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GREENLANDS PROPERTY SECUREMENT STRATEGY ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRAM UPDATE

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 21, 2004, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information as an update of the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the implementation of the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy – A Legacy for our Future adopted by Regional Council on April 12, 2001. At the time of adoption, Council set out a suite of securement tools (ranging from stewardship to policy planning, monitoring and acquisition) to use for the protection and enhancement of the Region's natural environment.

The Greenlands Property Securement Strategy is one component of the broader Regional Greening Strategy. The 2003 Greening Strategy achievements were reported on at the January 7, 2004 meeting of the Transportation and Works Committee. While the Greening Achievements Report highlighted a number of stewardship, education and monitoring securement initiatives, this report focuses on the Region's progress toward land acquisition and securement partnerships.

3. BACKGROUND

The Greenlands Property Securement Strategy – A Legacy for our Future is designed to strengthen the Region's commitment to the natural environment. The Planning and Development Services and Transportation and Works Departments developed the York Region Greening Strategy in the spring of 2001 to provide an action plan for Regional decision making that affects the natural environment. Staff from the Legal Services Branch and the Finance Department were included to provide critical input and support to help develop the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.

York Region, by its adoption of the Greening and Securement Strategies, is recognized as a leader in securement matters. These Strategies are the first of their kind in Ontario. The Greening Securement Strategy annual budget commitment of \$1,400,000 includes funding for the protection of the Region's important environmental heritage.

Implementation of the Securement Strategy relies on the utilization of as many of the securement tools available as possible including stewardship, policy planning, monitoring and acquisition. The Securement Strategy is a proactive program. Its goal is to guide the Region's securement activities and support land securement in areas that require protection or in areas which strategically enhance our Greenlands system.

3.1 Accomplishments

The following section highlights key securement accomplishments.

3.1.1 Regional Criteria for Greenlands Property Securement

On January 7, 2004, the Planning and Economic Development Committee endorsed staffs recommendation for Regional Council adoption of the Regional Criteria for Greenlands Property Securement. These criteria were originally introduced to Council in draft form in April 2003. The intent of the criteria is to ensure that Regional Securement initiatives are directed in such a manner as to optimize the benefits to the Regional natural heritage system and its value to Regional residents. Since April, the draft criteria have been considered by partnering stakeholders, including local municipalities, Conservation Authorities and non-government conservation organizations. Additionally, the draft criteria were tested and refined for Regional application through their use by the Internal Evaluation Team (IET) for Securement Initiatives (further discussed in Section 4).

The resulting criteria are strategic, defensible, unique to York Region and well supported by both the public and private sector.

3.1.2 Securement Partnerships

The Region continues to develop and explore securement partnerships with a variety of agencies and stakeholders for the purpose of property protection. The following partnerships were in place in 2003. Properties secured through these partnerships are described in more detail in Section 3.1.3 and are identified on *Attachment 1*.

- **Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)** – In July of 2001, York Region and the NCC entered into a three-year joint venture to protect Regionally and Provincially significant lands within York Region. For an annual contribution from York Region of \$100,000, the NCC is committed to securing a minimum of \$600,000 worth of land through fee simple and conservation easement donations each year. In 2003, the donation of the 120 acre MacMillan Nature Reserve in the City of Vaughan well exceeded this commitment. Through this partnership, the Region will continue to work with the NCC on the management of the MacMillan Nature Reserve and the securement of other key properties within York Region. The details of the partnership will be reviewed early in 2004 with the expectation that a similar venture will be entered into when the three year commitment ends in April of this year.
- **Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust** – In August 2002, the Region signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. Through this MOU, the Region assists the Land Trusts efforts to secure donations or

easements on the Oak Ridges Moraine on a case by case basis. The Calandra Conservation Easement, which significantly restricts future use of the property in the interest of protecting the natural heritage values, was a significant success achieved through this partnership.

- **Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation** – While no formal arrangement has been made with the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, the Region continues to see them as a key partner in the securement of a healthy Greenlands system across the Moraine in York Region. It is anticipated that this relationship will expand over and beyond 2004.

3.1.3 Acquisitions

There are a series of property acquisition tools, which are relevant to the Securement Strategy. These tools include bequests, easements, leaseback agreements, long term leases, donations or fee simple purchases.

Properties Secured in 2003

Strategic properties acquired in partnership with other stakeholders in 2003 are identified on *Attachment 1* and include:

- **Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Easement** – In 2003, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, in partnership with York Region, secured a conservation easement on a 60 acre parcel immediately adjacent to the Hall Tract of the York Regional Forest. This property is located south of St. Johns side road and east of McCowan Road in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. The Conservation Easement, donated by the Calandra Family, ensures that this property is protected from incompatible development and site alteration. As a neighbour to the York Regional Forest, this protection level is extremely important to ensure the continuation of the functions and experience of the Regional Forest. Opportunities to further protect and enhance this property through Regional ownership and rehabilitation are also in front of Committee and Council at this time.
- **Expansion of the Brown Hill Tract of the Regional Forest** – An estate residential development was approved to the south of the Brown Hill Tract of the Regional Forest. This property is located south of Ravenshoe Road, east of McCowan Road in the Town of East Gwillimbury. Through approval of the adjacent subdivision, York Region was successful in securing a two acre parcel to be consolidated with the Brown Hill Tract of the York Regional Forest. This land was conveyed to the Region by the developer as negotiated through the planning process. This securement achievement sets a great example to future development on mitigating the effects of development adjacent to the Regional Forest.
- **Tasker Conservation Easement** – The Nature Conservancy of Canada, in partnership with York Region, were successful in obtaining a donated Conservation Easement by Dr. Ronald Tasker in the Township of King. This Easement protects 12 hectares (30 acres) of land within the Happy Valley Forest south of 17th side road and west of 7th Concession in the Township of King.

- **MacMillan Nature Reserve** – In 2003, Robert and Lynn MacMillan donated 120 acres of land to the NCC. This property is located south of Major Mackenzie Drive, east of Dufferin Street in the City of Vaughan. Centred in an urbanizing area, this parcel is strategic in that it will provide an environmental oasis for future residents of York Region as the surrounding community continues to grow. This securement achievement was a significant product of the York Region – NCC joint venture.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Ensuring that Regional involvement in Securement initiatives is strategic is of paramount importance to the success of the program. As such, the delivery mechanisms outlined below have been established to direct and support the review process.

4.1 Internal Evaluation Team for Securement Initiatives (IET)

Consistent with the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy and Criteria, an IET was established in May 2003. This team includes Regional representation from Legal, Property and Financial Services, as well as the Planning Department and Natural Heritage and Forestry Section of the Transportation and Works Department. The purpose of this group, who meet monthly, is to review, assess, evaluate and make recommendations to Senior Management on properties for potential securement opportunities, including land acquisition.

Since May, the IET has been applying the Regional Criteria through the use of a Property Evaluation Form. The IET has been instrumental in fine-tuning this form and the criteria to ensure that they are scientifically defensible and accurately reflects the Region's priorities for Greenlands securement.

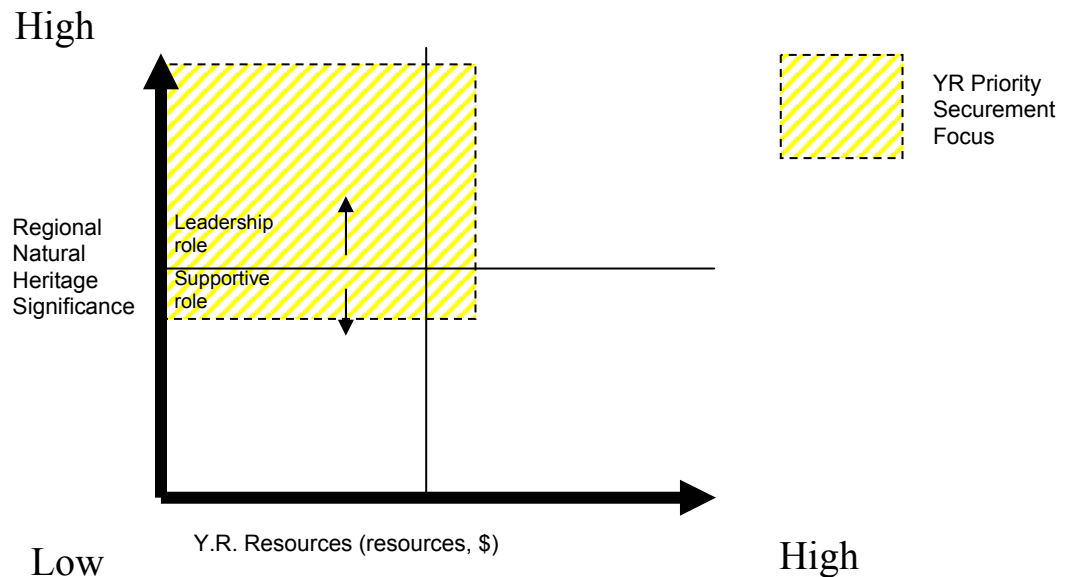
While the intent of the IET is to ensure that the interests of all relevant Regional Departments are considered prior to pursuing securement opportunities, the internal review process also involves keeping directors and commissioners informed through the use of IET extended distribution members which are circulated all information brought before the IET, including minutes and agendas.

York Region involvement in the securement of strategic properties ranges significantly. In some cases, it is most strategic for the Region to allow another agency to take the lead on property securement with the Region involvement limited to in kind assistance administered through the lead agency.

On other occasions, the property may be of significant Regional interest, but best protected through another agency (Conservation Authority, land trust or conservancy). In these instances, the Region may be acknowledged as a significant funding partner, with title, on conservation easement rights, being directed to another agency.

In some instances, a Regional leadership role is the most strategic approach. These properties may warrant pursuing Regional ownership of properties and occasionally significant financial expenditures. The following matrix, presented in the Regional Securement Criteria helps to direct IET members on which approach to pursue.

Figure 1
Regional Priority Matrix



This process will be routinely subject to review and assessment to ensure that Regional resources are being appropriately allocated to secure a healthy natural heritage system for future generations.

4.2 Land Securement Working Group

The Land Securement Working Group was established early in 2002. This group includes representatives from the local municipalities, NCC, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Rouge Park, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, Ministry of Natural Resources, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and Regional staff from the Planning and Development Services and Transportation and Works Departments. This group meets approximately four times per year to co-ordinate securement initiatives, to harmonize methodology and criteria, and to increase communication.

This group continues to play a valuable role in ensuring that a healthy natural heritage system is protected for future York Region residents. This group was instrumental in fine tuning the Regional Securement Criteria to ensure that efforts between the Region and other conservation organizations are adding value and minimizing duplication of effort.

4.3 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

In April 2001, Regional Council approved the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy – A Legacy for our Future. In support of the strategy, Council approved the establishment of a Capital Reserve with an annual contribution of \$1,400,000. This reserve is utilized to administer all aspects of the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies. Approximately \$400,000 annually is allocated to the following securement tools:

- Education.
- Stewardship.
- Monitoring.
- Community outreach.
- Securement partnerships.
- Greenland property bequests, donations and conservation easements.

The remaining \$1,000,000 annually is generally reserved for the fee simple acquisition of strategic properties, as recommended by the Transportation and Works Committee and approved by Regional Council. The current balance of the reserve is \$2,200,000. Continued funding required to support this program is part of the 2004 Business Plan and Budget for the Transportation and Works Department.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Securement Strategy. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through securement initiatives, local municipalities will benefit from the multiple benefits to both their communities and the natural environment. The Land Securement Working Group will continue to provide an open forum for local municipalities to work with the Region on this exciting program.

7. CONCLUSION

The Greenlands Property Securement Strategy continues to be a success story for York Region. With strengthened and new securement partnerships, York Region's Greenland System is seeing more and more protection for the future. Since its adoption, the strategy has seen eight key properties secured with more on the horizon for 2004. York Region is leading by example in the field of Greenlands Property Securement and, as such, is spurring comparable initiatives across Ontario.

It is recommended that this report be received for information as an update of the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(A copy of the attachment referred to in the foregoing is included with this report and is also on file in the Office of the Regional Clerk.)