigation of the urban heat island effect, and soil conservation. This project will help to protect and enhance the City's Greenway System and contribute towards the City's 30% tree canopy target.

Since 2007, the City of Markham has supported the planting of over 500,000 trees through the City's Trees for Tomorrow and other Reforestation Programs. Through these programs, City staff support FRW and other reforestation partners through direct financial support for materials such as plant stock or tree guards, and through in-kind staff support such as mowing, mulch delivery, garbage removal and staffing at public events. Financial support, where necessary, is provided through the Trees for Tomorrow capital project.

#### GCCC Funding Allocation

City staff note that the GCCC fund has a lifetime funding limit of \$10 million for each municipality which include any funding provided to non-municipal applicants. FRW's funding application requests \$270,000 which would be used entirely within Markham parklands. At this time, based on GCCC's end date of 2031, sufficient funding is available in the current program to support other City tree planting projects that meet the application guidelines should the City seek funding through the program in the future.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

This memorandum is seeking Council support for FRW's grant application to the Growing Canada's Communities Canopy Fund. This memorandum has no financial impact to the Operating Budget or Life Cycle Reserve. Continued financial support, where necessary, from the Trees for Tomorrow Reserve will be requested through a capital request during the Capital Budget process.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Staff recommend that Council support the Friends of the Rouge Watershed's funding application to the Growing Canada's Community Canopies Fund.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Appendix 'A': Letter from the Friends of the Rouge Watershed