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GREENING SECUREMENT DIRECTIONS REPORT YORK REGIONAL FOREST PROPERTY ACQUISITION TOWN OF WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends that Council adopt the recommendation contained in the following report dated December 17, 2008, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Commissioner of Corporate Services be directed to complete the acquisition of approximately 29 hectares (71 ac) being described as Part of Lot 34 Concession 6, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, for \$330,000 plus associated land securement costs of \$30,000 for a total acquisition cost to the Region of \$360,000.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Regional Council authorization to purchase 29 hectares (71 ac) of land, described as Part of Lot 34 Concession 6, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, as outlined on *Attachment 1* to be owned and operated as part of the York Regional Forest.

3. BACKGROUND

In 2001, Regional Council adopted the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies. In support of these strategies, \$1.4M is allocated annually to allow for the delivery of a number of Greening Strategy programs (tree planting, environmental education, etc.) and to secure strategic environmental lands. Since 2001, a total of 29 properties (837 hectares) have been secured with a total value exceeding \$44M.

Properties can be secured using a number of means ranging from stewardship agreements and tree planting, donations, conservation easements, to fee simple acquisition by the Region or a partner. These avenues were considered before confirming the purchase option. Under the Greening Strategy the Region continues to demonstrate leadership through the strategic land securement program and investment in green infrastructure.

The owner of 29 hectares (71 ac) across from the North Tract and south-east of the Bendor and Graves Tract of the York Regional Forest (*Attachment 1*), has agreed to sell these lands to York Region for conservation purposes in the amount of \$410,000 or

\$14,137/ha (\$5,775/ac). Staff is pleased to advise that in December 2008, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation approved an \$80,000 grant application for this acquisition, reducing the purchase price to the Region to \$330,000 or \$11,379/ha (\$4,650/ac) .

The property subject to this report is located at 17242 McCowan Road, south of Davis Drive on the west side of McCowan Road. It is described as being Part of Lot 34, Concession 6, Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, comprising of approximately 29 hectares (71ac). The property is currently part of a larger 37 hectare (91ac) parcel of rural land that includes a house and associated buildings and amenity space. The proposal is to acquire 29 hectares (71ac) of the property and leave the current owners with an eight hectare (20ac) forested residential parcel. The current owners have requested that their retained parcel be eight hectares providing them with sufficient land to enjoy and manage and maintain enrolment in the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program. Staff identified this land as a strategic opportunity for securement and therefore contacted the owner in 2007 to discuss potential Regional acquisition of this key natural heritage land.

The property includes 27 hectares (67 acres) of primarily restored forest that has been managed with the intent of restoring a native mixed forest community. This property, located on McCowan Road across from the North Tract of the York Regional Forest, is located within the Natural Core designation of the Oak Ridges Moraine. There are two Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) on the property, a hydrogeological ESA known as the Vivian Infiltration Area and a biological ESA known as the Mount Albert Creek Headwater Complex. Wildlife species such as deer and fox are abundant on the property, as well as Species at Risk such as a hybrid population of the Jefferson Salamander, the Least Bittern and the Red Shouldered Hawk. The acquisition of these lands for the York Regional Forest would represent a significant Greening Strategy achievement.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 REGIONAL PRIORITIES

This land is strategically located within one of several areas that are a priority for securement, including opportunities for protection and rehabilitation

Staff has been considering priority focus areas for Regional acquisition. Further consideration of priority focus areas will be undertaken in support of Action Items 1 (Update our Natural Heritage System) and 4 (Restore and Strengthen the Natural Heritage System) of the Natural Heritage Directions paper prepared in support of the Region's sustainability initiative, Planning for Tomorrow.

The subject land is included in one of these priority focus areas (*Attachment 2*). This land is in an area that is recognized as one of the highest priority areas due to the following:

- Extent of existing forest cover.
- Opportunities for strategic rehabilitation (tree planting) maximizing functional benefits.
- Extent of lands currently in public ownership.
- Enhancing connectivity in east/west and north/south directions.
- Opportunities to protect and enhance wildlife habitat.
- Opportunities to improve public access and education (through delivery of outdoor education programs).

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act (ORMCA) and Plan (ORMCP) protect this property from significant new development. However, the Natural Core designation does not preclude site alterations from an expansion of the existing residential use by the current or future owners. Residential and farm uses are permitted to continue on this property which may significantly impact the natural heritage features and functions on the property (e.g. cattle grazing, personal ATV use etc. throughout the sensitive woodlot area).

Acquisition of this property provides the opportunity for York Region to both protect and restore the natural heritage features and functions. The property would be managed as a public amenity to increase forest cover and improve natural corridors for the protection and movement of wildlife.

This property represents a significant opportunity to connect the North Tract and the Bendor and Graves Tract of the York Regional Forest

The subject property is located across McCowan Road west of the North Tract of the York Regional Forest. In November 2008 Regional Council approved the acquisition of 121 hectares (299 acres) of land, north of this location, as an addition to the Bendor and Graves Tract of the York Regional Forest. This acquisition will make a trail connection between the Bendor and Graves Tract, and the North Tract possible.

4.2 PARTNERSHIPS

The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation has approved a contribution of \$80,000 towards this acquisition

To date, the majority of securement projects that the Region has been involved in have included a number of financial contributors (up to 3 or 4 per property).

Funding partners, have generally included the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the City of Toronto (through their Source Water Protection Fund which includes support of the securement of headwater areas of rivers that flow south through the City), the local municipalities and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. This

acquisition is not within the TRCA area of jurisdiction, nor is it the site of source waters for the City of Toronto, accordingly these funding partners are not available. The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority do not have funding specifically allocated to environmental land securement.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation is a logical partner for this acquisition as it is consistent with their criteria for land securement. An application was approved by the Foundation in December 2008 for \$80,000 in support of this acquisition.

The Oak Ridges Trail Association is interested in discussing the establishment of an Oak Ridges Side Trail (secondary Trail) through these lands

York Region currently has an arrangement with the Oak Ridges Trail Association to promote and maintain a portion of the York Regional Trail Network as a component of the Oak Ridges Trail. They have indicated to staff that, in the event these lands are secured, they would like to discuss the potential for a side trail of the Oak Ridges Trail to be managed through these lands and up into the Bendor and Graves Tract to the north-west.

This partnership increases public awareness, use and appreciation of the York Regional Forest as an integral part of the Region's natural heritage system; an amenity for all York residents.

4.3 INTERNAL EVALUATION TEAM (IET) SECUREMENT ASSESSMENT

The IET recommends this property for acquisition

In order to evaluate properties for acquisition, an Internal Evaluation Team (IET) was established. The Region's Internal Evaluation Team, consists of senior staff from Planning, Legal, Finance, Realty Services and Transportation Services. The IET has considered this property against the Regional Securement Criteria and deem it a high priority for Regional involvement in securement for the following reasons:

- The acquisition places another 27 hectares (67ac) of significant forest cover into public ownership.
- The property provides an opportunity for 1.8 hectares (4.4 ac) of new forest cover.
- The property presents a strategic opportunity to pursue a public trail connection between the trail networks of the North Tract and Bendor and Graves Tract of the York Regional Forest.

The subject property, in relation to the adjacent North Tract, the Bendor and Graves Tract, including the expansion approved by Council in November 2008, is shown on *Attachment 1*.

The IET has reviewed this proposal and finds the property to be a high priority for Regional acquisition. Their recommendations included that:

- The property should be acquired by the Region at the appraised value of \$5,775 /ac, at a total acquisition cost of \$410,000.

In the interest of expanding the Regional Forest and reforestation of the property, York Region should be the sole title holder and manager of the property.

4.4 VALUE OF THIS OPPORTUNITY

This acquisition is of good value when considered on the basis of cost per acre

This acquisition of 29 hectares (71ac) with Regional ownership and management, requires an expenditure from the Greening Securement Reserve of \$410,000. The costs for this current opportunity are depicted below to allow for comparison with the costs associated with the four properties secured in 2008 (Table 1).

It should be noted that the total cost per acre (\$5,775) for this property is low when compared with other recent acquisitions.

Table 1
Financial Details of Recently Secured Properties

Property	Total Cost	Total Cost per Acre	York Contribution	York Contribution per Acre
Wolske	\$83,500	\$7, 590	\$83,500	\$7,590
Swan Lake	\$3,400,000	\$68,000	\$1,200,000	\$24,000
Perryman	\$2,150,000	\$26,000	\$762,000	\$9,180
Schickedanz	\$3,287,500	\$11,000	\$3,287,500	\$11,000
Subject Property	\$410,000	\$5,775	\$330,000	\$4,650

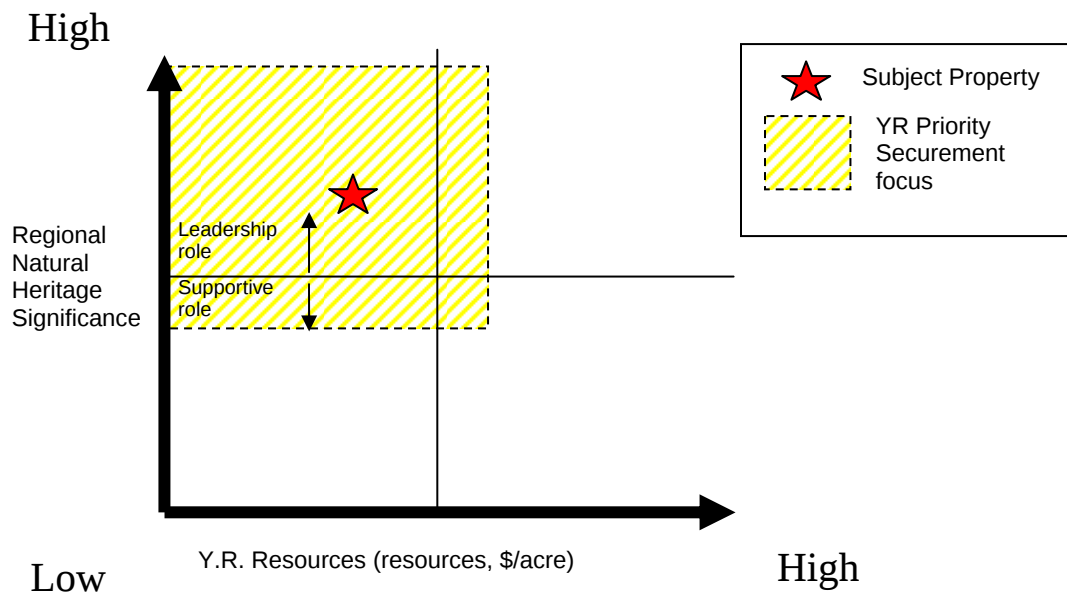
This strategic and highly economical opportunity was proactively sourced by Regional staff.

4.5 REGIONAL PRIORITY MATRIX

The Regional Securement Priority Matrix confirms this property as a high priority property, appropriate for acquisition

This property is a high priority for acquisition as it scores high (78/100) against the Regional Securement Criteria. When plotted on the Securement Priority Matrix, it is further noted that cost per acre for Regional acquisition is low. The Region seeks to focus its resources on properties that have a high Natural heritage Significance and also fall within the top left quadrant of the matrix (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Regional Priority Matrix



The subject property has been plotted on the matrix to graphically demonstrate how this property is assessed against the Regional Securement Criteria. The natural heritage value of this property is high (78/100 on the Evaluation Criteria checklist), but has additional value not reflected in the criteria as it provides an opportunity to expand the York Regional Forest and provide a public trail connection between two existing Forest Tracts. The price per acre of \$5,775/ac is supported by an appraisal and is deemed appropriate by Realty Services staff.

4.6 RELATIONSHIP TO VISION 2026

The Greenlands Property Securement Strategy continues to support Vision 2026 and such key goal statements as:

“In 2026, York Region residents will continue to value and embrace the Region’s unique natural heritage (land, air, water) and cultural heritage (sites and buildings important to our history, faiths and cultures).”

“In 2026, York Region will have grown at a pace that supports healthy communities, economic vitality, sustainable natural environment and effective human services.”

The strategy strengthens the Region’s commitment to focus on Vision 2026 action areas including:

- Protecting sensitive features such as forests, watersheds, the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Simcoe.
- Promoting a permanent linked Greenlands system.
- Continuing to develop and build strategies for a green region, such as the York Regional Forest Management Plan, the Greening Strategy and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.
- Taking a leadership role in the development and implementation of environmental strategies and conservation activities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Land costs of \$410,000 and \$30,000 associated costs are required to complete this Regional Forest property acquisition which will be supported by \$80,000 from the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation

In addition to the land acquisition cost of \$410,000, approximately \$30,000 is required for securement related costs including land transfer tax and other closing related costs as well as approximately \$15,000 to install fencing between the lands to be retained by the current owner and those to be acquired by the Region. This fencing was a requirement of the Vendor in the negotiated agreement.

The total acquisition cost of \$440,000 (\$410,000 land cost plus \$30,000 related costs) has been reduced thanks to a grant of \$80,000 approved by the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation in December of 2008.

Sufficient funds are available in the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve for this Regional Forest property acquisition

The forecast January 2009 balance of the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve is estimated to be \$1,250,000 (accounting for the four acquisitions approved by Regional Council in June, September and November of 2008).

Operational management of this addition to the York Regional Forest will be provided for through the existing budget allocation

This small but strategic addition to the York Regional Forest will possibly require some trail enhancement and consideration for access across the CN rail track. The CN ROW is currently fenced with a gate for the existing personal use crossing of the current owner. Funds will be drawn from re-prioritizing the York Regional Forest capital and operating allocation as required.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Securement Strategy. Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville staff has been consulted as negotiations with the landowner progressed; they are supportive of this Regional acquisition. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through securement initiatives, local municipalities benefit from the multiple enhancements to both their communities and the natural environment. The York Regional Forest is a prominent feature on the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville landscape. This expansion of the Regional Forest will further protect and enhance the Forest, the services they provide, and the natural environment, as a resource to residents across the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

Securement of this property is integral to advancing the objectives of the Greening and Securement Strategies and is considered to be a key strategic acquisition for the Region.

It is recommended that this Regional Forest property acquisition be completed.

For more information on this report, contact Paul Jankowski, General Manager, Roads, Roads Branch at extension 5901 in the Transportation Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)