

# THE LIVING CITY® REPORT CARD 2016:

A progress report on environmental  
sustainability in the Toronto region



Toronto and Region  
**Conservation**  
for The Living City

Produced by:

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CivicAction congratulates TRCA and contributors on producing The Living City® Report Card 2016. Like TRCA and its partners, CivicAction recognizes that a prosperous, flourishing GTA needs a healthy regional environment and an approach to building that respects the capacity of the region and of the planet to sustain us. That is why the community of leaders in CivicAction's Greening Greater Toronto initiative worked with TRCA in 2011 to launch The Living City® Report Card as an ongoing assessment of regional scale environmental performance in the Greater Toronto Area.

The Living City® Report Card 2016 shows that while there is much to celebrate across the GTA, we are not making progress as quickly as we need to on critical regional environmental and sustainability issues. Therefore, CivicAction once again supports the call for municipalities and other levels of government, civic leaders, businesses, and communities to reflect on The Living City® Report Card and to use this common fact-base for multi-sector collaboration towards an environmentally sustainable region.

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# ON THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

Report cards are designed to answer important questions: How are we doing? Where have we excelled? And on what issues will we need to work even harder? The inaugural The Living City® Report Card, released in 2011, took stock of the environmental health and sustainability of the Toronto region across six themes that are important measures of a flourishing living city: carbon, air quality, water, waste, land use, and biodiversity, and set goals that we should aspire to for each theme. It has been five years since the first report so it is time to ask what has changed and how are we doing in relation to our goals.

## GOALS:

reduced carbon

clean air

clean water

reduction of waste

sustainable land use and expanded greenspace

healthy biodiversity

The Living City® Report Card 2016 provides answers to these questions through both detailed analysis and expert opinion. In its pages, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and partners share our understanding of the environmental health and sustainability of the region based on the data we have about current conditions and change-making activity across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Where possible, we have looked at the progress made in achieving our short- and long-term environmental targets. We also chart some areas where we, collectively, will need to focus our attention in the future and identify opportunities for joint action by GTA leaders, governments, businesses, organizations and local residents.

## SO HOW ARE WE DOING?

We are pleased to report that there have been some notable successes.

- Our green building industry, one of the cornerstones of a sustainable city, is the largest and fastest growing in Canada. Green building initiatives are helping to reduce water and energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions from the region's built environment.
- Despite a rapidly growing population, the rate of land consumption for urban development has decreased significantly over the past two decades.
- Most of the commonly measured contaminants in our rivers, streams, and waterfront such as phosphorus and metals are stable or decreasing and Toronto beaches are swimmable over 80% of the time. Lake Ontario waterfront fish species biodiversity has been steadily increasing over the past two decades.
- We have planted over one million native trees, shrubs and aquatic plants since the last report card. Healthy forests and wetlands provide habitat for wildlife, help cool urban areas, retain water and reduce runoff, and help reduce impacts of climate change.

However, rapid population growth, continuing urban development and the impacts of a changing climate are placing tremendous pressure on the environmental health of our region and our progress towards sustainability. Our rivers, streams and natural areas reflect – and in some cases, are negatively impacted by – the communities that are growing up around them.

- More than half of our urban areas do not have modern stormwater control. Uncontrolled and untreated stormwater can increase flood risks and degrade water quality.
- The amount of chloride from road salt is increasing in our rivers, streams and the Lake Ontario waterfront impacting aquatic life. Microplastics, tiny pieces of plastic, are a new threat in our waterbodies.
- Grass Carp, a species of invasive Asian Carp, were captured several times in Lake Ontario. Although they are not thought to be breeding in the Toronto waterfront area, they still pose a threat to the lake ecosystem.

- We continue to see the amount of farmland in the GTA shrink despite the growing awareness of the importance of local agriculture.
- We are seeing marked changes in the quality of the plants and animals surveyed across the region.


While we appear to be ‘holding the line’ – maintaining the hard-won environmental gains of the past, progress has slowed in some areas. The disparity in ecological health is widening between the urban core and the less developed headwaters of our watersheds. And significant challenges remain in attaining additional greenspace, better managing stormwater, and growing the urban forest, in the face of continued growth and competing municipal priorities.

Lastly, while there continues to be a high level of activity and effort in reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the GTA, the total quantity of emissions has not been significantly reduced. Much more remains to be done if we are to drastically reduce regional emissions to address climate change, the most critical and pressing environmental challenge of our time.

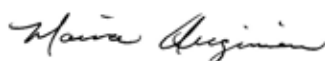
## A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

The Living City® Report Card 2016 makes a compelling case for TRCA, local governments, businesses, non-profit and community organizations, and citizens to renew their collective efforts to improve the environmental health and sustainability of the Toronto region. It is clear that we will only achieve environmental sustainability and its benefits to our health and prosperity if we think and act as a region. Environmental leaders in the public, private, and civil society sectors agree that we need better mechanisms to ensure we are working together in the most effective way possible to address these challenges across political and sector boundaries. Moving forward, The Living City® Report Card should continue to serve as a progress tracking tool for environmental health and sustainability, while evolving to also provide a platform for accelerating collective action by not only measuring our results, but also how well we work together.

We are pleased to present this update to The Living City® Report Card. We would like to thank TRCA staff, our partners, and our funders for their commitment and support. We look forward to working together with our partners and the residents of the Toronto region to take action towards achieving our goals for The Living City®.



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# HOW TO READ THIS PROGRESS REPORT

The Living City® Report Card is comprised of six themes related to environmental health and sustainability:

- **Carbon**
- **Air Quality**
- **Water**
- **Waste**
- **Land Use**
- **Biodiversity**

The Living City® Report Card 2016 is an update on progress that has been achieved over the past five years towards achieving the short- and long-term targets outlined in the inaugural The Living City® Report Card in 2011. Within each of the report's six themes, there are indicators that provide insights into the performance of the region in those areas. For each indicator, there is an analysis of the current state of the environmental issue, the recent progress that has been made, and the work that remains to be completed. Because resources were limited for this 2016 update, it was not always possible to provide a quantitative measure of the current indicator condition. However, local experts and thought leaders have been recruited to provide their insights and advice for these indicators.

Where possible, this progress report makes two key assessments for each indicator:

1. an assessment of the achievement of the 2016 short-term target; and
2. a progress arrow that shows the general trend toward the long-term target.

## TARGETS

**Short-term target** - Where possible, we assessed the completion of the short-term target set out for 2016 and set new short-term targets for 2021. Where we did not analyze data to determine if the 2016 target was met, we did not set a new short-term target. Instead, we suggest that we continue our momentum working toward the original long-term target.

**Long-term target** – The long-term targets were set out in the inaugural The Living City® Report Card in 2011. This regional target is based on local, provincial, or national targets where they already existed, or expert opinion on an appropriate target for the GTA taking into consideration global benchmarks and the desired healthy long-term state for the environment. The long-term targets represent aspirational goals for the GTA, and were set irrespective of progress made to date. The long-term targets remain the same as the previous report.

Progress towards the long term goal is represented with an arrow. An asterisk "\*" represents expert opinion.

↑	Much better
↗	Better
↔	No change
↘	Worse
↓	Much worse

## GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Information in The Living City® Report Card is presented either for the GTA or for the geographic boundaries of the TRCA jurisdiction (see study area map) depending on the type of indicator.

The GTA is the largest metropolitan area in Canada - home to six million people and counting. It spans an area of 7,125 square kilometres and includes the City of Toronto and the surrounding regional municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel, and York.

TRCA's jurisdiction is 2,506 square kilometres and it includes nine river systems - from the Etobicoke Creek in the west and Carruthers Creek in the east - and approximately 60 kilometres of the Lake Ontario waterfront.

## COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

**GHG** – Greenhouse Gas  
**GTA** – Greater Toronto Area  
**LID** – Low Impact Development  
**NGO** – Non-Government Organization  
**TRCA** – Toronto and Region Conservation Authority



