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2004 ACHIEVEMENTS GREENING AND SECUREMENT STRATEGIES

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends:

- 1. The presentation by Sandra Malcic, Regional Greening Co-ordinator be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, March 18, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted:**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. This report on the 2004 update of the Greening and Securement Strategies be received.
2. The attached public update brochure be endorsed for distribution to promote awareness of the Region's commitment to the natural environment and some of the significant environmental achievements over the past year.
3. Copies of this report and brochure be forwarded by the Regional Clerk to the Premier of Ontario, Federal Ministers of the Environment and Fisheries and Oceans, Provincial Ministers of the Environment, Natural Resources and Municipal Affairs and Housing and all Members of Federal and Provincial Parliament in York Region.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on 2004 Greening and Securement achievements and to seek Committee and Council endorsement of the attached draft brochure to be broadly distributed to the public in recognition of the significant environmental accomplishments.

3. BACKGROUND

Since 2001, the Region has demonstrated significant success through the implementation of the Regional Greening Strategy, and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.

Four years of strategic implementation have resulted in a number of significant achievements. It has also provided the opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships, create new partnerships and gain significant public and stakeholder support for York Region, its environmental awareness, greening programs, sustainable development and associated initiatives.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

In 2004, the Greening Strategy was involved in more than 50 projects or initiatives. While some of the initiatives are led by York Region, most are implemented through successful partnerships with other agencies taking the lead role. Summarized below are highlights of some of the 2004 activities and achievements.

4.1 Information Management

The importance of maintaining and updating a current Geographic Information System (GIS) and digital environmental databases is of paramount importance in conserving natural features. Ensuring that information is compiled and presented in a manner readily available to stakeholders and the public also serves to enhance education and promote our natural heritage system and the advancements the Region is making to protect and enhance it.

Natural Heritage Feature Inventory

In 2004, natural feature inventory data (e.g. wetlands) was compiled by the Ministry of Natural Resources into a GIS database and provided to York Region for consolidation with our Natural Environment database. This information will assist in setting Regional priorities for protection, rehabilitation and securement. Additionally, a Significant Woodlands Study is currently being undertaken for York Region. The findings of the report are expected to come before Regional Council later in 2005.

Key Deliverables: Updated environmental data and GIS mapping products.

4.2 Naturalization and Rehabilitation

The Region is committed to protecting, rehabilitating, and creating natural areas through the Greening Strategy. In partnership with a variety of organizations, the Region continues to positively impact the quality of our environment.

Adopt-A-Stream Crossing Program (AASCP)

This program rehabilitates stream crossings at Regional roads. In 2004, the partnership between York Region, York Environmental Stewardship and Ontario Streams expanded to include the Environmental Earth Angels (EEA). The AASCP will be integrated into school classrooms and programs across York Region. An application was submitted to the Trillium Foundation for \$136,000 over two years to enhance program delivery. With approval of the Trillium application, and contributions (including in kind) from the other partners, the total program budget for 2006/2007 will increase to \$300,000.

Key Deliverables: Enhanced EEA partnership with Trillium application developed.

Regional Forest Hall Tract (Calandra) Reforestation

In the spring of 2004, Council supported the acquisition of the 24 ha (60 acre) Calandra property for regeneration and consolidation with the adjacent York Regional Forest Hall Tract in Whitchurch-Stouffville. In support of the naturalization and restoration of this property, a Management Plan has been completed. Funding agreements are in place with the Federal Government Forest 2020 Kyoto Accord for the reforestation for this property which will be initiated in the spring of 2005. In addition, 300 children will assist with the planting in 2005.

Key Deliverables: 60 acres of new Regional Forest, with reforestation to be funded in partnership with the Federal government.

York Natural Planting Partnership (YNPP)

This very successful program, delivered in partnership through local Conservation Authorities, provides financial assistance to eligible landowners for the private property tree planting. A new program brochure was prepared and distributed increasing public awareness of this York Region program and the benefits it can provide to landowners.

Key Deliverables: YNPP program brochure, over 45,000 trees and shrubs planted.

Reforestation Guidebook

A Guidebook has been drafted to help direct reforestation (tree planting) efforts on newly secured lands. In addition, this publication will help identify and assess the costs of planting and maintaining secured lands.

Key Deliverables: Publication (draft) - internal guidance document.

4.3 Securement of Priority Greenlands

In addition to securing priority greenlands through education and stewardship, there are a series of property acquisition tools, which are relevant to the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies. These tools include land bequests, easements, leaseback agreements, long term leases, donation and fee simple purchases. A summary of the securement achievements is listed below.

Securement Criteria

The Securement Criteria document, which directs and rationalizes securement activities, was adopted by Council in January 2004.

Calandra Property Acquisition

This strategic 24 ha (60 acre) parcel is located immediately south of the York Regional Forest Hall Tract in Whitchurch-Stouffville. The property has a conservation easement

on it held by the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. The Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation partnered by providing 1/3 (\$108,000) of the purchase funding.

Key Deliverables: 24 ha (60 acres) secured as Regional Forest in Regional ownership.

Newmarket Woodlot Acquisition

In June 2004, Regional Council approved a request for funding (\$196,000) from the Town of Newmarket to assist with the purchase of a 4.5 ha (11.3 acre) woodlot in north west Newmarket.

Key Deliverables: 4.5 ha (11.3 acres) secured in Town of Newmarket ownership.

Slokker Property Acquisition

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), in partnership with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, requested financial assistance for the purchase of a 69 ha (170 acre) parcel in the Township of King. The property is located within the Nobleton Community settlement area of the Oak Ridges Moraine. The TRCA was seeking to obtain 25% of the funds from York Region. Once secured in public ownership, this presents a significant opportunity to establish a new Regional Forest Tract in the western portion of the Region.

Key Deliverables: Regional Council commitment of \$750,000 for the securement of 69 ha (170 acres), of which approximately 36 ha (90 acres) of tableland will be transferred into Regional ownership.

Morning Glory Property Donation

This potential donation of 60 ha (150 acres) is located immediately adjacent to the Morning Glory Swamp Nature Reserve, owned and managed by Ontario Parks in the Town of Georgina. York Region has been facilitating this potential donation through the Federal EcoGift Program. The intent is for the land to be donated to the Region for conveyance to Ontario Parks by agreement. This donation will be subject to a report to Committee and Council later this year.

Key Deliverables: Future 60 ha (150 acre) donation to Regional ownership.

Roches Point Conservation Easement Donation

York Region has facilitated a partnership arrangement with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the LSRCA to secure a Conservation Easement on this 56 ha (140 acre) property. LSRCA will hold the conservation easement.. This conservation easement donation is currently going through the Federal EcoGift program in order for the donors to receive a charitable donation tax receipt. This opportunity will be brought before Regional Council in a report later in 2005.

Key Deliverables: Future 56 ha (140 acres) to be secured through a conservation easement donation.

Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust Partnership

Through our agreement with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust (ORMLT), the Region provided financial assistance for the securement of four conservation easements totalling approximately 130 ha (320 acres) that will likely be finalized (and reported on in detail) in 2005.

Key Deliverables: Over 120 ha (300 acres) of land to be secured through conservation easement donations finalized in 2005.

Landowner Contact Extension Services

York Region has proactively approached landowners to discuss conservation options for their land, for the purposes of establishing land donations or conservation easement donations. The intent is that these donations be secured by the Region or transferred to the appropriate conservation partner. The interest by landowners has been significantly greater than anticipated. Several potential conservation easement donations have been provided to the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for finalization in 2005/2006. A number of other advancements of this program are also expected in 2005.

Key Deliverables: Over 110 landowners contacted with 20 individuals actively interested in pursuing a donation. These 20 individuals represent a potential for up to 400 ha (1000 acres) of land protected through conservation easements or public ownership.

4.4 Community Education and Promotional Campaign

Awareness of the values of our natural environment is an essential factor towards securing a healthy natural heritage system for future generations. The Region has a number of promotional and educational initiatives underway to raise public awareness of our natural environment and the Region's diverse environmental programs and initiatives.

Greening Strategy Awareness, Presentations and Displays

Awareness of the Region's Greening Strategy is being increased through internal and external marketing. In 2004, the Greening Strategy was brought to approximately five events, and comprehensive presentations were made at 15 public forums. There is significant value in the Greening Strategy being identified as the Region's marketing and promotional vehicle for our broad based environmental initiatives.

Key Deliverables: Over 500 stakeholders educated about the Region's Greening and Securement Strategies.

Forest Festivals and Events

Monthly Forest Festivals and 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 2004, over 700 people participated in three Forest Festivals and nine Forest Events.

Key Deliverables: Over 700 community members learned about the York Regional Forest and our environmental initiatives and partnerships.

Nature's Classroom

Nature's Classroom is a Regional education program which presents a unique opportunity for a variety of groups to experience and learn about the natural environment in a forest setting.

Key Deliverables: Over 1,000 community members educated about the York Regional Forest and the Region's environmental initiatives.

4.5 Role of Federal/Provincial Government Legislation

Legislation is a very useful tool to protect, enhance and promote our natural environment. Over 2004, a number of pieces of legislation were reviewed/proposed in the interest of environmental protection. Through Planning and Development Services, there was a review of the Provincial Policy Statement, the draft Places to Grow legislation and the proposed Greenbelt legislation. The Natural Heritage and Forestry Services Section of Transportation and Works is also updating the current Trees By-law to a more comprehensive Forest Conservation By-law. This new by-law is expected to be approved later in 2005. In addition to the aforementioned, the following initiatives are underway to greatly assist in Greening Strategy implementation.

Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP)

In the summer of 2004, the MFTIP underwent a governmental review through the Environmental Bill of Rights. The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario proposed a number of recommendations to respond to concerns that the program was not an effective incentive for private landowners to protect their existing woodlots. In addition to the recommendations of the Environmental Commissioner, the Minister of Finance also announced that a revised property assessment process would be considered to ensure the effectiveness of the program. A provincial task force has been established to address the recommendations of the Environmental Commissioner and the Minister of Finance. York Region is one of four representatives of the Association of Ontario Municipalities on this important task force.

Key Deliverables: Review of MFTIP, with more woodland protected through an improved incentive program.

Amendments to the Regional Official Plan

The Region approved two Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPAs) to address environmental protection. These include the Nodes and Corridors ROPA and the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM) Conformity ROPA. The former encourages development of higher density mixed use districts served by higher order transit facilities in centres and

corridors. The Oak Ridges Moraine amendment further protects the ORM by bringing the Region's Official Plan into conformity with the Provincial Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Key Deliverables: Environmentally sustainable growth management policies.

4.6 Regional Operations

Through the Greening Strategy, the Region seeks to continually expand and improve the protection and enhancement of the natural environment while providing the necessary infrastructure and services to our residents.

Salt Reduction Guidelines

A salt management strategy has been developed to minimize impacts on the environment while continuing to provide safe conditions on our winter roads.

Street Tree Planting Guidelines

Guidelines have been prepared to direct the protection, planting and establishment of street trees. These guidelines will ensure that Regional road rights-of-way are planted in a manner that improves survival and minimizes costly maintenance and replacement. The guidelines have been incorporated as a chapter of the Infrastructure, Design and Construction Road Design Guidelines.

Key Deliverable: Street Tree Planting Guideline.

Management Plans and Partnership Agreements for Co-owned Lands

Management plans and management agreements have been drafted for Baker's Sugarbush and the Jefferson Forest. These plans will ensure that these features are adequately managed within their urban settings to protect their significant natural features and functions while allowing for public use and enjoyment.

Key Deliverables: Draft management plans for over 48 ha (120 acres) of land managed for their environmental benefits.

Corporate Clean Air Task Force

A corporate Clean Air Task Force has been established to oversee the Region's actions towards improved air quality. The recommendations of this task force will help the Region implement actions that will strive to meet objectives articulated under the Kyoto Accord.

Key Deliverables: Improved air quality through modified corporate actions.

4.7 Urban Forest

The urban forest plays a significant role in enhancing the natural environment. Trees provide many environmental benefits such as oxygen production, improved aesthetics, and temperature moderation – in addition to enhancing the quality of life in York Region.

Annual Street Tree Planting and Streetscaping Program

York Region has increased seedling, riparian and calliper stock tree planting in many areas of its operation. High quantities of high quality trees are being planted each year on Regional Road rights of way. Staff continue to review and improve planting and maintenance specifications.

Key Deliverables: Over 2000 new street trees planted (excluding those planted as a condition of new development).

Street Tree Assessment and Inventory

In 2004, the Region initiated a street trees inventory to spatially locate street trees as part of the Region's Asset Management Strategy. A GIS database to compile and manage the information is currently being developed. It is anticipated that full implementation of this program will begin in the summer of 2005.

Key Deliverables: GIS Asset Management Database for Regional Street Trees.

4.8 Green Partnerships

The Greening Strategy is successfully administered with the assistance of numerous partners. Partnerships have been established with local municipalities, other levels of government, academic agencies, and private and public stakeholders.

Strategic Partnerships

York Region continues to demonstrate leadership through Green Partnerships. These partnerships enable us to leverage additional funds, services and support, and optimize on the experience of other groups and individuals. Some key partnerships in 2004 included York Environmental Stewardship, the Conservation Authorities, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the University of Toronto, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation. New partnerships for 2004 included Natural Resources Canada and the Environmental Earth Angels.

4.9 Monitoring and Reporting

The Transportation and Works and Planning and Development Services Departments will continue to report annually on the progress and achievements of the Greening Strategy including Securement activities. In 2005 the Region through the Health Services Department and the Planning and Development Services Department, will provide an overall assessment on the current state of York Region's natural environment and report on the State of the Environment (SOE).

4.10 Relationship to Vision 2026

The Greening and Securement Strategies continue 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 strategies strengthen 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 systems.
- Continuing to develop and build strategies for a green region, such as the York Regional Forest Management Plan, the Greening Strategy, the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy.
- Taking a leadership role in the development and implementation of environmental strategies and conservation activities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

York Region has committed to an annual \$1.4 million contribution to the Greening Securement Reserve. As such, the approved budget contains the funds necessary to undertake all of the greening tasks identified for 2005. Specifically, the \$1.4 M annual allocation covers all program and partnership implementation costs and staff time with \$800,000 to \$900,000 annually being maintained in the reserve for major property acquisitions. Operational dollars across a number of other Departments and Branches also assist in the delivery of Greening Strategy programs and initiatives.

The current balance in the Greening Securement Reserve has built to approximately \$3.6 million as of December 2004. At this time no new funds are required to continue with the successful delivery of our Greening and initiatives.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the Greening and Securement Strategies and are being consulted on a number of implementation items. Local municipal staff are also members of the Land Securement Working Group. As well, through Vision 2026, the people of York Region have reiterated the importance of the Region’s natural heritage.

7. CONCLUSION

The Greening Strategy continues to grow with a diverse base of implementation programs and initiatives. These programs help to address the Region's environmental policies and objectives as articulated in the Regional Official Plan and Vision 2026. Implementation of this strategy has resulted in York Region being recognized as a national leader in the environmental field.

In addition to substantial gains in the protection and enhancement of our natural heritage system (tree planting and land securement), the Region has demonstrated its commitment and leadership on environmental matters, public education and outreach, research and monitoring. Continued improvements to 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 current and future residents.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause was included in the agenda for the April 6, 2005 Committee meeting.)