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BAKER'S WOODS, CITY OF VAUGHAN PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

The Transportation Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated May 10, 2011, from the Commissioner of Transportation Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Region enter into a partnership agreement with the City of Vaughan and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to manage the Baker's Woods in City of Vaughan.
2. The Regional Clerk forward this report to the Chief Administrative Officer of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and the Clerk of the City of Vaughan.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides an update on the status of the Baker's Woods and seeks Council endorsement of the partnership management agreement.

3. BACKGROUND

Baker's Woods has international, provincial and municipal natural heritage protection designations

Baker's Woods is a 31 hectare (76 acre) old-growth forest located at the northwest corner of Bathurst Street and Highway 7, just north of Highway 407 (*Attachment 1*). Baker's Woods is one of the only remaining forests of its size in the City of Vaughan and one of the most mature, with maple trees over 100 years old. It offers a glimpse of what the landscape was like in Southern Ontario pre-European settlement. The habitat provided by the size and age of this forest is very important to several bird and plant species dependant on this type of forest.

The woodlot also has historical and cultural significance. It had been owned by the same family since 1816 as part of a larger farm operation, and was managed as a maple sugar bush until it was sold in 1997 to a developer.

The International Biological Programme, which identified natural areas for conservation purposes world wide, identified Baker's Woods as one of its sites as far back as 1974. As a result, Baker's Woods is currently identified as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) by the Ministry of Natural Resources and an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. The Regional Official Plan designates Baker's Woods as Environmental Policy Area, Regionally Significant Forest, and part of the Regional Greenlands System.

Baker's Woods was purchased in 2000 to protect this Provincially-significant and historic old-growth forest

The Baker's Woods was purchased in 2000 from a developer by York Region, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), and the City of Vaughan. The Province of Ontario contributed \$1.13 million toward its acquisition. York Region, TRCA and Vaughan each contributed \$375,515. The total purchase price of the property was \$2,259,090. Baker's Woods is owned by York Region, TRCA and City of Vaughan, each with an undivided one-third interest as tenants in common. The forest is part of City of Vaughan's Sugarbush Heritage Park.

York Region, TRCA and City of Vaughan have worked cooperatively on operational management since 2000

An operational arrangement has been in place since 2000 between the three owners. In 2004, a Forest Management Plan was prepared with input from York Region and TRCA, and is currently in effect. The goal of managing Baker's Woods is to protect, enhance and preserve the ecological integrity of the forest while accommodating passive recreation and education.

Since 2000, an Operations Committee consisting of staff from the forestry departments of York Region, TRCA and the City of Vaughan have met at least twice a year to review management activities of the forest.

Since the acquisition of Baker's Woods, the Region has participated in the following operational activities in the woodlot: hazard tree assessment, invasive plant species control, trail maintenance, garbage and debris removal. These works include occasional staff and student support as part of collaborative projects.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Public use of Baker's Woods is increasing, and capital funds are required to upgrade trails, install fencing and signage

The site has been closed to the public for the last two years, pending the availability of capital funding to implement site securement initiatives. Interest in the forest increased

after the surrounding subdivisions were built and occupied, and the City of Vaughan's Sugarbush Heritage Park was opened to the public. Capital funds are required to make the forest safe for public use, and concurrently to protect its ecological integrity. Funds will be used to implement improvements including restoring trails, removing hazard trees, installing fences, gates, and signage.

Increasing public use of Baker's Woods also requires a clear definition of owner responsibilities

Increasing public use requires regular maintenance of the forest and a responsive land manager to address inquiries and concerns. The operational arrangement between the owners needs to transition to a formal management agreement clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the owners.

The partnership management agreement sets out the financial, administrative and operational responsibilities of each owner

A tri-party management agreement has been drafted. Each owner's Legal, Risk and Liability Departments have reviewed the draft agreement. The agreement sets out the financial, administrative and operational responsibilities of each partner with respect to the management of Baker's Woods.

There are some shared responsibilities between the owners, such as administration functions, forestry activities and environmental monitoring. Given the location of the forest within City of Vaughan's Sugarbush Heritage Park, Vaughan has committed to the day-to-day administration, operations and maintenance of the forest. The responsibilities of the owners, as set out in the agreement, are as follows:

Table 1
Responsibilities of the Owners of Baker's Woods

Responsibility	City of Vaughan	TRCA / York Region
Administration	• annual reports • partner meetings	• operating and work plans
Maintenance	• public inquiries • hazard tree removal • garbage clean up • trails, fences and gates • edge management • encroachment issues	• assist with trails

Forestry	n/a	• revise management plan • forestry prescriptions • tree and shrub planting
Monitoring	n/a	• forest health (insects, etc) • bird / wildlife populations • environmental conditions

The Region's role will be primarily to provide strategic oversight, and technical support to the other partners

It is anticipated that the Region will not have direct operational involvement in Baker's Woods. Vaughan will lead the operational aspects of the site, with input from the other owners as agreed to through the development of 5 year Operating Plans and annual work plans. Vaughan will hold the capital funds and be responsible for distributing the funds to meet the capital expenditures.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A one time \$100,000 allocation is required for capital works to secure the site, and these costs will be shared equally among the three owners

The Region has not contributed any funds for capital expenditures for Baker's Woods to date, other than the initial acquisition costs. Capital Funds are now required to secure boundaries and access points, repair trails, remove hazard trees along trails, erect signage, and restore damaged areas. It is proposed that each owner contribute one third of \$100,000. required for the proposed works. The Region's contribution of \$33,333.33 would be allocated from the York Regional Forest 2011 Capital budget, and existing projects would be adjusted to accommodate this contribution.

There will be no additional operating budget pressures associated with this partnership agreement

To date, the Region has contributed some staff time to provide direction on the development of the Forest Management Plan, the initial capital plan, and to support interim minor operational issues such as invasive species (garlic mustard) control and debris removal.

Future Regional involvement will be limited to providing technical advice and direction, and providing occasional staff support for educational initiatives or monitoring programs (e.g. monitoring forest health, bird or insect populations). Any operating budget impacts will be minor (staff time) and resourced from within existing forest operations programs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Baker's Woods is within the City of Vaughan Sugarbush Heritage Park. The proximity of Baker's Woods to an urban area provides an amenity to those who may be unable to travel to other natural areas. It is a significant ecological feature in a fragmented natural environment, and its presence enhances the surrounding community and park. Through educational initiatives Baker's Woods will help the community to appreciate and value York Region's natural heritage.

City of Vaughan staff will be taking a report forward in support of the management agreement in June 2011. TRCA staff were granted authority in 2004 to sign off on the agreement, and have committed to their operational and financial roles funded from within existing budgets

7. CONCLUSION

Baker's Woods was purchased in 2000 to protect this environmentally significant and historic old-growth forest. It is owned by York Region, TRCA and City of Vaughan, each with an undivided one-third interest as tenants in common. York Region, TRCA and City of Vaughan have worked cooperatively on operational management since 2000. Public interest in using Baker's Woods has increased, therefore capital funds are required to improve the site's safety and upgrade trails, install fencing and signage. The increase in public use also requires a clear definition of owner responsibilities.

A partnership management agreement has been drafted that sets out the financial, administrative and operational responsibilities of each owner. The Region's role will be primarily to provide strategic oversight and technical support to the other partners. A one time \$100,000 allocation is required for capital works to restore the site, and these costs will be shared equally among the three owners, therefore the Region's share is \$33,333.33. There will be no additional operating budget pressures associated with this report. By contributing the capital funds, the Region will be supporting the protection and enhancement of a significant natural feature within Vaughan.

For more information on this report, please contact Ian Buchanan at Ext. 5204.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

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

Location Plan

Baker's Woods, City of Vaughan

Partnership Management Agreement

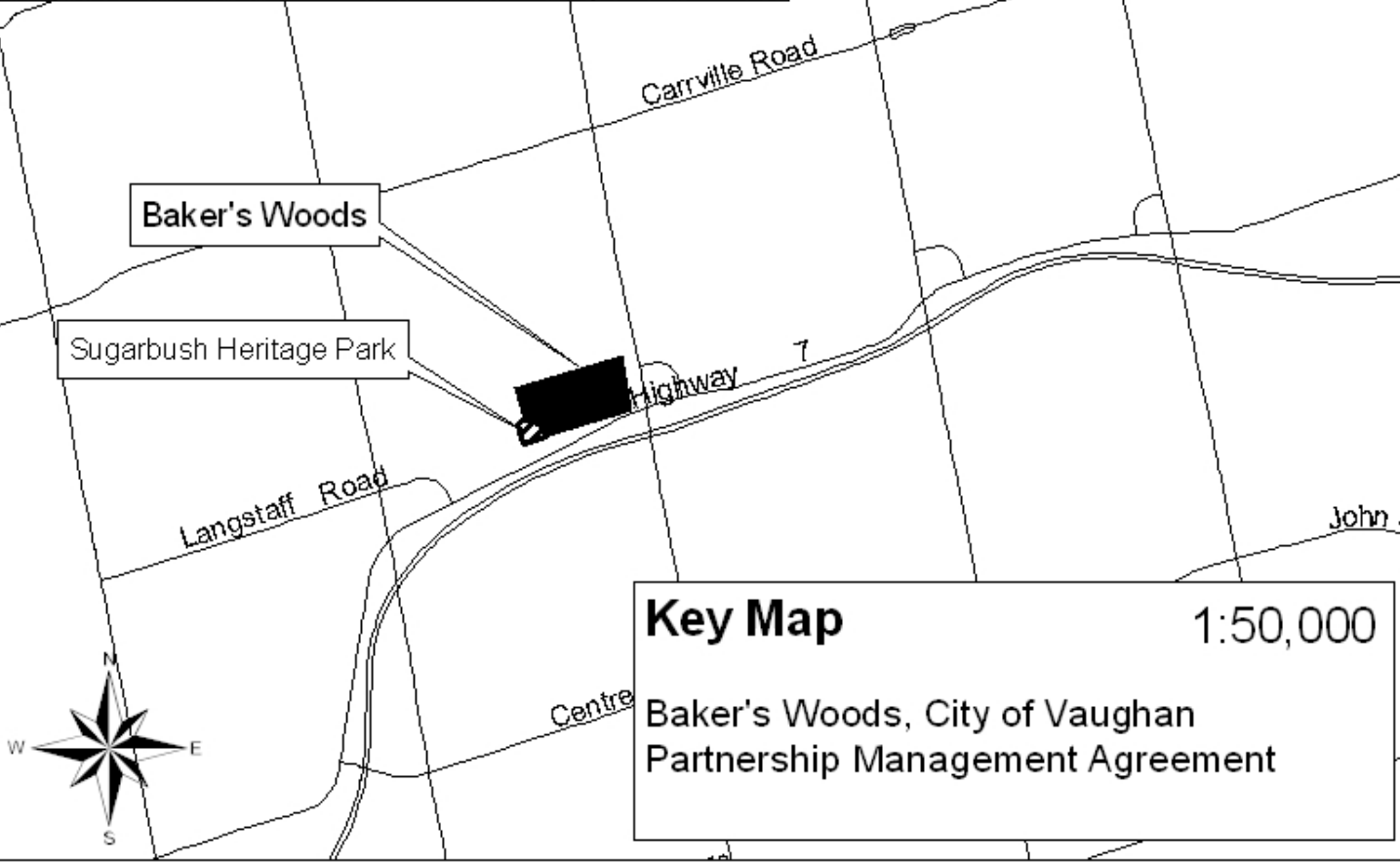
LEGEND

- Multi-Lane Provincial Highway
- Provincial Highway
- Road
- Railway
- Municipal Boundary
- Regional Boundary
- Lake
- Waterway
- Town or Village
- Urban Area

Kirk Region

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Key Map

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