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GREENING SECUREMENT DIRECTIONS REPORT SWAN LAKE PARTNERSHIP ACQUISITION TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL

The Transportation and Works Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 28, 2008, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council authorize the contribution of the lesser of \$1,200,000, or 1/3 of the acquisition costs of the 20 hectare (50ac) Swan Lake Property located at 1229 Bethesda Road in the Town of Richmond Hill, subject to successful fundraising by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for the balance of the acquisition costs.

2. PURPOSE

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has an executed Agreement of Purchase and Sale with the registered owners (Hollander) of the 20 hectare Swan Lake property located adjacent to three existing TRCA properties. It is located in a strategic natural heritage corridor north-east of the Oak Ridges Corridor Park within the Town of Richmond Hill (*Attachment 1*) and has significant natural heritage functions and values. This report is to seek Council's support to contribute to the purchase of the Swan Lake property.

3. BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Region adopted the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies, and allocated budget to secure strategic natural heritage properties within York Region

In 2001, Regional Council adopted the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies. In support of these strategies, \$1.4M is allocated annually to allow for the delivery of a number of Greening Strategy programs (tree planting, education, data collection etc.) and to secure strategic environmental lands. Since 2001, a total of 20 properties (535ha) have been secured with a total value exceeding \$30M.

Properties can be secured using a number of means ranging from stewardship agreements and tree planting, donation, conservation easements, to fee simple acquisition by the Region or a partner. The Region continues to demonstrate leadership through our strategic land securement program and our investment in green infrastructure.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY THIS STRATEGIC ACQUISITION

The Swan Lake property will expand an existing network of publicly owned land along a significant wildlife corridor on the Oak Ridges Moraine

Natural habitat provided by the Oak Ridges Moraine in York Region reaches its narrowest point through the Town of Richmond Hill. A significant portion of this sensitive east-west corridor, recognized as the Oak Ridges Corridor Park, was successfully protected from development with the Pickering Land Exchange Agreement reached between the developing groups and the Province of Ontario in 2004. To further protect and restore this natural corridor, the TRCA, York Region and the Town of Richmond Hill have been active in acquiring additional lands in this area. York Region was a 1/3 partner in two land acquisitions, the Jefferson Forest purchase in 2001 and the Bayview Oakridges Estates purchase in 2006. The extent of lands acquired to date is shown on *Attachment 1* along with the location of the Swan Lake property.

4.2 INTERNAL EVALUATION TEAM (IET) SECUREMENT ASSESSMENT

The IET recommends this property for acquisition

The Region's Internal Evaluation Team, a senior committee which includes staff from Planning, Legal, Finance and Transportation Services, has considered this property against the Regional Securement Criteria and deem it a high priority for Regional involvement in Securement (criteria checklist score of 74/100).

The most significant value of this acquisition relates to protecting, enhancing and restoring a strategic east-west wildlife corridor along the Oak Ridges Moraine, in an area of extensive public ownership. The main natural heritage values and ecological functions of this property include its:

- (i) Contribution to the Regional Greenlands system on the Oak Ridges Moraine,
- (ii) Unique and fragile kettle lake ecosystem with associated flora and fauna,
- (iii) Significant hydrogeological function in terms of groundwater recharge in the headwaters of the Humber and Rouge River watersheds, and
- (iv) Opportunities for habitat protection, enhancement and reforestation.

In addition, acquisition of the property also provides a reforestation opportunity helping the Region work towards the Regional Official Plan target of 25% forest cover. It is anticipated that the TRCA will manage this property either directly or through an agreement with the Town of Richmond Hill. There is a house on the property, which will be further assessed by the TRCA from an operational perspective following acquisition.

The IET has reviewed this proposal and finds the property to be a high priority for Regional acquisition. Its recommendations are as follows:

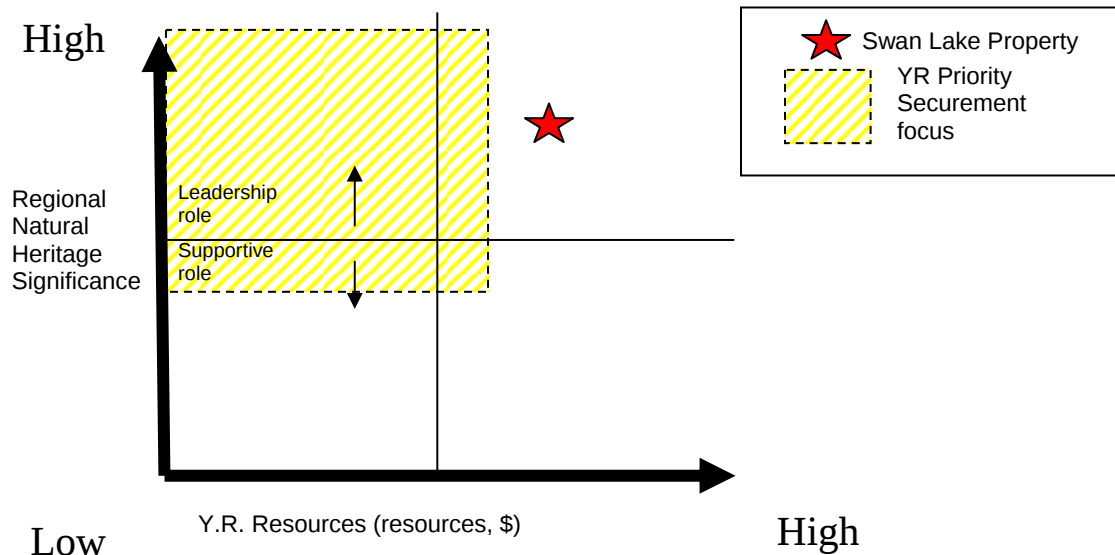
- The property acquisition by TRCA should be supported by a Regional contribution of 1/3 of total acquisition costs to a maximum of \$1.2 million, with other potential funding partners including the Town of Richmond Hill, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, and the TRCA/City of Toronto, through the Source Protection funding.
- Additional financial partners for the acquisition should be explored by the TRCA.
- York Region funding be conditional upon the TRCA raising the additional funds.

4.3 REGIONAL PRIORITY MATRIX

The Regional Securement Priority Matrix confirms this is as a strategic acquisition opportunity

This 20 hectare (50 ac) property is of high natural heritage value to the Region when assessed against the Regional criteria. The Region targets expending resources on properties which have high Regional Natural Heritage significance (Figure 1). It is recognized that in some instances strategic properties, representing sound securement opportunities, are more or less expensive to acquire based on charitable contributions of owners up to and including appraised market values.

Figure 1: Regional Priority Matrix



The Swan Lake property has been plotted on the matrix to graphically demonstrate how this property is assessed against the Regional Securement Criteria and Priority Matrix. Although the property's cost places it outside of the low cost high priority area of the matrix, the property is recognized as having exceptional natural heritage values and is seen as a priority by TRCA, Richmond Hill, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the Region, and should be secured. The natural heritage value of the Swan Lake property is high (74/100 on the Evaluation Criteria checklist). The Regional contribution (\$27,000/acre) is seen as reasonable for the property given its location, attributes (ecological functions, kettle lake, wildlife habitat) and strategic linkage function within this quadrant of Richmond Hill.

4.4 RELATIONSHIP TO VISION 2026

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

The acquisition and reforestation of this property also provides a significant opportunity to strive towards the Region's Official Plan objective of increasing Regional forest cover to 25%.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

TRCA has negotiated a successful offer of purchase and sale with Mr. and Mrs. Hollander for the Swan Lake property

Mr. and Mrs. Hollander currently own the Swan Lake property within the Town of Richmond Hill (*Attachment 1*). The total acquisition cost of \$3,580,000 (3,450,000 property costs and \$130,000 associated acquisitions costs) has been considered by IET members including York Region Realty Services staff, who find it acceptable.

Sufficient funds are available in the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve for the Swan Lake property partnership acquisition

In April 2001, Council approved the Greenlands Property Securement Strategy – A Legacy for our Future. This approval included the establishment of the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve with annual contributions of \$1,400,000 from 2003 on (contributions were phased in over 2001 and 2002). The approximate current balance of the Reserve is \$6,300,000. This contribution, at approximately \$1.2 million (\$27,000 per acre) will be funded from the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve. The property acquisition is expected to close in 2008 contingent on successful fundraising by the TRCA. TRCA staff will continue to seek the financial assistance of partners which may reduce the cost to the Region. There are sufficient funds in the Greenlands Property Securement Reserve for the Swan Lake partnership acquisition.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Local municipalities are important partners in the implementation of the Securement Strategy. Town of Richmond Hill staff has been consulted as negotiations with the landowner progressed; they are supportive of this acquisition. As Greenlands are protected and enhanced through securement initiatives, local municipalities benefit from the multiple enhancements to both their communities and the natural environment. This expansion to a large network of publicly owned lands will further enhance the protection of the area as a resource to residents across the Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The Swan Lake property is integral to advancing the objectives of the Greening and Securement Strategies, and is considered to be a key acquisition given the location on the Oak Ridges Moraine, in close proximity to a number of publicly owned lands. In addition, the lands have environmental significance due to the presence of a kettle lake, mature forest, and opportunities for additional reforestation.

It is recommended that the request for funding for the TRCA acquisition of the Swan Lake Property be supported.

For more information on this report, contact Paul Jankowski, General Manager, Roads, Roads Branch at extension 5901 in the Transportation Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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