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GEOCONNECTIONS FUNDING FOR “ATLAS PLUS” INTERNET MAPPING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated February 7, 2007, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council accept the awarded funding of approximately \$182,000, spread over two fiscal years, from the GeoConnections Program, Natural Resources Canada, to supplement Regional expenditures of \$155,000 and in-kind contributions of \$107,000 from proposed budgets spread over two years.
2. The Regional Solicitor and Director of Geomatics be authorized to immediately negotiate a formal funding agreement with representatives of the GeoConnections Program establishing the Atlas Plus project deliverables and payment schedules.
3. The Regional Chair and Clerk be authorized to execute the final agreement prior to March 31, 2007, subject to budgetary approval and receipt of funding.

2. PURPOSE

To inform committee and council of successful submissions made to the Federal Government with respect to a collaborative internet mapping project designed to assist planners across York Region with planning and sustainable development issues. Approval is sought to enter into a project funding agreement between York Region and the GeoConnections Program, Natural Resources Canada to supplement application development and information for planning and growth management purposes.

3. BACKGROUND

The GeoConnections Program funds projects that advance the development and use of geospatial infrastructure by implementing standards-based internet mapping applications within Canada. The GeoConnections secretariat is a unit within Natural Resources Canada.

In 2006, GeoConnections announced several funding opportunities, including a “Developing Regional Atlases for Decision-Making”, and a “Developing GeoSpatial Applications for Decision-Making” opportunity, with program focus areas of Public

Health, Public Safety, Environment and Sustainable Development, and Matters of Importance to Aboriginal Peoples.

York Region, with the participation of local municipalities and conservation authorities, submitted two proposals under the Environment and Sustainable Development program area, following a needs assessment undertaken with the planning departments and GIS staff in the various agencies. The needs assessment identified areas where additional planning tools were needed to aid decision-making relating to sustainable development and growth management.

The submission process for the “Developing GeoSpatial Applications for Decision-Making” opportunity required a letter of intent, prior to an invitation to submit a full proposal. York Region submitted the letter of intent on September 15, 2006 and was selected to submit a full proposal for November 22, 2006. In parallel with that process, York Region also submitted a proposal to the “Developing Regional Atlases for Decision-Making” opportunity on October 12, 2006.

York Region’s proposal on “Developing Regional Atlases for Decision-Making” ranked the highest of all proposals submitted. The proposal for “Developing GeoSpatial Applications for Decision-Making” was also highly ranked. However GeoConnections will only fund one project at a time.

GeoConnections therefore proposed that we blend the two proposals, and resubmit it as an “Atlas Plus” proposal, which they were prepared to fund at a higher level than each project individually. York Region consulted with its project partners, in order to ensure the blended project would satisfy the interests of York Region and its project partners. The blended proposal was submitted January 22, 2007. GeoConnections staff wish to proceed with a formal funding agreement.

The project will enable York Region and its project partners to develop useful planning tools that will help us address the Places to Grow legislation, based on a distributed internet architecture that we can build on in the future for other projects.

York Region has received funding under the GeoConnections program before. In 2004-2005, the Advancing YorkExplorer Project brought York Region’s internet mapping services into compliance with standards and specifications endorsed as part of the Canadian Geographic Data Infrastructure. This project enhanced YorkExplorer’s user interface and underlying technology, and established a geospatial information catalogue enabling users to access metadata. The project was completed on time and on budget (see Planning & Economic Development Committee reports, *Advancing YorkExplorer through GeoConnections Funding*, adopted by Regional Council on March 25, 2004 and *Advancing YorkExplorer Project Final Report*, adopted by Regional Council on June 23, 2005).

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

York Region's blended Atlas Plus submission to GeoConnections proposes a sustainable regional atlas with land-use planning applications that will bring together spatial data from several agencies across York Region. The project will simplify access to land-use regulations, and enable geo-processing of planning information. The Atlas Plus information will be made available through the websites of each participating agency. Primary users will be planners in agencies across York Region. It will aid decision-making for planners in relation to environmental land-use restrictions, and help planners intensify existing urban areas to achieve sustainable growth. The following views and applications assist in planning and monitoring sustainable development:

- Density Assessment Application
- Development Intensification Capacity Application
- Environmental Monitoring Application
- Regulatory Lands View
- Public Regulatory Lands View
- Property Lookup View.

These applications and views will assist planners in dealing with the requirements of the Places to Grow legislation by providing quantitative results for specific geographic areas that evaluate current and potential future densities. Environmental reporting through change detection will be enhanced. Information updated by each of the participating agencies will be available to planners in other agencies, and the applications and views will foster further information sharing between York Region and its municipal partners.

The Public Regulatory Lands View will enable developers and residents to determine what restrictions there are on developing land, on a parcel by parcel basis. This view will be accessible through the websites of any of the participating agencies.

This geospatial infrastructure developed as part of the project will expand on GIS architecture already in place, and will extend Canadian Geographic Data Infrastructure-endorsed technologies to project participants. This infrastructure can potentially be used in the future to address other projects with a geospatial element that require collaboration between local municipal staff and regional staff.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The GeoConnections investment will supplement the development of growth management and sustainable development applications. The revised proposal to GeoConnections requested funding of \$182,000, representing 34% of the anticipated project costs spread over two years. This maximized both their contribution and score ratings of the proposal. The Region's contribution is 49% in cash (\$155,000) and in-kind (\$107,000) contributions, allocated within the proposed Geomatics budgets in 2007 and

2008, as part of on-going operations, infrastructure improvements, and leveraging investments already in place. Additional in-kind and cash contributions from partner agencies amount to \$91,000, for a project total of \$509,000.

The project is approximately 14 months duration, finishing by March 30, 2008; therefore cash and in-kind expenditures from the Region and project partners will span two fiscal years, and are not in addition to current proposed budgets.

A requirement of the GeoConnections program is that at least 70% of their funding flows through to the private sector. The purchasing bylaw provisions will be followed as private sector contractors are engaged to assist in the project.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are participating in the project, and were engaged in a user needs assessment prior to the proposals being submitted. As part of the application process, partner agencies submitted a letter of collaboration, indicating financial commitment both as cash and in-kind contributions.

The major benefit to local municipalities is that they can participate in a major geospatial project that will provide access to geospatial tools for sustainable development planning that they would not otherwise be likely able to develop.

The project also provides a distributed geospatial infrastructure, and advances the geospatial capabilities and access of each participating agency. This infrastructure can potentially be used in the future to address other projects with a geospatial element that require collaboration between local municipal staff and regional staff.

The project additionally helps fulfill strategic goals identified by the YorkInfo Partnership, to provide a parcel-based look-up accessible to all agencies, and further integrates geospatial information with business processes in participating agencies.

7. CONCLUSION

GeoConnections funding requested in the amount of \$182,000 offers a significant opportunity and subsidy for the Region to develop geospatial applications that will be useful to planners as they deal with intensification, sustainable development, and the Places to Grow legislation. The proposed project will further advance geospatial infrastructure across the public sector in York Region.

For further information about this report, please contact Andrew Satterthwaite, GIS Business Support Analyst, Geomatics Branch at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1546 or andrew.satterthwaite@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.