

Green Guardians

Community Programs Strategy

YEAR ONE ANNUAL REPORT | 2026

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Message from the Mayor



Vaughan takes great pride in being a green city. We all share the responsibility of caring for our environment – and that responsibility starts at the government level. The City of Vaughan must continue to lead by example by championing initiatives that protect and enhance our natural spaces. That’s why we put forward concrete, actionable plans – like the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy – to drive this important work forward.

Through this Strategy, we are strengthening and accelerating the City’s environmental sustainability objectives and encouraging residents and the business community to get involved through tree planting events, horticulture sponsorship opportunities and educational activities. As Vaughan continues to grow, it’s vital to stay connected and work together to create a greener, brighter and better city for the years ahead.

I want to thank the many dedicated City staff in the Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations department for expertly guiding and overseeing many environmental stewardship programs over the last year.

We’ve seen remarkable momentum – and I know we’re not done yet. Let’s continue to lead by example, protect the greenspaces we love and empower our entire city to become Green Guardians.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "S. Del Duca". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Steven Del Duca
Mayor

Message from the City Manager



In much of our work as a City, our focus remains on keeping Vaughan safe, clean and beautiful. Our Public Works team helps bring that goal to life by protecting and enhancing the natural environment through litter collection, tree and shrub plantings, public education programs and many other efforts.

This Year One report for the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy has shown us what's possible when City staff, residents and business leaders work together with a shared commitment to environmental stewardship.

Over the last year, community participation has grown, partnerships have strengthened and residents of all ages have stepped forward to play an active role in protecting and enhancing our parks and greenspaces. None of this could have happened without the hard work, expertise and talent shown by the Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations team.

Year One is just the beginning. As we look ahead, I am excited to grow this Strategy, expand community involvement and continue building a sustainable and thriving Vaughan for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoran Postic'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Zoran Postic
City Manager



Message from the Deputy City Manager, Public Works

Vaughan’s Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy sets the pace for our work toward a cleaner, greener and more resilient city.

The achievements highlighted in this report reflect more than just strategic alignment – they represent many meaningful actions taken by people who care deeply about Vaughan’s environment and natural spaces. From tree planting events and the Grow with Vaughan program to the 20-Minute Makeover and securing sponsorships and grant funding, Green Guardians has made a meaningful impact city-wide in just one year.

I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to the staff in Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations and the entire Public Works team, who have all played an important part in bringing our Year One initiatives to life.

As outlined in this report, we have much more to look forward to over the next four years as we continue to introduce new programs, grow our partnerships and make more meaningful progress.

Emilie Alderman
Deputy City Manager, Public Works



Message from the Director, Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations

I am pleased to present the first annual report on the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy and to reflect on the meaningful progress achieved in its inaugural year.

Community programs deliver essential services that support the Vaughan community. These programs create opportunities for residents, organizations and businesses to actively participate in environmental stewardship, while reinforcing our shared responsibility to protect, maintain and enhance public spaces for everyone's well-being and enjoyment.

In just one year, we have made significant strides in strengthening program delivery, improving internal processes and enhancing community experience. These efforts have resulted in increased engagement, stronger partnerships and more impactful environmental outcomes across the city.

Our work is guided by the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy's three core pillars: Engage, Educate and Expand. These pillars shape how we connect with the community, share knowledge and continue to grow our programs in ways that are inclusive, accessible and responsive to community needs.

The results highlighted in this report reflect the strong foundation established in year one and the collective efforts of staff, residents and community partners. As we look ahead, we remain committed to continuous improvement with more growth and impact anticipated beyond year one.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of Green Guardians in its first year. Together, we are building a more sustainable, connected and resilient community for years to come.

Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo

Director, Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations



Introduction

As Vaughan continues to grow and urbanize, environmental stewardship is essential to protecting and enhancing the city's natural environment. Residents, volunteer groups, organizations and businesses play a vital role in keeping Vaughan safe, clean and beautiful, while advancing the City of Vaughan's long-term environmental and community-building goals.

Green Guardians is the City's environmental stewardship strategy that encompasses programs that encourage residents to participate in both City-led and community-driven initiatives, supporting local ecological well-being and fostering civic pride. Participation opportunities

include litter cleanups, tree planting events, community garden projects, tree and bench dedications, horticultural recognition programs and educational initiatives. Green Guardians programming also supports community-led stewardship activities within homes and neighbourhoods by providing guidance, resources and participation pathways.

This report serves as the first annual update on the City's progress towards the goals and actions outlined in the four-year Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy.

Council commitments and strategic alignment

Vaughan Council endorsed the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy in May 2025 as a multi-year framework to strengthen community participation, promote sustainable practices and expand the City's environmental stewardship programming.

Council has consistently demonstrated its commitment to environmental sustainability through the 2022-2026 Term of Council Service Excellence Strategic Plan. The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy directly supports the objectives of this plan and aligns with several other City initiatives, including:

- ▶ the **Mayor's Monarch pledge** (2018), through pollinator-friendly planting, habitat creation and educational campaigns.
- ▶ **Beautification 2.0 Strategy** (2021), through initiatives that enhance public spaces, such as pollinator gardens and community-led greenspace improvements and reinforce the City's horticultural standards across public spaces.

- ▶ **Green Directions Vaughan** (2021), by advancing public education, community stewardship and sustainable practices across the city.
- ▶ the **Urban Forest Management Plan** (2024), through tree planting, native species restoration and habitat-enhancing projects that contribute to canopy growth, biodiversity, climate resilience and long-term forest health.
- ▶ **Litter Reduction Action Plan** (2024-2026), supported by community cleanup events, 20-Minute Makeover and Adopt-a-Park, helping to reduce litter, increase public awareness and promote shared responsibility over public spaces.

These alignments ensure the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy strengthens and accelerates the City's environmental sustainability objectives through co-ordinated, community-driven action.





Areas of focus

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy brings together Vaughan’s environmental stewardship initiatives under a unified, community-focused framework. The Strategy builds on the City’s long-standing commitment to sustainability by aligning community engagement, environmental education and program growth through three interconnected pillars:



Engage

- ▶ Strengthen community connections
- ▶ Empower local leaders and volunteers



Educate

- ▶ Promote sustainable practices



Expand

- ▶ Expand outreach to drive program growth
- ▶ Increase inclusivity and resilience

Roadmap

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy outlines a multi-year roadmap to guide the delivery and growth of environmental stewardship programs across Vaughan.

The table below provides an overview of the strategic actions for each Green Guardians program across the four-year timeline. This snapshot helps to ground the Year One Annual Report in the broader, Council-endorsed framework and illustrates how each action contributes to long-term program development.

PROGRAM	ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Communities in Bloom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Collaborate with the Communities in Bloom community to learn from best practices and innovative approaches to beautification. ▶ Explore opportunities to become recognized as a Communities in Bloom participating member. 	2025-2026
Community Planting Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Create online portfolios highlighting the impact of approved projects on the City’s website and through social media campaigns, to inspire participation, increase engagement and foster community connections. 	2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Broaden outreach efforts to engage and promote the Community Planting Fund to diverse cultural and environmental groups. 	2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Consider expanding the funding availability to include food and herb gardens, outdoor learning spaces and sensory gardens. 	2028
Adopt-a-Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Refresh the Adopt-a-Park program to include a minimum number of stewardship activities required per year and the annual renewal of membership. 	2026
Curb Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Introduce a digital interactive map showcasing gardens recognized under the Curb Appeal program. 	2026
Vaughan Gardeners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Organize annual workshops covering topics such as growing and preserving food, saving seeds and educating about invasive species. 	2026

PROGRAM	ACTIONS	TIMELINE
Community Cleanup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Partner with schools and community organizations to drive program growth and increase awareness around the negative impacts of litter on the environment, encouraging environmental stewardship. ▶ Develop educational resources and learning sessions at Vaughan Public Libraries and community centres focused on litter reduction, recycling and the positive impact of cleanups, raising awareness and encouraging sustainable practices. 	2026-2027
Grow with Vaughan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Introduce multi-year discounts and early bird rates to incentivize and increase participation. ▶ Explore opportunities to recognize local sponsors on the City’s website. 	2026-2027
Vaughan Healthy Yards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Offer educational resources to help residents develop and maintain healthy yards and the benefits of eco-friendly practices on the environment through social media campaigns. ▶ Launch seasonal pre-order campaign list for rain barrels and composters for pickup. 	2026-2028
20-Minute Makeover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increase participation rates by enhancing outreach efforts targeting large corporations and businesses. 	2027
National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Engage with community associations to identify opportunities to plant monarch gardens. 	2027
Tree and Bench Dedication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Explore sponsorship opportunities for tree and bench dedications. 	2028
Vaughan Green Helpers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish a volunteer group to support conservation and gardening efforts at North Maple Regional Park. 	2028
Corporate and Community Tree Planting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Explore opportunities to increase participation from corporations and community groups in tree-planting initiatives through enhanced program marketing and partnerships. 	2029



Year One at a glance

To reflect the core goals of the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy, Year One performance metrics are organized according to the three strategic pillars: **Engage**, **Educate** and **Expand**. This approach highlights how program activities collectively strengthened community participation, increased environmental awareness and extended the reach and impact of stewardship initiatives across Vaughan.



 **Engage**

In 2025, residents, community groups, local organizations and businesses united through Green Guardians programs to take action and enhance Vaughan’s greenspaces. More than 12,500 community members participated across all programs, demonstrating their commitment to environmental stewardship.

The City delivered 10 events and supported 137 community-led events, including litter cleanups and planting events, demonstrating strong public initiative and a growing interest in hands-on stewardship opportunities across Vaughan.

City staff promoted Green Guardians programs at 11 local festivals, reaching 2,295 residents. City staff also developed an engagement strategy to enhance and optimize program promotion.

10
City-led events

137
community-led events

2,295
residents engaged across 11 local festivals

12,500
total participants across all Green Guardians programs



Educate

Education and knowledge sharing were central to Green Guardians programming in 2025. Resources, outreach initiatives, interactive booths and the launch of a new workshop series – Vaughan Gardeners – have helped increase public understanding about the importance of biodiversity, urban forestry and environmental responsibility. The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy enhanced residents’ access to information and practical tools to support sustainable practices at home and in their communities.

In 2025, more than 300 residents engaged in environmental stewardship-themed trivia and more than 900 native seed packets were distributed to encourage pollinator-friendly planting. Green Guardians programs mobilized more than 350 community members to collect several hundred bags of litter, plant 1,180 native trees and create six new pollinator habitats consisting of nearly 400 native shrubs, grasses, herbs and flowers – promoting environmental awareness through action.

6

pollinator habitats created

100+

bags of litter collected

300+

residents engaged

398

native flowers, herbs and shrubs planted

900+

native seed packets distributed

1,180

native trees planted





Expand

The Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy expanded its environmental impact and program reach through new initiatives, partnerships and measurable sustainability outcomes.

Residents, families, community groups and businesses came together to plant 1,180 native trees, create six pollinator habitats and collect hundreds of litter bags. These contributions from diverse community participants helped to foster forest canopy growth, enhance biodiversity and support local climate resilience.

The Strategy also strengthened its foundation for growth through more than 100 newly formed partnerships, the launch or advancement of eight programs in alignment with the roadmap and the generation of more than \$60,000 in revenue through sponsorships, grants and donations.

4

new programs launched

4

existing programs advanced

100+

partnerships with community groups, schools, non-profits and businesses established

\$60,000+

generated





Impact spotlight

Hundreds of partnerships were forged through horticulture sponsorships, corporate and community tree planting events, community planting projects, litter cleanups, property recognition and workshop programs – collectively enabling and encouraging stewardship action from diverse local groups.

Litter was collected at more than 100 City parks, parkettes, trails and public spaces by community stewards through the Community Cleanup program and 20-Minute Makeover campaign, helping to protect and maintain the health, cleanliness and beauty of Vaughan's greenspaces.

In 2025, 1,180 trees and 398 native plants were planted through Green Guardians programs, creating more than 1,600 square metres in wildlife habitat, supporting a variety of pollinators and enhancing local biodiversity for generations to come.

1,600m² +

of land restored or newly planted

1,100,000kg +

of carbon dioxide projected to be sequestered over the lifetime of the newly planted trees

Program updates

In 2025, thousands of participants contributed meaningfully across Green Guardians programs and City staff made significant progress toward the goals of the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy.

This section provides a progress update on each program:



Corporate and Community Tree Planting



Grow with Vaughan



Community Cleanup



Tree and Bench Dedication



Community Planting Fund



20-Minute Makeover



Curb Appeal

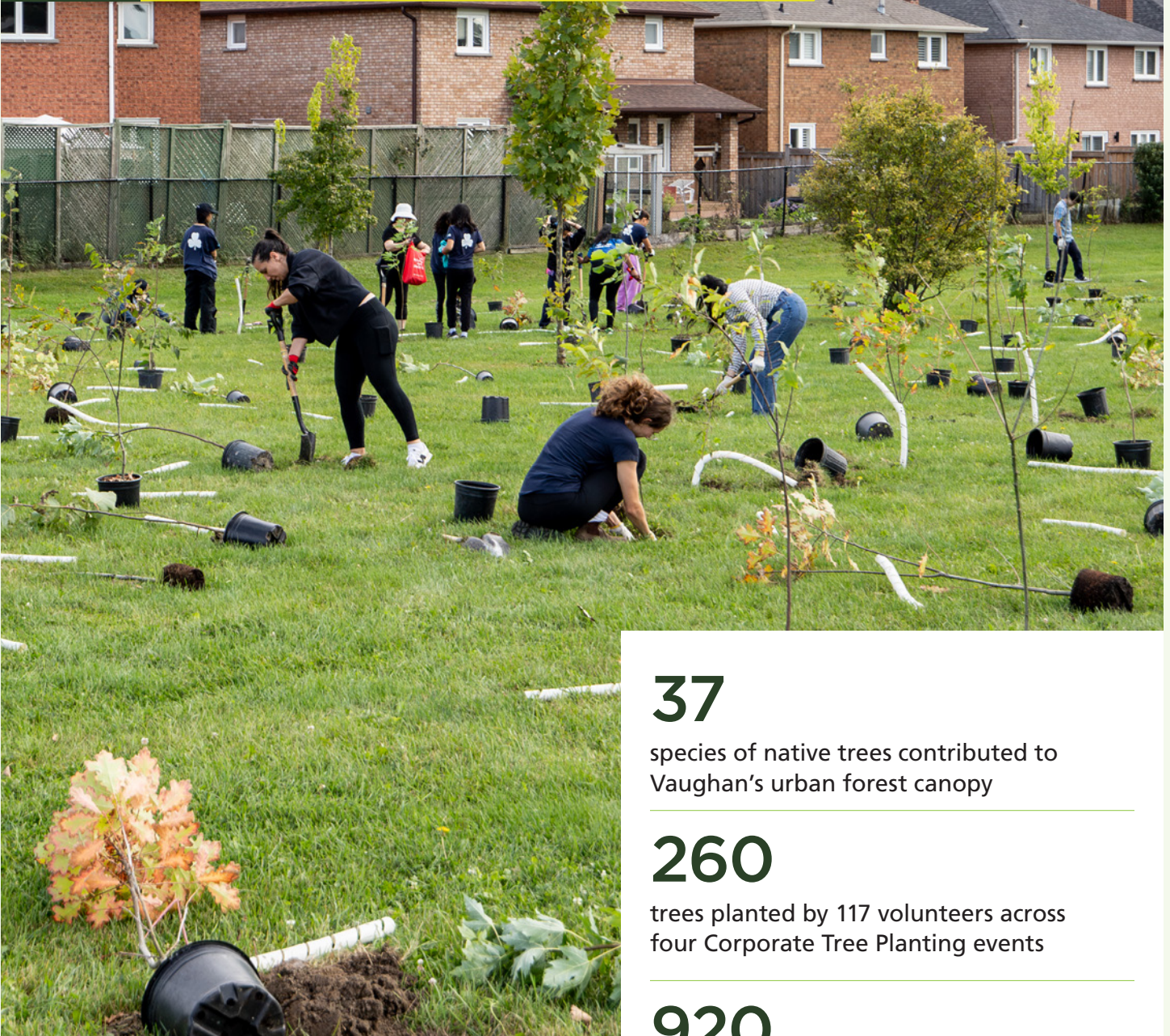


National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day





Corporate and Community Tree Planting



37

species of native trees contributed to Vaughan's urban forest canopy

260

trees planted by 117 volunteers across four Corporate Tree Planting events

920

trees planted by 215 volunteers across five Community Tree Planting events

1,400m² +

of land reforested with 1,180 trees planted by 332 volunteers

The Corporate and Community Tree Planting program saw a significant increase in engagement and the number of trees planted in 2025.

In alignment with the Strategy, tree-planting initiatives expanded through new partnerships with local organizations and enhanced outreach to build community engagement and grow the City's urban forest.



Community Cleanup



As with any major city, litter remains an issue in Vaughan, as identified in the City's Litter Reduction Action Plan. The Community Cleanup program addresses this challenge by empowering residents, community groups and local businesses to take shared responsibility for keeping public spaces clean.

Since its launch in 2021, Community Cleanup has continued to grow, with the first year of the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy marking the highest participation to date. The value of community cleanups is further reinforced through the City's annual proclamation of World Cleanup Day and by strong return participation from community groups and local businesses committed to caring for Vaughan's parks and public spaces.

32

parks, parkettes, trails and public spaces cleaned

35

community-led events hosted

671

people participated



Community Planting Fund



The Community Planting Fund supports community-led greening projects by providing funding for community groups and local organizations to plant and maintain pollinator gardens, rain gardens, Indigenous education gardens and other environmentally beneficial plantings on City-owned or publicly accessible land.

5

community groups consisting of more than 100 volunteers helped co-create six pollinator gardens across the city

127m²

of pollinator habitat created using 398 native shrubs, grasses, herbs and flowers



SPOTLIGHT: Pollinator presence and drought resistance were among the top ecological benefits realized by community groups.



Curb Appeal



Curb Appeal is a long-standing City program that recognizes homeowners and businesses who demonstrate exceptional pride and effort in the maintenance of their properties. The program is driven by community participation: residents nominate properties and a team of volunteer resident judges visits and evaluates each nominated property.

13%

increase in properties recognized

34

volunteer judges recognized 850 beautifully maintained, creative and sustainable properties

843

resident nominations received



SPOTLIGHT: Sustainable garden features such as rain barrels and the incorporation of native, pollinator-friendly and drought-resistant plants were recognized.



Grow with Vaughan



Grow with Vaughan is the City's corporate sponsorship program that offers local businesses a unique opportunity to boost brand visibility while enhancing local greenspaces, supporting beautification efforts and fostering community pride. On an annual basis, businesses can sponsor a City-maintained flowerbed, pollinator bed or flowerpot in select locations across Vaughan.

17

businesses sponsored 23 City garden beds and flowerpots

\$60,000+

generated to fund environmental stewardship initiatives



Tree and Bench Dedication



The Tree and Bench Dedication program offers a meaningful way to commemorate loved ones, celebrate milestones or honour special occasions while enhancing the City's parks, trails and public spaces. Through the installation of a tree or bench with a custom plaque, the program supports urban canopy growth, provides lasting public amenities and strengthens the connection between people and the places they cherish.

8

native trees dedicated

11

benches dedicated



20-Minute Makeover



100+

City parks, parkettes, trails and public spaces cleaned

102

groups registered

9,952

people participated

20-Minute Makeover is a week-long litter cleanup campaign that takes place each April to commemorate Earth Week, bringing residents, schools and businesses together for a series of quick and high-impact events across City parks and public spaces. The initiative encourages simple, collective action, showing how a small time commitment can make a visible difference in keeping Vaughan safe, clean and beautiful.



National Pollinator Week and Flight of the Monarch Day



300+

residents engaged

900+

pollinator seed packets distributed

National Pollinator Week (June 16-22) and Flight of the Monarch Day (Aug. 23) celebrate the importance of pollinators and raise awareness about the role that the community can play in protecting them. Through interactive displays, educational activities and hands-on engagement, these initiatives encourage collective action to create and enhance pollinator habitats across Vaughan.



SPOTLIGHT: To promote Flight of the Monarch Day, interactive milkweed murals were displayed in all Vaughan Public Libraries branches throughout August. Visitors were invited to get crafty and attach their origami butterfly to the mural depicting the monarch's favourite food - common milkweed!

Next steps: 2026-2027 roadmap

As endorsed by Council, the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy will continue to expand. Over the next year, City staff will focus on continued program enhancements and the co-ordinated rollout of four new programs designed to strengthen participation and community-led environmental action:



1. Vaughan Gardeners (Q1 2026)

The Vaughan Gardeners program provides resident-centred gardening education through a series of workshops held across the city. Workshop delivery is informed by public input gathered during program development.



2. Vaughan Healthy Yards (Q2 2026)

Vaughan Healthy Yards will support sustainable practices on private property through newly developed educational resources and targeted communications campaigns.



3. Adopt-a-Park (Q2 2026)

The Adopt-a-Park program introduces a new stewardship opportunity for community groups interested in preserving and enhancing a City-owned park of their choice.



4. Communities in Bloom (Q4 2026)

Communities in Bloom is a member-based organization aimed at encouraging and recognizing resident involvement in creating beautiful and sustainable urban environments.



Conclusion

In 2025, more than 12,500 participants from community groups and local businesses engaged in Green Guardians initiatives, demonstrating growth across all programs compared to 2024. These results reflect the strong foundation established in the first year of the Green Guardians Community Programs Strategy to support community stewardship, environmental education and program expansion.

Through measurable outcomes, strengthened partnerships and increased public participation, the City is advancing a culture of shared responsibility for protecting and enhancing Vaughan's natural environment.

This early progress positions Green Guardians to scale effectively over the next three years, as new programs are introduced and community interest continues to grow. Together, these efforts contribute to a cleaner, healthier and more beautiful Vaughan for future generations.

vaughan.ca/GreenGuardians

