

The Riverwood Conservancy: Strategic Directions 2020 – 2023

Vision: A community that lives in harmony with nature

Mission: The Riverwood Conservancy (TRC) is the charity that provides programs and direction for Riverwood - the 150-acre, urban nature preserve situated on the shores of the Credit River in Mississauga. Working together with like-minded groups and individuals, our mission is to enable people of all cultures, ages, and abilities to respectfully connect with nature and learn about the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring natural spaces for the well-being of future generations – all while experiencing the beauty of the Riverwood gardens.

Climate Change Action: Since 2012, TRC has been advancing climate change awareness and education to students and the public at large through its Stewardship, Gardens and Education programs. These programs already align with aspects of the City of Mississauga’s Climate Change Action Plan.

Moving forward, TRC is committed to include action on climate change as a lens through which it adjusts and implements its strategic plan. This means, in addition to awareness and education, TRC will integrate climate change actions across all its program platforms to help mitigate and adapt to our changing climate, and as feasible, include actions in the City of Mississauga Climate Change Action Plan.

The following pages provide specific strategic goals and objectives by TRC program area (Stewardship and Conservation, Gardens and Education) and by those pertaining to organizational stability (Fund Development, Marketing and Communications, Facilities, Partnerships and Governance):

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Strategic Goals and Objectives

Stewardship and Conservation

Riverwood is a significant Natural Area along the Credit River and the focus of TRC's Stewardship Program. Activities follow a management plan and engage the community to revitalize and protect Riverwood's wildlife and native plant habitat, maintain trails, manage invasive plants, install native plants, while raising awareness and increasing the community's knowledge and understanding of Riverwood and the Credit Valley ecosystem. A full-time Conservation Specialist coordinates the Stewardship Program assisted by seasonal summer staff.

Strategic Goal: TRC is recognized as a leader in environmental stewardship and conservation in an urban setting through:

1. Conservation, protection and enhancement of the ecological features and functions at Riverwood

Objectives:

1. Protect ecological features and functions of Riverwood.
 - Apply conservation management practices as outlined in the TRC Stewardship Management Plan
 - Receive the City of Mississauga's Invasive Species Management Plan (under development 2020) and consider implementing recommendations that will help conservation and protection practices and efforts at Riverwood
 - Continue to find new and proven ways to engage community groups and volunteers to achieve the overall goal
 - Annually, monitor invasive species, prioritize and remove highly invasive species to protect sensitive habitats
 - Maintain and enhance the diversity of habitat types through mapping and continue to protect sensitive features. For 2020 – 2021, prioritize the focus on meadows

2. Protect local hydrology, wetlands and water quality.
 - Engage community partners to help restore biodiversity and protect these habitats (2020 – 2022)

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- Work with partners to achieve a net ecological gain of the MacEwan Pond-Wetland 2020-2021
- Post pond restoration, maintain or improve the health of the MacEwan Pond resulting in enhanced accessibility for educational programs and public groups
- Monitor creek tributaries leading into the Credit River, and valley slopes for erosion and mitigate degradation where possible

3. Develop a sustainable trail strategy.

- Collaborate with partners (CVC and City of Mississauga) and other stakeholders to implement a staged, well-managed and funded trail strategy which includes:
 - o A comprehensive review and analysis of existing trails (2020 - 2021)
 - o A trail system design that protects sensitive features, provides safe access for recreational and educational use and maximizes accessibility
 - o Identification of unsanctioned trails that are candidates for immediate closure, and in collaboration with the City and CVC, develop strategies to deter use

2. Expanding TRC's expertise in environmental stewardship to help build the broader community's collective knowledge and capacity

Objectives:

1. Build Stewardship Learning Programs that communicate and demonstrate how and why to restore and protect biodiversity and ecological health of Riverwood.
 - Work with TRC educational staff to integrate stewardship objectives into educational program activities
 - Continue to seek opportunities to engage community groups and the public in stewardship projects
 - Help to foster the public's understanding and appreciation of natural areas and restoration area projects through integration of stewardship objectives in Discovery presentations and guided hikes (e.g. impact of invasive species, trail safety, etc.)

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- Work with marketing staff to improve user-led educational material about habitat biodiversity and restoration projects at Riverwood through signage, technology and conveying stories on website
 - Assess how best to sustain the Native Plant Propagation Program (2020-2021) and implement changes and improvements to engage volunteers and enhance, protect and restore native habitats and ecosystems (2022)
2. Identify and grow the staff and volunteer resources required to sustain and further share TRC expertise which includes:
- Promoting and implementing the Volunteer Stewardship Training / Learning Program
 - Seeking opportunities to further share TRC's expertise in natural areas stewardship and engaging individuals, the public and other conservation organizations
 - Offering learning workshops on natural areas stewardship
 - Create and publish resources on stewardship and TRC's stewardship model
 - Establish learning / training programs for specialized volunteers to assist with the implementation of stewardship programs at Riverwood and that can be adapted and transferred to other natural areas
3. Determine the feasibility for providing TRC guidance and expertise to support volunteer stewardship groups at off-site properties (2022 and beyond).
- Make evidence-based decisions for any planned program growth
 - Evaluate the current and future resources required to incrementally increase delivery of programs off site without negatively impacting the Stewardship Program and restoration activities at Riverwood

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Garden Programs

TRC is responsible for designated gardens within Riverwood, specifically all the gardens surrounding Parker-Chappell House, the Pollinator Garden near Chappell, gardens by the front entrance, and the Enabling Garden and Scotts Garden in MacEwan Terrace. Gardens are maintained by volunteer teams, led by volunteer Garden Leaders, and supervised by the Executive Director. In the summer, the gardens are supported by a Horticulture Assistant who leads teams of summer volunteers.

Strategic Goal: TRC is recognized as a leader in Horticulture through:

1. Continued leadership in the design and maintenance of gardens at Riverwood to support and enhance the natural beauty of the site

Objectives:

1. Introduce one new garden to Riverwood every 2-3 years (certain gardens are defined in the Master Plan for 'Mississauga Garden Park, 2002'), with an emphasis on greater plant diversity and thematic designs, and by so doing broaden volunteer opportunities:
 - Begin with the design and building of Pollinator Paradise, a new innovative pollinator garden; support Mississauga as a Bee-Friendly city (monitor and measure pollinator activity and diversity of pollinators);
 - Engage in discussion with the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects to provide pro-bono garden design, including for proposed interpretive visitor centre gardens, and green garden initiatives that make wise use of water, (for example, rooftop garden and storm-water recycling)
2. Stage an incremental expansion of the Enabling Garden while improving accessibility:
 - Begin with the Dawn Redwood Circle and Sensory Path
 - Take responsibility to redesign the Agricultural Garden and consider an Indigenous themed garden to align with the overall Time and Change theme; do so in consultation and dialogue with Elders and The Indigenous Network
3. Support the City of Mississauga in the curatorial practices of MacEwan Terrace Garden and initiate same curatorial practices for the Parker / Chappell Gardens.

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4. (Longer term objective) Continue discussions with the City to take on greater responsibility and autonomy for the ongoing operations of MacEwan Terrace Garden.
 - Continue maintaining the Scott's Miracle-Gro Garden
 - Hire a Horticulture Coordinator to assume responsibility for the continued design and maintenance of MacEwan Terrace Garden and by so doing, expand volunteer opportunities
 - Plan for a future training centre for Horticulture, Horticultural Therapy and Stewardship at Parker-Chappell House
 - Establish a working compost area on Riverwood grounds

2. Sharing TRC's horticultural expertise to help build the broader community's collective knowledge and capacity

Objectives:

1. Enhance horticultural learning opportunities to TRC volunteers, staff and the community:
 - Add signage in English and Latin in strategic, popular garden areas of Riverwood
 - Continue to offer Tours of Riverwood gardens
 - Establish a 'garden education program series' for all levels in Discovery@Riverwood
 - Provide gardening and training opportunities to people with special needs, as a potential capacity-building and transition to degrees of independence
 - Engage volunteer garden leaders to help mentor and convey career-based skills and knowledge to summer employed youth (for example, Horticulture Assistant, who in turn passes this knowledge to secondary school students)
 - Include gardening in the Junior Naturalists Club program
 - Offer Scouts and Guides the opportunity to achieve their horticulture badge
 - Explore Food Bank partnerships to provide garden training as a way to lead to employment

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- Revise TRC website with an embedded link to the "Ask a Mississauga Master Gardener"; and write garden blogs
 - Add technology (for example, Wi-Fi, QR codes, VoiceEye) to enhance visitor experience and knowledge including tourists
 - Consult with schools planning to establish a garden or naturalization project
2. Build partnerships with University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) to develop and deliver UTM and Citizen Science projects in botanical field research:
- Explore topics on the impact of climate change on urban horticultural and native plants;
 - Expand field testing (aka Brueckner Rhododendron Hybrid Test Project) to companion plants;
 - Recruit UTM and York University interns and co-op students to assist to measure field data
 - Leverage university partnerships to establish further collaborations and to expand sharing of knowledge with local horticulture groups, the Ontario Horticultural Association, Mississauga Master Gardeners and specialty societies, (for example, North American Native Plant Society, Begonia and Hosta societies)
3. Plan how best to incrementally offer TRC expertise to:
- the garden design process contemplated at the future Britannia outdoor education centre of Peel District School Board (PDSB)
 - delivery of community-based garden programs at Britannia after hours, weekends and summer
 - establish a model for a volunteer-led garden program at Brueckner Rhododendron Garden, building on the success of Hancock Woodlands, and consider the same for other garden areas along the Credit River

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Education Programs

Education programs offered at TRC include Education Naturally (primary grades); Enabling Garden (special needs and health and wellness); L.E.A.D.S. (Leaders in Environmental Achievements through Diversity and Skills); Discovery@Riverwood (free public programs); and paid programs such as Scouting/Guiding, Junior Naturalists Club and other courses. A full-time teacher or instructor teaches Education Naturally and L.E.A.D.S.; a full-time Enabling Garden Coordinator plans and delivers Enabling Garden programs and is assisted over eight months by an Enabling Garden Assistant; and the Education Program Director / Consultant coordinates the Discovery and paid programs as a contractor.

Strategic Goal: TRC is recognized as a leader in environmental education for all ages by offering relevant and innovative educational and community programs that will encourage people of all cultures, ages and abilities to connect with nature

Objectives:

1. Ensure the Education Program has the current and future staffing and volunteer resources required to provide the highest quality school-based, community-based and special needs programs.
 - Address current staffing required with an emphasis on:
 - o Hiring a third teacher to support both Education Naturally and LEADS
 - o Providing additional time for the Enabling Garden Assistant
 - Continually evaluate capacity of TRC staff to deliver quality educational programming and ensure adequate staffing for any planned program growth
 - o Continue to train and utilize qualified Occasional Teachers
 - o Continue to work with the Volunteer Coordinator to recruit volunteers to support programs
 - Exercise robust program evaluation to measure success
2. Determine the feasibility for incremental growth of curriculum-based and community programming at TRC and off-site properties.
 - Make evidence-based decisions for any planned program growth
 - o Evaluate current and future resources required to deliver programs off- site, on an incremental basis

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- Evaluate topical trends in programs and customer demand
 - Develop strategies to address various contingencies, including school work disruption and health concerns in program areas (e.g., ticks, red ants), to ensure the continued ability to deliver quality programs
 - Understand the constraints on program delivery, including space, site capacity, accessibility and other classroom limitations (e.g., supplies and tools) and plan programming accordingly
 - Assess the number of free and fee-based public programs and adjust according to market demands
 - Coordinate with fund development staff to identify mechanisms to sustain programs (e.g., program naming opportunities, grant opportunities)
 - Develop programs to support the Membership initiatives
3. Coordinate with Conservation staff to assess current and develop future infrastructure (e.g., trails, placement of birdfeeders, teaching gardens, etc.) and program content to support education programs.
- Identify specific conservation activities that are curriculum-based
 - Identify conservation activities suitable for all cultures, ages and abilities
4. Seek out and plan to provide Wellness-based programs across all educational platforms.
- Enhance the focus of Enabling Garden programs to include an emphasis on Health and Wellness
5. Coordinate with Marketing staff to increase active and passive community education and involvement at TRC and beyond through:
- Social media posts, e.g., Wildlife Wednesdays
 - Vimeo videos for teachers and others
 - Sharing success stories to support program funding
 - Improve the bird cam for online access by all

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Organizational Sustainability

The Riverwood Conservancy commits to building a sustainable future for the organization through effective governance and planning including:

Fund Development

Fund Development generates the resources for the achievement of TRC's mission. All staff at TRC play a role in maintaining strong relationships with the generous supporters who make our work possible. The core staff team includes a Project Development Specialist who focuses on grants; a Community Events Officer who coordinates events; a Development Administrator/Coordinator who maintains the database; and a full-time Director of Development who oversees the team and coordinates other fundraising strategies (e.g. major gifts, legacy gifts, individual giving). The Executive Director manages the relationship with the City and a number of key supporters. Many board members also support Fund Development through participation on the Fund Development Committee, and/or by nurturing relationships with potential and current supporters.

Strategic Goal: A dynamic and well-planned fund development plan

Objectives:

1. Maximize and diversify TRC's revenue streams by focusing on cost-effective, evidence-based fundraising activities with the potential for long-term value, including:
 - Providing opportunities for TRC supporters with the capacity and inclination to make more significant gifts to the organization by:
 - o Using the appropriate research, tools and resources to identify existing and potential individuals capable of making larger gifts, and by collaborating with the executive director, other staff and volunteers, establish appropriate strategies to increase their support to TRC, as appropriate
 - o Examining gift and recognition levels, including exploring the possibility of re-establishing a "Friends of TRC" symbolic giving club
 - o Exploring naming opportunities and appropriate gift levels, including naming of programs and continuing discussions with the City to name municipal assets
 - Developing a cost-effective donor acquisition plan
 - Developing and implementing a monthly giving program

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- Re-engaging lapsed TRC supporters
- Establishing minimum gift requests for corporate stewardship days
- Increasing direct mail to a minimum of three appeals per year supported by e-fundraising appeals, and exploring outsourcing of direct mail printing and stuffing to a printer/mail house to reduce staff time associated with this activity
- Continuing to offer donors opportunities to support TRC in the long-term through legacy gifts and endowments through the Knowledge Café series, and inclusion of TRC in The Canadian Book of Charities and other relevant publications
- Continuing to strategically pursue granting opportunities
- Negotiating multi-year grants, whenever possible

2. Elevate TRC's internal fundraising capacity and performance.

- Hiring a Director of Development to guide the planning and execution of a co-ordinated, integrated fundraising plan and to act as the primary internal fundraising resource
- Involving all development staff in the development of an annual fundraising plan, with accountability and performance objectives
- Ensuring all fundraising activities have measurable goals and ROI's are calculated and assessed, including estimates of staff time, to ensure organizational resources are being used effectively
- Supporting fundraising staff in enhancing their fundraising knowledge and expertise by continuing to provide professional development opportunities
- Exploring streamlining fundraising roles to improve efficiency
- Developing and implementing consistent recognition policies and protocols
- Ensuring consistent treatment and documentation of donors and sponsors, including development of gift agreements and terms of naming opportunities

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3. Enhance and integrate communications with fundraising efforts by:
 - Continuing to align communications and marketing materials with fundraising goals on all platforms, website, social media, print collateral, etc.
 - Refining how TRC “tells its story” to inspire philanthropic support
 - Highlighting donor testimonials, “Why I Give to TRC” on the website, in e-newsletters and in other communications tools
 - Improving the donor experience on the website, specifically the donation and other fundraising related pages
 - Testing new messaging to respond to the marketplace and donor interests, e.g. climate change

Marketing and Communications

Marketing and Communications at TRC delivers digital and print media to a variety of stakeholders. Activities include but are not limited to: e-blasts to promote programs and events; sponsor, donor, and volunteer recognition through social media; listing and updating events, courses, and program descriptions on the TRC website; sending media advisories and releases before and/or after notable events; raising awareness of TRC and Riverwood through booth setups at events around Mississauga. The 30-hour per week Marketing Coordinator is responsible for all marketing and communications. In the summer (June – August), a Communications Assistant is also hired.

Strategic Goal: An effective and transparent organizational communications and marketing plan

Objectives:

1. Raise TRC’s public profile and create more awareness of our programs and the Riverwood property by:
 - Increase and refine use of digital communications
 - o Launch mobile-friendly, search engine optimized website
 - o Provide timely and relevant content across social media accounts to drive users to the TRC website

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- Use more concise pieces of print collateral that drive people to the website for details and actions (registering for events, signing up as volunteers, becoming TRC members etc.)
 - Utilizing TRC tables/booths at more community events
 - Increasing the number of volunteers who can staff booths at such outreach events
2. Improve internal processes to ensure consistency and accuracy in marketing collateral, including:
- Updating brand and style guides to ensure consistent language and visuals in marketing collateral (both print and digital)
 - Ensuring funders, sponsors, and donors are appropriately recognized, in collaboration with the Fund Development team
 - Working with Volunteer Team to create and send emails to volunteers that remain in line with TRC style standards
 - Purchasing up-to-date design software (Adobe Creative Cloud) and computer hardware/operating systems to ensure compatibility with the new software. Clarifying newsletter and annual report naming conventions and distribution schedule
3. Review and revitalize the use of public-facing communications, including:
- Ongoing revisions of the website to create better user experiences and easier transactions (registrations, bookings, etc.)
 - Creating regular blog content for the website that can be repurposed in newsletters, social media, and eblasts in order to share more stories of our work
 - Clarifying newsletter and annual report branding and delivery expectations
 - Managing current video assets and video platforms (YouTube, Vimeo) that support programming and marketing initiatives
 - Working with City of Mississauga contacts to have TRC materials posted in libraries and community centres, and TRC messages displayed on digital reader boards

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Facilities

The Credit Valley Conservation Authority owns the buildings that TRC uses for its programs. There are currently 3 buildings on the property used by TRC: Parker-Chappell House, the MacEwan Field Station and the MacEwan Barn. Visual Arts Mississauga (VAM) uses another building on the Riverwood property. There are 179 parking spaces for visitors to the property.

Strategic Goal: Work with partners to provide the facilities to achieve TRC's goals

Objectives:

1. Prepare an annual facilities and outdoor space assessment report describing:
 - Current utilization of the buildings by TRC programs
 - Parking and public transit utilization by visitors
 - Accessibility to buildings and trails
 - Any safety concerns and suggested improvements
 - Suggestions for improving energy efficiency in the buildings
 - Impact of space limitations on programs and staff/volunteers
2. Work with the City to address critical space issues (2020 – 2023 and beyond):
 - Office and meeting space
 - Accessibility
 - Improvements to the MacEwan Barn, including heat
 - Parking and public transit requirements
 - Washroom facilities
 - Other program and staff/volunteer facility needs
3. Strive to develop a Visitors Centre on the site by 2025.
 - Continue to work closely with the City and its consultants to ensure a complete feasibility study for the proposed Visitors Centre
 - Develop a detailed response to the feasibility study in 2020
4. Conduct a program gap analysis and work with VAM to identify opportunities to make use of each other's indoor spaces during available times.

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- For example, Art Studio side of the MacEwan Field Station
5. Explore further opportunities for TRC use of off-site facilities with partners and others:
- University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus
 - Local churches, community centres, libraries and educational facilities
 - Peel Board of Education - Britannia Site
 - ErinoakKids
 - MetroLinx

Partnerships

TRC is fortunate to have a range of partners including the City of Mississauga, the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, local school boards, other non-profit organizations and charitable foundations, corporations and businesses.

Strategic Goal: Deepen existing and establish further strategic and collaborative relationships

Objectives:

1. Further relationships with like-minded corporate and not-for-profit organizations to support TRC programs and development goals by:
 - Cultivating relationships with corporate groups that visit Riverwood for volunteer stewardship days with a view to developing expanded partnerships by:
 - o working with primary contacts to identify whether they have a foundation arm or marketing arm that would be open to a request
 - o Identifying opportunities for corporate matching gifts through volunteerism
 - Exploring new funding opportunities through collaborations with the University of Toronto Mississauga and CUE (Centre for Urban Environments) and others including for indigenous collaborations
 - Growing corporate funding and sponsorship by targeting Mississauga-based companies e.g. by working with the Mississauga Board of Trade to build relationships; by strategically targeting companies that do business with the City of Mississauga; researching companies that are

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- sustainability champions and/or support other environmental organizations
 - Reviewing Grant Connect and other resources regularly for granting opportunities
2. Engage the Board of Directors and the Fund Development Committee to augment financial support by identifying prospective donors and participating in cultivation, stewardship and solicitation activities, in collaboration with Fund Development staff.
 3. Explore opportunities for collaboration with the PDSB as the program planning for the Britannia Farm is designed and implemented.

Governance

TRC has a Board of Directors of 18 members, a staff complement of 13 permanent staff, 5 seasonal staff, 3 consultants, and approximately 400 core volunteers and 1300 corporate volunteers.

Strategic Goal: Continual review and improvement of TRC's organizational and governance structures and processes to increase its effectiveness

Objectives:

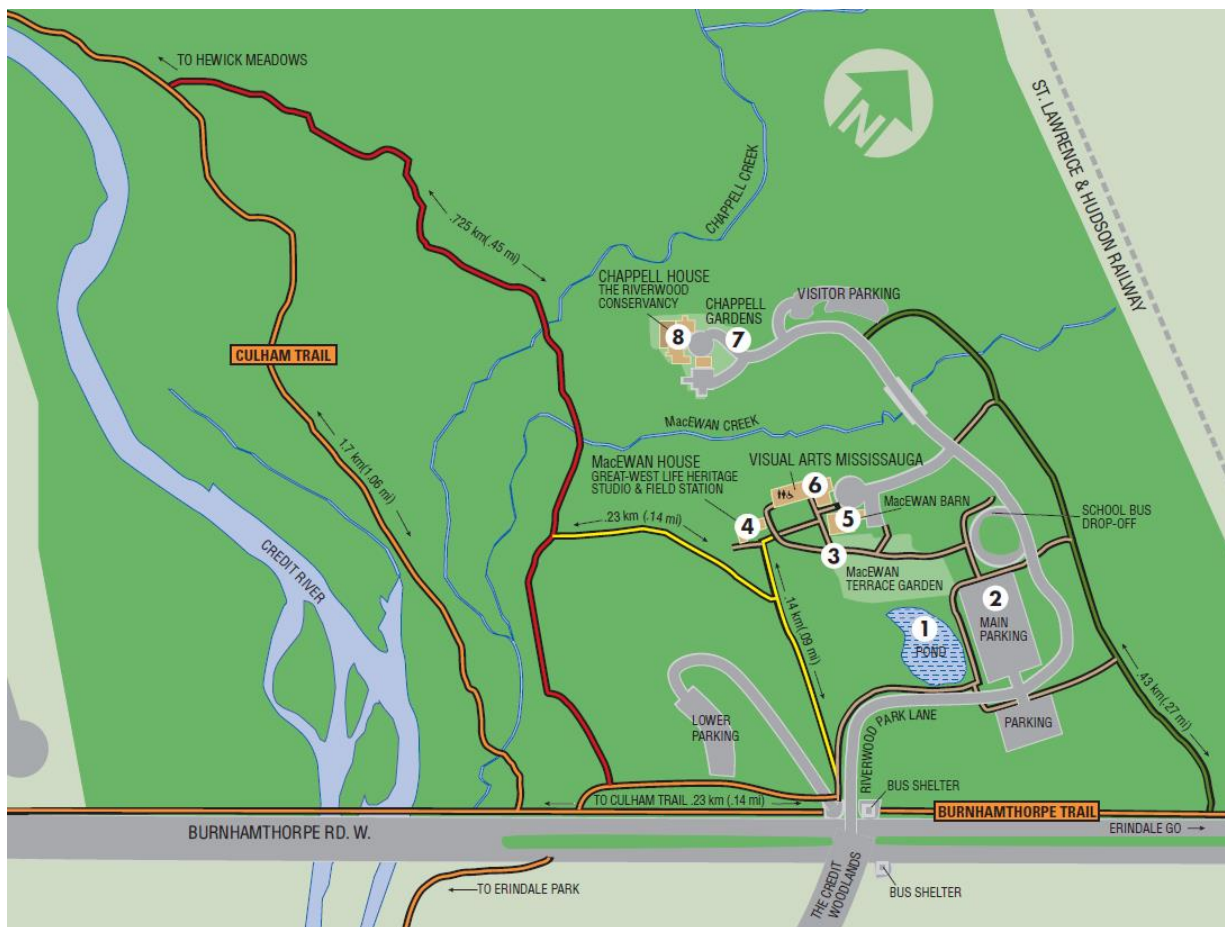
1. Conduct a Board Self-Appraisal Survey every other year starting in 2020 to evaluate Board members' knowledge, satisfaction and effectiveness.
 - Based on findings, address key concerns and provide Board development activities to improve governance beginning in 2020
 - Incorporate relevant research in governance of the non-profit sector
 - Chair or designate to provide an organized Board Orientation for each new Director
 - Executive Director to meet with each new director for an operational overview and orientation
2. Continue to shift the emphasis of Board discussions from operational to policy governance topics.
 - Encourage greater participation by all members in Board and committee discussions

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3. Develop a succession plan for key officer positions in 2020 and review and update every 2 years:
 - Chair of the Board
 - Executive Director
 - All key staff and consultant positions
4. In the annual performance appraisals of staff identify their training, development and personal needs including mental health.
 - In 2020, establish a process to ensure that sufficient time and resources (within the budget) are available to assist staff in addressing these needs
5. Ensure financial, staff, volunteer and space resources are available, as needed, for all considerations of new or expanded programming.
 - For example, incrementally increase Volunteer Coordinator and Marketing Coordinator positions to full time; hire a seasonal Conservation Assistant, etc.
6. Encourage all TRC Board and management to make it a regular practice to thank staff and volunteers for their contributions and to address key concerns they identify.
 - Recognize everyone's effort as part of our team approach
7. Regularly monitor volunteer and staff safety, satisfaction and effectiveness.
 - Continue to conduct the regular (every 3 years) volunteer satisfaction survey.
 - Continue to conduct an Employee Safety Survey every two years

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Appendix: Map of Riverwood with Legend



1. Pond: A cattail marsh area and important wildlife habitat and water source.
2. Bioswale: A man-made filtration system that processes pollutants from storm water runoff from the parking lot.
3. MacEwan Terrace Garden: The gateway to the cultural and natural landscapes of Riverwood, consisting of small gardens, perennial borders, specimen trees, garden pergola and an Enabling Garden uniquely designed and programmed for people of all ages and abilities.
4. MacEwan House Originally constructed in the mid 1800s, with further additions and renovations in 1915, 1950 and 2005, the completed building now houses Visual Arts Mississauga's Great-West Life Heritage Studio & The Riverwood Conservancy's MacEwan Field Station.
5. MacEwan Barn The stone foundation and timber sections date back to 1840. Renovated in 2006, the barn is used today as an accessible classroom and camp lunchroom by Riverwood tenants.
6. Visual Arts Mississauga A Mississauga Urban Design award-winning building, clad in natural stone to complement neighbouring MacEwan House.
7. Parker/Chappell House Gardens Natural landscape surrounding Parker/Chappell House frame tiered gardens with all-season interest and a lily pond.
8. Parker/Chappell House (home of The Riverwood Conservancy) Built in 1919 in the Arts and Crafts style, this heritage house is located at the end of the winding Riverwood Park Lane.