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2007 GREENING STRATEGY ANNUAL REPORT

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, February 21, 2008, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the 2007 Greening Strategy Annual Report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Council with an update on the activities and achievements of the Greening Strategy in 2007, and sets the stage for future reports on funding, projects and policy development.

3. BACKGROUND

Since the adoption of the Greening Strategy in 2001, the Region has demonstrated significant success through in the ground action and implementation. Greening Strategy achievements are reported to Regional Council annually

Regional Council has committed \$1,400,000 annually in the Roads Capital program to support high profile Greening Strategy initiatives through two means. First, approximately \$400,000 is allocated to the delivery of annual programs and projects, such as:

- Tree planting
- Education programs
- Conservation land planning and management

When allocated to partnership projects, Greening funding for these annual projects is generally matched at a ratio of approximately five to one.

The remaining approximately \$1,000,000 is transferred to a Greenlands Property Securement Reserve. This reserve supports strategic conservation land securement within the Region, with a focus on partnerships. Activities supported by the reserve include:

- Securement of priority lands, by the Region, or by partners
- Major securement partnerships including providing the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) with \$100,000 to secure lands within York Region under the York Region – NCC Joint Venture, a three-year agreement

In most instances, expenditures from the Greening Reserve are matched with partner funding at a ratio of at least three to one. In addition to the leveraging of partner funds, the land securement projects frequently involve significant charitable contributions from landowners, including the donation of lands. As a result the ratio of York Region expenditures to value of land can frequently exceed ten to one.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2007, the Greening Strategy was involved in approximately thirty high profile partnership projects and initiatives. To maximize the value of shared resources and avoid duplication of effort, the Greening Strategy has developed strong partnerships with other agencies to add significant value to the projects.

4.1 2007 GREENING ACHIEVEMENTS

A comprehensive list of programs and achievements are presented in *Attachment 1*. Some notable 2007 highlights include:

Greening Strategy supports tree planting initiatives resulting in 41.5 ha of new forest cover

The Greening Strategy supported a number of tree planting initiatives in 2007 including a Regional Staff volunteer tree plan in Rouge Park, support for local municipal community tree planting programs, reforestation of newly acquired Regional Forest land (Slokker) and the York Natural Planting Partnership. These projects resulted in the creation of approximately 41.5 hectares (over 100 acres) of new forest cover. This new forest cover represents almost 20% of the new forest cover required annually within York Region to meet our forest cover target of 25% by 2026, (currently at 22.5). When combined with new tree cover resulting from natural succession and restoration efforts of other groups and individuals, this annual achievement is a good start towards meeting our goal.

York Region assists with conservation land securement and management planning

As a follow up to the signing of renewed agreements with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust in late 2006, 2007 focussed on expanding landowner contact and generating new interest. We are currently conducting active negotiations with a number of key property owners. Management planning was advanced on the recently acquired Peggy's Wood in Newmarket and East Gwillimbury, and contributions were made to the Rouge Park Bob Hunter and Little Rouge Corridor Management plans. In 2007 tree planting was initiated in the York Regional Forest on the former Slokker lands in King Township. In late 2007, an 8 hectare (20 acre) land donation in the Town of Georgina to the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority was facilitated with the Regions assistance.

Over 1000 people participate in Forest Festivals and Events

Monthly Forest Events are hosted in the York Regional Forest. The intent of these events is to educate the public about forest ecosystems and to increase awareness of the natural and social heritage of the York Regional Forest. In 2007, approximately 1000 people participated in two Forest Festivals and ten Forest Events, the highest level of participation since the program began in 2001.

York Region hosts Street Tree Symposium attended by over 100 municipal and Regional staff

In June 2007, the Natural Heritage and Forestry Services Section hosted a one-day symposium, titled *Street Trees: Our Green Infrastructure*. Over 100 municipal and Regional staff participated and heard six highly respected international experts speak on the latest approaches and technologies for maintaining the health of the urban forest.

Study and pilot program result in more efficient and effective street tree watering

In 2007, the Region increased the level of effort exerted on immature tree maintenance to include an aggressive street tree watering program. In addition to improving the survival of recently planted street trees, the program also included a study analysing different methods of watering to improve efficiency and effectiveness in future years.

The popular "Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest" booklet gets updated in 2007 as communication and education continue to be strong components of the Greening Strategy

In 2007, the "Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest" booklet was updated to include greater detail on the Forest Tract maps as well as additional information about forest uses. This guide, developed in its current form in 2003, includes information on

the York Regional Forest, Forest Festivals and Events, the Greening Strategy, and the Securement Strategy. The Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest is an exceptionally effective tool for educating the public on the Region's Greening Strategy. This high demand product is supplied to all York Region libraries, municipal offices, Conservation Authority offices and the Ministry of Natural Resources for distribution to the public. Between 2003 and 2007 over 30,000 copies have been distributed. In response to demand, 10,000 copies of the 2007 updated version have been ordered for distribution in early 2008.

On-going Greening Initiatives, as summarized in *Attachment 1*, will be highlighted to the public through posting on the Greening page of the Region's website and by being made available to the public in hard copy by request.

4.2 GREENING STRATEGY – NEXT STEPS

The Greening Strategy has been very successful since its adoption in 2001. With the approval of the Sustainability Strategy and the adoption of the Natural Heritage Strategic Directions Paper in 2008, it is now appropriate to review the Greening Strategy to more specifically incorporate the principles of Sustainability..

Staff will be reporting back in May 2008 this year's projects and a summary of securement expenditures. A full update report in the Fall of 2008 /Winter 2009 will be provided as an update to the Greening Strategy and informing of the results of a review under the sustainability initiative, including the consideration of relevant targets, benchmarks, program objectives, and continued strategic investment in the Region's green infrastructure.

4.3 RELATIONSHIP TO VISION 2026

The Greening Strategy addresses several goal areas of Vision 2026, including "Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture", "Responding to the Needs of Our Residents", and "Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region".

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

When allocated to partnership projects, Greening Strategy funding leverages, on average, funds at a ratio of five (partners) to one (York Region Greening).

In 2001, Regional Council committed to an annual \$1.4 million contribution to the delivery of the Greening Strategy. Accordingly, the approved budget contains the funds necessary to undertake all of the Greening tasks planned for 2008. There are no financial implications.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the Greening and Securement Strategies and are consulted on a number of implementation items. Local municipal staffs are also members of the Land Securement Working Group. As well, through Vision 2026, the Corporate Clean Air Task Force and the State of the Watershed Report, the people of York Region have reiterated the importance of the Region's natural heritage.

7. CONCLUSION

The Greening Strategy continues to demonstrate the Region's leadership and commitment to the natural environment. This proactive, high profile Strategy exemplifies the Region's actions in environmental protection, rehabilitation and enhancement. The broad suite of Greening Strategy programs help address the Region's environmental policies and objectives as articulated in the Regional Official Plan, the State of the Watershed Report and Vision 2026. Implementation of this Strategy has resulted in York Region being recognized as a leader and champion in the environmental field.

In addition to substantial gains in the protection and enhancement of the natural heritage system (tree planting and land securement), the Region continues to demonstrate its long-term commitment to the environment, through public education and outreach, and monitoring. Growth in the delivery and communication of the Region's Greening Strategy and environmental initiatives will continue to build public confidence, environmental awareness and improve the quality of life for both present and future residents.

For more information on this report, contact Ian Buchanan, Manager, Natural Heritage and Forestry Services, Roads Branch in the Transportation Services Department at extension 5204.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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