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2006 GREENING STRATEGY ACHIEVEMENTS

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the following:

- 1. The presentation by Sandra Malcic, Regional Greening Co-ordinator, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendation contained in the following report, April 18, 2007, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services, be adopted.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the activities and achievements of the Greening Strategy in 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

Since 2001, and the adoption of the Greening Strategy, the Region has demonstrated significant success through the implementation of the Regional Greening Strategy, and the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy. Greening Strategy achievements are reported to Regional Council annually. Projects implemented under the Greening Strategy have a variety of themes including the following:

- Tree planting
- Education programs
- Conservation land planning and management
- Securement of priority lands

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Environmental Protection and Public Opinion

Census data at the Federal, Provincial and Regional levels is consistently indicating that the environment is a high priority for tax payers. An Angus Reid survey, conducted in early January 2007, reported that a third of Canadians (35%) are ranking the environment as the number-one issue facing the country today. Similar results were found at the

Provincial scale with the environment ranking as the most important issue. Other issues mentioned included Health Care, Tax Relief, Poverty, Crime and The Economy (listed in order of popularity at the National level).

Within York Region, census participants were asked to list the top three factors that make for a good quality of life. The factor named most was the environment (Clean, Healthy Environment, Fresh Air, Parkland and Open Spaces), with Safety and Low Crime being the second most frequently named factor.

The Region's commitment to the Greening Strategy, and actions to protect and enhance the natural heritage system for current and future generations, continues to be a proactive and strategic means to address the environmental interests of our residents.

The following are examples of some of the significant achievements that have been accomplished since inception of the Greening Strategy in 2001.

- Over half a million trees and shrubs have been planted through rural naturalization initiatives and urban tree planting programs.
- Nature's Classroom, the Region's Forest Education program, has provided education to over 7,500 Regional residents.
- In 2001, the York Regional Forest was the first publicly-owned forest in Canada to be certified as sustainably management by the Forest Stewardship Council, an international body who sets standards for sustainable forest management.
- Five hundred and sixty (560) hectares (1388 acres) of lands have been secured through donations, conservation easements, purchases and other opportunities through high level partnerships with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, and others.

4.2 2006 Greening Achievements

In 2006, the Greening Strategy led or supported more than 30 projects and initiatives. The Region leads a number of Greening Strategy initiatives and, to maximize value of shared resources, has strong partnerships with other agencies to implement additional projects.

The value of the Greening Strategy as a Corporate delivery and promotion tool for the Region's environmental initiatives was further confirmed with the Greening Strategy being involved in implementation of 19/33 recommendations coming out of the 2005 Update of the State of the Environment report. Additionally, the Greening Strategy provides an excellent tool to assist the Region in meeting a number of the goals and objectives of the Corporate Clean Air Task Force, as well as public recognition of our achievements in this regard.

A comprehensive list of programs and achievements are presented in *Attachment 1*. Some notable 2006 achievements include:

- Adopt-A-Stream Crossing Program: This program, which provides for habitat restoration where Regional Roads cross valley and stream corridors, saw over 1,800 trees and shrubs planted on 13 sites with the assistance of school and community group volunteers. This program is a Regional initiative delivered in partnership with the Environmental Earth Angels, York Environmental Stewardship and the Trillium Foundation, who provided \$130,000 over two years to significantly enhance program delivery.
- Greenlands Property Securement: 2006 was an extremely successful year for the securement program; the following properties were secured:
 - The Regional acquisition of a strategic 0.7 ha (1.7 ac) parcel of land in the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville linking the Patterson, Hall and Eldred King Tracts, forming a continuously connected system of Regional Forest Tracts totalling 377.7 hectares (933.3 acres).
 - The partnership acquisition of 69 hectares (170 ac) of Oak Ridges Moraine land (from Slokker Canada Inc.) within the Township of King. This property will be owned by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority with approximately 36 ha (90 ac) of tableland being managed as the first York Regional Forest Tract in the west portion of the Region.
 - The Regional acquisition of 22 ha (54 ac) of forested land south of Green Lane and east of Bathurst Street in the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket through a generous donation by the Robarts and Dunlap families.
- Urban Forestry: In the interest of recognizing the benefits of our urban canopy, and consistent with objectives of the Corporate Clean Air Task Force and State of the Watershed Report, York Region contributed to the Healthy Yards program delivered by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Town of Richmond Hill which promotes urban native tree planting, and low maintenance landscaping resulting in reduced water and energy use and improved pollutant uptake through the urban canopy.

These initiatives represent a cross section of over 30 other on-going Greening Strategy initiatives and accomplishments (*Attachment 1*). These projects demonstrate the Region's commitment to the natural environment.

4.3 Public Promotion of Greening Strategy Successes

Since the adoption of the Greening Strategy, York Region has been very successful in publicizing our Greening Achievements through update brochures in 2003 and 2005. The Region's website has also been enhanced with substantial promotion of our commitment to the natural environment on the Greening page.

The 2006 production and distribution of 10,000 copies of a new Greening Strategy brochure resulting in increased public awareness of the Region's commitment to a healthy natural environment and healthy communities. Distribution of these brochures through public libraries, conservation authorities and municipal offices, increases public

awareness and interest in the Strategy and facilitates enhanced program delivery and participation.

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.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For partnership projects, Greening Strategy funding leverages, on average, partner funds at a ratio of 5 to 1.

Table 1
2006 Greening Strategy Financial Leverage

Program Area	Regional Funding	Total Project Value*	Leverage Ratio
Naturalization	\$58,000	\$119,000	2:1
Regional Operations	\$20,000	\$147,000	7:1
Urban Forest	\$5,000	\$26,000	5:1
Securement	<u>\$1,255,000</u>	<u>~\$6,000,000</u>	<u>~5:1</u>
TOTAL	\$1,338,000	\$6,292,000	~5:1

* including funding in kind contributions from partners including: landowners, the Conservation Authorities, local municipalities, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, the Trillium Foundation, the Environmental Earth Angels, York Environmental Stewardship, the City of Toronto, and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation.

In 2001, Regional Council committed to an annual \$1.4 million contribution to the Greening Securement Reserve. Accordingly, the approved budget contains the funds necessary to undertake all of the greening tasks identified for 2007. The annual allocation to the reserve covers all program and partnership implementation costs with significant contributions to the Greening Securement Reserve for strategic property acquisition. The current balance in the Greening Securement Reserve has built to approximately \$4.5 million as of December 2006. Operational dollars across a number of other departments and branches also assist in the delivery of Greening Strategy programs and initiatives. At this time no new funds are required to continue with the successful delivery of our Greening initiatives.

As a result of tax levy pressures identified in the 2007 budget process, and that the Reserve continues to build, it is timely for staff to undertake a review of the Greening Strategy and the securement funding allocation. It is anticipated that this review will consider and present funding options which include enhancements, status quo or funding reduction scenarios for this program while maintaining (or improving) the profile of the Greening Strategy. It is intended that outputs from this review will inform the 2008 budget cycle.

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 staff is 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 to 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 current and future residents.

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

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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