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GTA AGRICULTURAL ACTION COMMITTEE UPDATE

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

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Regional Clerk circulate this report to the nine area municipalities for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee, and the implementation of the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

The “Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Agricultural Action Plan” (*see Attachment 1*) was developed through partnership among the Regions of Halton, Peel, Durham and York, the City of Toronto, the GTA Federations of Agriculture and the Province. The Action Plan, which was endorsed by Regional Council on January 22, 2005, provides a GTA-wide framework to keep the GTA agricultural industry competitive through the identification of 37 action items in the areas of economic development, education/marketing, land use policy, accountability and responsibility.

The Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTA-AAC) was established to ensure the implementation of the actions identified in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan and to champion the agricultural industry sector in the GTA. The founding Terms of Reference, the Implementation Plan and the governing by-law including membership composition of the GTA-AAC have been attached for reference (*see Attachments 2, 3 and 4*). Regional efforts towards implementing the Action Plan are also being coordinated through the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO) which includes a sub-committee - the GTA Agricultural Working Group.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 The GTA Agricultural Action Committee

4.1.1 Appointments to the GTA-AAC

Membership of the GTA-AAC consists of representatives from the four Regional municipalities, GTA Federations of Agriculture, Dairy Farmers of Canada, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Toronto Food Policy Council. Regional appointments to the GTA-AAC run concurrently with terms of Council and as a result of the 2006 municipal elections, new members for the Action Committee have been appointed. York Region Council appointed Mayor Margaret Black (member) and Mayor James Young (alternate) to serve on the GTA-AAC. On January 24, 2007, the GTA-AAC appointed Peter Lambrick, Halton Federation of Agriculture as Chair of the GTA-AAC.

4.1.2 Hiring of an Executive Director of the GTA-AAC

The Implementation Plan for The GTA-AAC (*see Attachment 3*) outlines a three-year plan to manage the implementation of GTA Agricultural Action Plan actions, including the need for an Executive Director, a three-year work plan and associated budget (*see Attachment 3*). In May 2006, Elbert van Donkersgoed, P. Ag (Hon) was hired as Executive Director of the GTA-AAC for a three-year term. In 2006, the Executive Director has participated in/achieved the following:

- Developed an administrative structure including procedural by-laws for the GTA-AAC.
- Raised the profile of GTA agricultural industry through many speaking engagements.
- Promoted local food systems and near-urban agriculture through the development of a website and e-mail news subscription.
- Coordinated the GTA-AAC's first exhibit and local food seminar at the 2006 Royal Winter Fair.

Refer to *Attachment 5* for the Executive Director's 2006 Work Plan.

4.2 Regional Participation In Implementing the GTA Agricultural Action Plan

The GTA Regions and the City of Toronto have been identified as the lead implementer on nine of these Agricultural Action Plan actions (*See Attachment 6*). A GTA Agricultural Working Group, a sub-committee of the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario (RPCO), was established to support the work of the GTA-AAC and to ensure implementation of the nine Regional action items. (These include agricultural market opportunities based on changing demographics, protection of prime agricultural land and encouraging Ontario Farmland Trusts). The working group is comprised of planning and economic development staff from the four GTA Regions and the City of Toronto.

In 2006, the RPCO's Agricultural Strategy Work Group participated in/ achieved the following:

- Assisted the Executive Director in coordinating the GTA-AAC's first exhibit in the 2006 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair by providing brochure and display materials and staffing the display booth during the running of the Agricultural Winter Fair. York Region designed and provided the background display which consisted of a map showing GTA Farm Fresh Locations.
- Developed the GTA Agricultural Action Plan Database as a tool to outline the GTA Region's role and progress made in implementing specific actions in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. This database can be adapted for use by all stakeholders identified in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan, and will be used by the Working Group to provide regular updates on progress to the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.
- Began implementation of Action Item 19, which directs the development of a GTA population profile to identify the emerging consumer trends. A sub-working group has been established and has begun investigation into existing research on food and consumer trends.
- Under the direction of the RPCO, the Working Group also functions as a critical liaison group between the GTA-AAC and their work program, and the agricultural initiatives being undertaken by the Regions.

4.3 Next Steps

4.3.1 Next Steps for the GTA-AAC

- Adoption of the 2007 Business Plan, financial management strategy and budget based on the work plan. To this end, the GTA-AAC is considering a Memorandum of Understanding for services with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, which would include human services, accounting and administrative support to the Executive Director and the GTA-AAC.
- Participation in the Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy Public Consultation Session sponsored by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to highlight the unique requirements of the GTA agricultural sector.
- Continuation of the Executive Director's Work Plan (*Attachment 5*).

4.3.2 Next Steps for the GTA Agricultural Working Group

- Under the direction of the RPCO, continued support to the GTA-AAC and Executive Director to ensure the implementation of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan particularly the nine regional action items.

- Continued management of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan Database as a means to provide regular updates on the progress made in implementing the GTA Agricultural Action Plan.
- Complete the development of the GTA Population profile to identify emerging consumer trends (Action Item 19) by the Spring 2007.

4.4 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Enhanced Environmental, Heritage and Culture goal area of Vision 2026 identifies “Sustaining Our Agricultural Base” as an action area. The GTA Agricultural Action Plan is a key strategic initiative to meet the objectives of this Vision 2026 goal.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

York Region continues to provide ongoing in-kind support through Council representatives on the GTA-AAC; and the work of the RPCO and the Agricultural Advisory Working Group. No additional funds are required at this time.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local staff across the GTA have participated in the development of the Action Plan and their continued support is needed to implement certain action items within the Plan.

7. CONCLUSION

The GTA-AAC is continuing its efforts to champion the agricultural industry sector in the GTA, to ensure the implementation of the actions identified in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. York Region continues to support the GTA-AAC by providing Council representatives on the GTA-AAC and through the ongoing work of the York Regional staff in coordination with the GTA-AAC, in such areas as marketing, research and program development.

For further information about this report, please contact Teresa Cline, Planner, Community Planning Branch at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1518 or teresa.cline@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)